

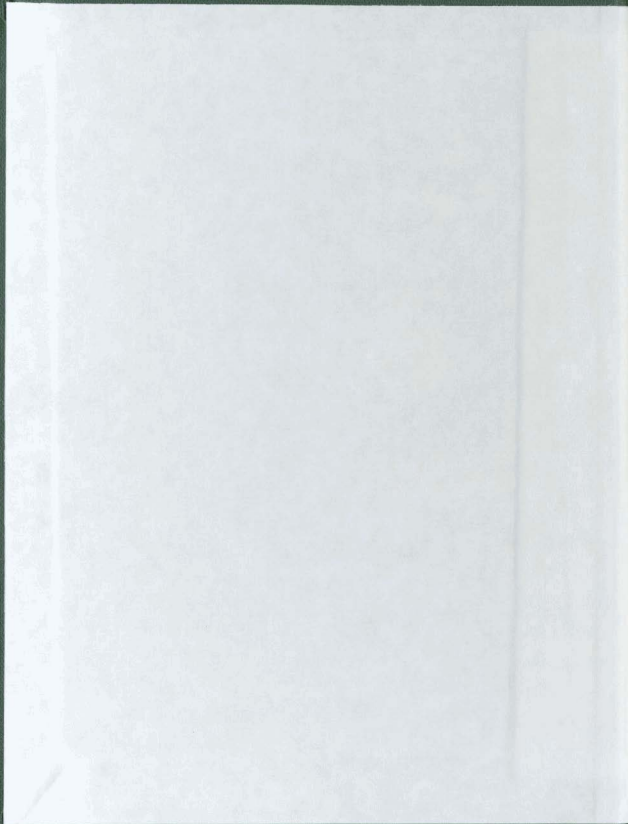
PERSPECTIVES ON THE INVOLVEMENT OF
TEENAGE GIRLS IN SCHOOL VIOLENCE

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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Perspectives on the Involvement of Teenage Girls in School Violence

By

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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ABSTRACT

Current literature says that youth violence is on the rise, and it also specifically says that teenage girls are becoming more and more violent and getting involved in school violence as well.

Findings from this case study conducted in one inner-city Junior High School, unfortunately, confirm most of the claims made in the literature. This study shows that violence among teenage girls is a reality in this school; girls are involved in both physical and verbal forms of violence. Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of it is their consideration of verbal violence as unimportant and rationalizing it as "horsing around".

The findings further show that peer pressure, the desire to be accepted and liked by their peers and the need they feel to protect them from bullies are the main factors that push these girls into violence. Further shown by these findings is the frustration and feelings of helplessness expressed by parents and teachers who indicate not knowing how to provide guidance and discipline to the youth without being accused of having overstepped their bounds and engaging in illegal behaviour.

Nevertheless, it seems clear that these girls need help. It will not be without challenges, though, because of the stereotypes society holds about gender and violence coupled with the difficulty in detecting it. With some effort and cooperation from parents, teachers, community members, government and its agencies and the youth, teenage violence may be overcome.

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Contents

1	Overview of the Study	1
1.1	Introduction	1
1.2	Statement of the Problem	3
1.3	Research Questions:	5
1.4	Significance of the Study	6
2	Literature Review	8
2.1	Introduction	8
2.2	Weapons	22
2.3	Drugs	24
2.4	Gangs	26
2.5	The Feminist Movement, Female machismo and Female Violence	29
2.6	Women police enjoy using excessive force on women suspects?	31
2.7	Reporting Violence/Acts of Violence	31
2.8	Should schools produce good scholars or good citizens?	34
3	Methodology	36
3.1	The Interviews	37
3.2	The Questionnaire	39
3.3	Analyzing the Data	40
4	Findings	41
4.1	The Students' Perspective	41
4.1.1	Introduction	41
4.1.2	Students' Definition of Violence	43
4.1.3	The Presence of violence and who the Perpetrators are	43
4.1.4	Punishment for Perpetrators of Violence	44
4.1.5	The Student as a Perpetrator	46

4.1.6	The student as a Victim of Violence	46
4.1.7	Reporting Acts of Violence	47
4.1.8	Gangs	50
4.1.9	Weapons	51
4.1.10	Help for Violent Students	52
4.1.11	Spending Time after School	53
4.1.12	Conclusion	54
4.2	The Administrators' Perspective	56
4.2.1	Introduction	56
4.2.2	Types of Violence	57
4.2.3	Age and Gender of the Perpetrator and Victim	59
4.2.4	Dealing with Violence	60
4.2.5	Causes of School Violence	61
4.2.6	The School's Responsibility and Role	62
4.2.7	The Administrators: Closing Comments	63
4.3	The Teachers' and the School Counsellor's Perspectives	68
4.3.1	Introduction	68
4.3.2	Types of Violence, Weapons and Threats	69
4.3.3	The Combatants	72
4.3.4	Dealing with School Violence	76
4.3.5	Causes of School Violence	79
4.3.6	Dealing with School Violence	83
4.3.7	Conclusion	88
4.4	The Parents' Perspectives	93
4.4.1	Introduction	93
4.4.2	Types of Violence, Gender of Perpetrators and Victims	93
4.4.3	Gangs	96
4.4.4	Drugs	97
4.4.5	Parents' Concerns	98
4.4.6	Dealing with Violence in the Community	100
4.4.7	Causes	102
4.4.8	Dealing with Violence	106
4.4.9	Conclusion	110
4.5	The School Board Member's Perspective	113
4.5.1	Introduction	113
4.5.2	Violence: Definition	114
4.5.3	Drugs	116
4.5.4	Reporting violence to the School Board	116

4.5.5	Girls and Violence	117
4.5.6	Causes	118
4.5.7	Dealing with violence	121
4.5.8	Conclusion	123
5	Summary and Conclusions	125
5.1	Summary of the Main Findings	126
5.2	Similarities and Differences in the Various Perspectives	129
5.3	Implications of the Findings	131
5.4	Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Further Research	135
5.5	Conclusion	136
6	Appendix A - Guiding Questions for Adult Interviews	142
7	Appendix B - Student Questionnaire	153

List of Tables

4.1	Composition of Respondents by grade	42
4.2	Respondents' Age Range	42
4.3	Acts considered violent by the students	43
4.4	Spending time after School	54

Chapter 1

Overview of the Study

1.1 Introduction

This research deals with the issue of school violence, specifically with school violence as experienced by female teenagers aged between twelve years old and sixteen years old, inclusive.

While there is a lot of research on school violence, youth violence or adolescent violence in the United States, there is not much literature available on Canada, especially on violence as experienced by female teenagers. It must be mentioned, though, that there are some reports of studies that have been done in some Canadian provinces on school violence. However, the main focus has been on strategies and programs that schools can use to prevent this kind of violence in general. Furthermore, since there is little literature on school violence by female teenagers beyond making mention that teenage

girls are becoming more violent, the literature that shall be reviewed is that on school violence in general, based on studies done in the United States and the few reports on some Canadian provinces.

What is violence? Henrietta Moore, in Gow and Harvey (ed.) (1994) says.

...in spite of a great mass of writing, research and speculation, the concept of violence in the social sciences still seems remarkably undertheorized. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that the causes of violence are clearly multiple and cannot be explained using a single set of determinants." (p.138)

According to the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing Advisory Panel on School Violence (1993) as quoted by Soriano, Marcel; Soriano, Fernando and Jimenez, Evelia (1994), violence is a public health and safety condition which results from individual, social, economic, political and institutional disregard for human needs. It includes physical and non-physical harm, which causes damage, pain, injury or fear. It disrupts the school environment and results in the debilitation of personal development, which may lead to hopelessness and helplessness.

Girard and Koch (1996) contend that the trauma of violence interrupts and distorts the developmental process at every age. According to them, the age at which a child's first traumatizing violence experience/exposure makes a difference. They state that those exposed to traumatizing violence before

the age of eleven are more likely to develop psychiatric symptoms than those who experience their first trauma in their teens.

Most of the literature on violence depict several factors as causes of violence. Day, MacDougall, Beals-Gonzalez (1995), claim that any one or even a combination of biological, familial, environmental, social and academic factors could cause violent behaviour in a child.

According to Moore in Gow and Harvey (1996), many writers report that violence is often the outcome of an inability to control other people's sexual behaviour, that is, other people's management of themselves as gendered individuals. When their self-representation and social evaluation is threatened, they lash out with violence (p.151).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Violence in the past has usually been associated with males. Providing a biological explanation of male violence, Day *et al.*(1995) contend that there are genetic influences. They say that males have a greater propensity for aggression than girls because of higher levels of testosterone and the extra Y chromosome. Thus, males have generally been the ones seen to be violent. Females, on the other hand, have in the past been considered, and

still are, as a matter of fact, victims of male violence. However, in recent years, researchers (and some school teachers) have reported that girls are more and more becoming active participants in committing violent activities. Authors like Peoples and Peoples (1995), DuPont-Morales (1995) and Gelles and Straus in their 1988 work as quoted in Schwartz and Dekeseredy (1993), make claims based on studies they have done that indeed females, including adolescent females, engage in violent acts at an alarming rate.

This study explores and examines claims about adolescent females and violence. It is aimed at exploring and describing the experience of violence among adolescent females in St John's, Newfoundland.

Having been a female teenager myself, some years back, and in a different environment and culture (Swaziland) in which females are expected to be calm and collected at all times, and required not to show any form of aggression or violence, I also had the opportunity of being in a classroom, as a teacher of teenage students in that society. In that society, an aggressive female is considered shameful, first to herself and to her parents as well. Any aggressive or violent behaviour by females, no matter what age group, is unexpected and considered "unladylike".

I noted, however, during my teaching years that some changes were taking place. From the time I was a teenager to the time I was a teacher, female

teenage behaviour had changed. They seemed to behave in a slightly more aggressive manner than in the past.

Upon coming to Canada, I found significant behavioural differences between Canadian females and females from my home country. As I listened to news, read some newspapers and some books, I kept hearing and coming across statements that school violence was on the rise. I became interested in finding out why it was so, and particularly interested in finding out whether females had any part to play.

1.3 Research Questions:

To explore adolescent females' involvement in school violence, I pose the following research questions:

- (1) To what extent are girls involved in violence at or around school?
- (2) Who are the girls who are involved in violence? Is there a relationship between violence and family background, socio-economic level, friendships, etc.?
- (3) What is their understanding/definition of violence? Do they consider their actions as violent?
- (4) If no, how do they view their actions? If yes, why do they commit

those actions and why do they get involved?

(5) Does the school and community consciously or unconsciously contribute to the girls' involvement in violence? How?

(6) Do the girls who perpetrate violence feel that they need help?

(7) Who do they think could help them? How?

1.4 Significance of the Study

In many inner-city neighbourhoods, children are exposed to violence on a daily basis. Yet, even in suburban and rural communities, today's children run the risk of exposure to violence at home, in their neighbourhoods and in their schools. (Girard and Koch, 1996, p.116)

From the claims and reports on escalating adolescent female involvement in violence, it seems clear that more effort and insight is needed to determine the root cause of this kind of violence. As if the male perpetrated violence in schools was not enough to struggle with, it has now crossed the gender boundary, thus posing a new challenge for educators, especially, as they assess the needs of students and work towards reducing violence in school.

To win this struggle, everybody committed to it needs some perspective and direction. This study, I believe, will provide some of what is needed. It gave, among other people, the youth themselves an opportunity to give their

opinions on the issue; hence spelling out in their own words their feelings, expectations, reasons, hopes and aspirations.

This study shall shed some light on the problem, providing educators, parents, curriculum designers or perhaps even politicians with some ideas as to how to meet the needs of the students and maintain a safe and healthy school environment. Educators cannot afford to turn a blind eye to this problem anymore since violence may impede a child's ability to learn. By virtue of their profession, their dedication, their time and, above all, the personal self-fulfillment experienced in seeing children learn, educators have, according to Girard and Koch (1996), the following necessary tasks:

- (i) finding a way to help children cope with violence.
- (ii) finding ways of making the school secure, stable and a safe environment.
- (iii) helping children learn that alternatives to violence exist, and that they can choose to use such alternatives.

These students are, after all, the province's future.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

As mentioned earlier, most literature on this topic of violence is U.S. based, and not much has been written on adolescent females and violence. The inavailability of literature on teenage girls' involvement in violence does not, however, mean that it does not happen. Right here in Canada, the gruesome murder of Reena Virk, a 14 year old British Columbian girl, sent shock waves all over. Virk's murder investigation led police to the arrest and charges being brought against eight teenagers, of whom seven were girls. Their ages ranged between 14 and 16.

Looking at the causal factors of violence noted above, particularly the environmental and academic causes, it comes to mind that schools are institutions that somehow reflect or mirror the society. Two questions come to

mind: One, to what degree are schools a reflection of society? As DuPont-Morales (1995) claims, if schools are a reflection of the society they are in, the use of guns among youth may be part of the behaviour juveniles have copied from adults in their society. He says that these young people carry guns to school for various reasons. Some carry them for protection, others as a means of controlling their environment, which happens to include other human beings; others, yet, carry them just to show of how bold they are. From this, one can deduce that school violence cannot be wholly blamed on the youth: adults will need to share the blame. Indeed, the *Globe and Mail* (September 6, 1993, p.1.6) featured an article on youth crime, and the question posed was: Violence by young people is on the rise. Is it because they are 'bad kids', or are they the scapegoats for society's ills?

Kevin Marron, author of *Apprenticed in Crime*, the *Globe* article, seems to believe that these young people are just society's scapegoats. He states that the problem lies, not with the young people entirely, but with parents and teachers. He writes that society has a tendency to look for quick solutions and blame teenagers before looking inward.

We just feel angry and helpless about it. Our society is supportive of children but not very sympathetic towards teenagers. There is a tendency to be very angry about teenagers.

... Kids are left up to their own devices and they do not have good roots in the community. Kids are looking for support from

their peers, which is not good when they run into bad peer groups.
(Marron, p.6)

Gordon Hoggs, director of the Willingdon Youth Detention Centre in Burnaby, B.C., agrees with Marron that these young people are being used as society's scapegoats. In his view, society forces children to become adults at an unacceptable age.

We have stripped families of their sense of motivation and involvement. The rights of passage that used to exist, like the bar mitzvah for Jewish children are so rare. (Hoggs, p.6)

In the same Globe and Mail article, Howard Sapers, executive director of the John Howard Society's Alberta chapter, and Frank Addario, a Toronto criminal lawyer, bring to attention other factors involved in the rise in teenage violence. Sapers questions the way in which statistics on crime are gathered in the country. He says, "Parents and teachers, spurred by dramatic media reports have become less lenient with teenagers and are reporting incidents with more frequency. Schoolyard fights have resulted in police intervention. Ten years ago, if two kids got in a scuffle in the schoolyard, that is how it would stay. Now, because of liability concerns and heightened awareness about violence in our society, it has resulted in a dramatic increase in the reporting of violence." Addario says that overcharging youth for crimes can inflate statistics dramatically.

There is no excuse for it. There is no reason when two kids have stolen a case of Coke to charge them with twelve counts of theft and twelve counts of possession. (Addario, 1993, p.6)

Violence is not produced in isolation, nor does it affect only the adult segment of society.

A second question is: Could the school generally, and the classroom specifically, be contributing directly to the problem of violence? This second question is based on the claim made by Bybee and Gee (1982) that students' behaviour is affected by the school, and this behaviour can be disruptive, depending on the students' perception of the school and its teachers, i.e., the students' perception of their freedom, power, their perception of the process of educational decision making and their perception of the teachers' authority, control and punitiveness.

As quoted in Walker (1995, pp.5.6), a report made by the National Institute of Education to the United States Congress mentioned among other things that there was a strong relationship between lax enforcement of school rules and the rate of violent crimes. Another point made in the report was that arbitrary expulsions and suspensions incite students to violence, and that violence occurred mainly in hallways, stairs, cafeteria, locker rooms, washrooms and other areas where teachers' supervision was weak. As to the

percentage of the student body perpetrating violence, the report indicated that it was a small percentage of students; about 10% in each school that were responsible for all the violence and they were easily identifiable and generally known to both staff and students. This demystifies the notion that intruders are responsible for a great deal of school crime.

Walker, Dinkins and Robin (1995), in *Dealing with Youth Violence*, suggest that violence includes more than just physical conflict. There is also mental violence (such as telling a student how dumb he/she is and humiliating him/her in the presence of his/her peers). They go on to say that mental violence on individuals or groups is more pervasive and devastating to society. They caution that dehumanizing and negative stereotypes are the worst forms of violence.

If the school system is involved somehow in youth violence, the school could be a starting place to reduce violence. Soriano, Soriano and Jimenez (1994), for example, contend that cultural ignorance on the part of school personnel increases the risk of violence. They further say that, conversely, knowing the cultures found in the schools affords the opportunity to nurture the protective factors found in them. The relevance of cultural competence to school violence is that such knowledge of the existing cultures in schools would ensure that school psychologists will exercise a critical leadership role

in the education of other school personnel about the sociocultural and institutional factors associated with violence. Cultural sensitivity is crucial, and it begins with an appreciation of another person's world view, the differences in opinions on certain things among people. I believe that this area of cultural sensitivity could be one of the best starting points for schools to engage in this noble struggle against violence.

At this point, it is worth noting that if we are to deal with violence today, we need to be aware that traditionally violence has been seen as related to socio-economic factors, ethnic identity, geographic boundaries and gender. New approaches, however, suggest that those factors are not as good determinants as they were thought to be. Duhon-Sells (1995), quoting a study by Peoples and Peoples, argues that educators can no longer make assumptions regarding how students are supported by their families, their beliefs in the value of school and their "appropriate" behaviour based on gender. On the same note, quoting studies by Felgar (1992); Nordland (1992); Prothrow-Stith and Weissman (1991); Seigal and Senna (1991), Larke and Carter state that school aged children, regardless of socio-economic level or ethnic identity, have become initiators and victims of violent activities in both their schools and communities. Also, working under a Carnegie Corporation grant, Elliot's 1994 findings, as quoted in DuPont-Morales (1995), show that school

violence has increased in all geographical locations. He found that employed white and black youth had comparable rates of violent behaviour. He also reported that among unemployed youth "...approximately twice as many young blacks as whites continue their violent careers into their twenties" (1994, p.2). Thus, employment, not race, seems to be the factor related to violence there. He went on to say that the violence associated with youth is frequently connected with schools. If the violence does not occur on school property as a reaction to a previous incident, it occurs close to the campus. He gave some statistics to the effect that "the National School Board Association found that out of 270 school districts, 82% reported an increase in violence in the past five years" (1994, p.3).

DuPont-Morales (1995) states that, "Violence is no longer the sole act of adolescent males; adolescent females engage in violent acts at an alarming rate. These fierce adolescents are armed and their violent activity appears well documented from the age of twelve years." (pp. 122-123). His statement emphasizes and concurs with Quarles' (1989) who said, "...some 7% of all armed robbers are now women. Female armed robbers are more likely to inflict injury than their male counterparts."(p. 21)

Walker (1995) reports that in an American survey, five elementary school principals and one in four middle school principals said there was an upsurge

in fights between females.

Despite these claims that adolescent females are becoming as violent as males, others argue that there has not been any significant increase in female violence, but that female violence has been traditionally under-reported for a number of reasons. Kirsta (1994) says that the reason why female violence/crime is getting so much attention lately is two-fold: firstly, because of their gender and the help from tabloid prurience and society's fascination with anything supposedly wicked and deviant; secondly, because of society's need to reassure itself that these women are by definition aberrant and inherently evil monsters, dangerously deranged.

Others, Gelles and Straus (1988), for example, argue that even if females are truly becoming violent, they are doing what they have to do to survive, i.e., they commit violent acts in self-defence. Kirsta (1994) concurs with them. She says,

...But are women, as I am constantly being asked, really becoming more violent and aggressive? They are, but for reasons more demonstrably to do with changing circumstances than any sinister mutation, as often claimed.

...Today, with the break-up of 'traditional' family values and the nuclear family, together with the demystification of the mother as a superhuman deity, the onus is once again on women to fight in order to survive. Thus, women at last are beginning to rediscover strength, and power that were always there from the beginning, but which centuries of male dominance seemed to have long conditioned out of them. The rediscovery of these qualities

is in some areas rapidly helping to advance the empowerment of women which is why, even when talking about crimes of violence, I cannot denounce female aggression as either unhealthy or wholly 'bad', whether for women or society as a whole. Even at its worst, crime may pay and violence is discovered increasingly by women and young girls to have survival value; a realization that has always been second nature to the great majority of men.

The tragedy is that it is those with the least capacity for true self-assertion, let alone a way of safely yet effectively expressing anger and aggression or harnessing it productively, often because they are never given the chance, who are usually most likely to end up in prison. (p.8.9)

There are different types of violence. Larke and Carter, as reported in Duhon-Sells (1995), provide three working definitions:

(i) *Verbal abuse* — which involves profane language. They discovered that pre-schoolers had developed the skill of using profanity in the right context. Verbal abuse often triggers physical abuse. Most students believe that such language and speech is 'cool' and that its usage makes them accepted by their peers.

(ii) *Threats and physical abuse* — These threats can be in a written or verbal form. They are accusations intended to harm. They produce fear, which in turn may cause students to surrender money, valuables and even stop them from reporting incidents to authorities. Teachers, too, are susceptible to this kind of abuse from students. For example, Quarles (1989) reported that increasingly, teachers were afraid to go to work. He gave an

example of a discovery made by the Oklahoma City Federation of Teachers, that 66% of that city's middle school teachers and 52% of all city teachers had considered quitting because of verbal and physical abuse they received from students.

Walker (1995) records that, according to findings reported by the National American Institute of Education (NAIE) to the U.S. Congress, urban teachers were likely to be victimized more than suburban or rural teachers.

(iii) *Weapons and gangs* — NAIE defined a weapon as any instrument or device used for attacking or defending. Girard and Koch (1996) say that weapons and assaults are common events in schools. Consequently, both students and teachers share fears of what may erupt over minor disagreements, and fear that schools cannot guarantee the safety of either their students or their teachers.

According to Quarles (1993), basing his statistics on a survey communicated by Camp Fire Boys and Girls, says the presence and usage of weapons as well as physical violence in schools was a sad reality. The survey found that 53% of the respondents believed their schools had problems with students carrying weapons. Of 13 to 19 year olds, 20% had witnessed confrontations in school with a knife; 7% had seen an encounter involving a gun; 83% had witnessed fist fights and 55% had seen other students vandalize school

property.

They discovered that gang membership now reaches into the upper elementary and middle school. On gangs, Quarles says,

Many students, whether or not they are involved in gangs or drug subculture, are willing to involve adults in problem confrontation. Often problem redefinitions occur as well. To an adult, a fight may be a criminal assault. To a child, a fight may be an acceptable way to handle a threat. To an adult, drugs are a crime; to a child, this could be an alternative lifestyle or a youth subculture. To an adult, a gang may be a group of thugs. To a child, it may be his/her safety net and the only source of true emotional and physical security he/she has in the community. (p.40)

Quarles goes on to say that gangs are no longer just intergenerational ethnic or neighbourhood social clubs. He says many gangs exist only for crimes, and that gang members may require payments from students for a variety of things, such as the freedom to walk unmolested to and from school, to use gang turf, to obtain protection or to use certain school hallways, gymnasiums or cafeterias. He mentions that some officials, school officials that is, view gang membership as simply another behaviour problem.

Reporting on one of the few studies done in Canada on the topic, Matthews (1993), suggests that youth involved in violent acts and gangs are getting younger in age (some in grades 1-2). Walker (1995) agrees with Matthews. She admits to the existence of violent crimes and weapon use in many larger

Canadian cities. She, however, goes on to argue that it has not been proven that school related solutions such as better teachers, smaller classes, fair and equal treatment of students, relevant subject matter in courses, tighter discipline and stricter rule enforcement involving suspension and expulsions, security, or fortress-like alterations to the schools, significantly lower the levels of school crime. She contends that, in fact, many of these approaches do not take effect until after the violent act has occurred, while others only displace the problem to the community.

Still on gangs, Daniels and Pike (1995) say that all students are susceptible to gang involvement. They argue that although in the past the students most susceptible were generally ethnic minorities from lower socio-economic backgrounds, this is no longer the case. They state that students involved with gangs cross all ethnic, racial, cultural, geographic and economic boundaries. Recent trends, they go on to say, show that female gangs are experiencing rapid growth in a previously male dominated enterprise. Students with disabilities also appear to be at risk for gang involvement, especially those with emotional and behavioural disorders, learning disabilities and mental impairments.

There is another kind of violence, sexual violence, which adolescents commit against each other as well. Teenagers can be perpetrators and victims

of sexual violence. This kind of violence happens to teenagers in most cases during dating incidents as date rape. For example, McEvoy and Erickson (1990) say, "During the teenage years, females are at the highest risk of being sexually assaulted. Over 57% of all reported rape victims are between twelve and nineteen years of age, and conservative estimates are that over a quarter of a million female and male teenagers will be raped each year in the United States and Canada. Millions more risk the probability of being raped. Although statistics vary, the best estimates suggest that well over one-half of all these rape victims are attacked by someone who is known and trusted. In a great many cases, rape occurs in the context of a dating situation . . ." (pp. 58-59). They continue to mention that to further aggravate the situation of rape, most males think of it as only a problem for females. They feel that it is important to help all males as well as females understand what acquaintance rape involves and how they should respond to it.

As far as Canadian studies are concerned, Mathews (1993) says, "Youth gangs are not a historically new phenomenon in Metropolitan Toronto, nor are they unique to North America However, a majority of young people involved in gangs/groups today are not living in poverty, nor are they all from marginalized groups in Canada." (1993, p.1).

Mathews further says that a recent Canadian study revealed that, be-

tween 1986 and 1991, violent offence charges for youth aged 12-17 increased by over 106% (Canadian Social Trend, 1992). He goes on to recall the Yonge Street riots in Toronto in May of 1992. He says that those riots were a watershed event, unique in Canadian history. He says although the teenagers were not the only participants in the beating, looting and destruction of private and public property, they represented a significant proportion. He believes that that action by youth of all backgrounds was a way by which the youth could capture attention of the adults to focus on what they had to say about the adult world they often feel alienated and excluded from.

He further mentions that there is evidence to suggest that, at a minimum, there has been an increase over the past few years in the level of violence by youth, particularly gangs/groups and especially in or around schools. He provides evidence that:

- Youth involved in violent acts and gangs are becoming younger.
- Girls are becoming more directly involved in gangs/groups assaults and are using weapons such as knives, though most of the attacks are against other girls, either as individuals or in groups.
- Guns and other weapons are present in schools.
- School Boards are reporting an increase in verbal, physical assaults on teachers and vandalism of teachers' cars and other property.

- The individual school yard bully has been largely replaced by a group of youth who commit assaults and thefts.
- Students are reporting that they often do not feel safe at school or while walking to school.
- Extortion and drug dealing is becoming a routine part of the school day in some communities.
- Intruders have become a serious problem for many schools.

2.2 Weapons

The Canadian experience is not the same as the American experience as far as the presence and usage of weapons in school is concerned. However, that does not mean that Canadian schools are free of weapons.

Walker (1995) reports that, according to a survey done by the Ontario Teachers Federation in 1991, there had been an increase in physical and verbal assaults in schools over the previous two years. Major incidents had been reported, ranging from biting to kicking to the use of guns and knives. She also says in her report that the possession of weapons is a serious problem in many schools and that incidents of trespassing on school property had increased.

Walker says that over the years studies have attempted to find out the strength and direction of the relationship between watching electronic media violence and the levels of aggression manifested by the viewer of such movies, videos and television programs. She also says despite all those studies, researchers have not been able to resolve the issue. The relationship is not straightforward and she suggests that the impact of such media to the viewer is best predicted by taking into account certain factors about the viewer: his/her pre-existing aggression skills; aggression restraints; proportion of reinforcements provided for aggressive conduct; contextual variables encountered during their daily interactions and the perception of the program by the viewer.

It appears that television and movie watching takes up about one third of the whole day everyday in the teenager's life, more hours per day than even the number of hours they spend in school. That makes television a great part of their lives. As quoted in Walker (1995), Fine *et al.* (1990); Manley-Casimir (1992); Statistics Canada (1991) report that the average teenager spends about eight hours a day with some form of mass media.

2.3 Drugs

Teachers cannot afford to look the other way where drugs are concerned. Drugs are a life-and-death matter. Keeping drugs and the gangs running the drugs out of your school is the single most important approach to developing a crime free school strategy. No other strategy will ever work as well. (Quarles, 1993, p.43)

According to Quarles (1993), in America illegal narcotics trafficking is the biggest business. He points out that one of the primary markets is school aged children. He goes on to say that the presence of drugs at school in relation with school safety and security issues in addition to the individual problem of addiction to the user. Among other things that come along with drugs are problems of competition (for sale, franchise, distribution rights), money, violence and gangs. Quarles is bothered by the progressive nature of substance abuse.

It begins with a milder drug and then keeps progressing to stronger drugs. Once, substance abuse meant cigarette smoking in the school restroom. Later, we were concerned about marijuana; then hallucinogenic drugs became a problem. Now, we are concerned with methamphetamine, crack, crank and cocaine in addition to heroine, uppers, downers and tranquilizers. (Quarles, 1993, p.43)

To illustrate and support his point that substance abuse is a problem and a growing one among teenage students, he uses the findings of the National Institute of Education's Violent Schools-Safe Schools study that reveals that

over three million teenagers had problems with alcohol. In grades 10, 11 and 12, one in four students drank alcohol at least once a week. 6% of all 12th graders drank daily.

Quarles further quotes findings by the Federal Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Research and Development Project from the work of Regnery (1994) where it was reported that the proportion of 7th grade students reporting being high on drugs or alcohol at school ranged from 2.2% at some schools to nearly 10% at others.

On the subject of drugs/substance abuse in relation to women and violence, Kirsta (1994) argues that drugs are the primary cause of violence among women. She says,

What seems increasingly clear is that, although women may embark on a life of crime via a number of different entry points or pathways depending upon individual need and circumstance, what propels them there in the first place, especially in cases of robbery and assault and then leads them to continue committing further, perhaps more violent offences, is principally drugs. (p.92)

She contends that although violence among women is, for some, another means of survival which they accidentally stumble upon and undertake as a last resort, many seem to gain considerable confidence and a feeling of control by carrying weapons and successfully ripping off their tricks or even targeting strangers as victims. For those few, such behaviour feels good and

even regard it as increasing their self-esteem or peer status.

Eloise Dunlap (as quoted in Kirstar, 1994, pp.95-96), agrees with Kirsta. She says,

Although to the outside world, women like these (violent and in the drug business) may be categorized and pitied as helpless victims of a corrupt, degenerate system, for the most part this is the exact opposite of how they regard themselves – or are regarded within the community. For many, whose lives from childhood were marked by violence, abuse, abandonment and rejection, whether by parents or institutions, leading to limited expectations for the future, both in personal relationships and job prospects, proving to themselves and others that they are able to play an integral part in a business as dangerous, complex and male dominated as drug dealing, has proved a potent source of self-esteem, pride and empowerment.

Dunlap continues to say,

For many of these women, this is the first time ever that they have gained control over their lives through economic independence and that they perceive themselves as valued and respected in the community.

2.4 Gangs

As mentioned earlier, students involved in violent acts and gangs are getting younger in age and girls seem to be taking up gang membership and participating in gang violence. There are gang “wanna be” gangsters who are equally capable of committing horrible crimes, for example, the Reena Virk case in Canada. The assailants were other teenage girls and a boy who are

alleged to have worshipped actions of Los Angeles street gangs and wanted to be just like them.

Cernetig Miro, Laghi Brian, Matas Robert and McInnes Craig for The Globe and Mail in their article 'Reena Virk's short life. Lonely death' in the November 27, 1997 issue wrote,

That last nightmarish night of Reena, a pudgy East Indian girl trying desperately to fit into a teen subculture where girls pretending to be members of L.A. street gangs fight each other, has been elevated into a national tragedy. Dozens of interviews have begun to show that in a period of hours a teenage spat over name calling spiralled into the sort of brutality those young, wanna be gangsters worshipped on their TV screens and listened to on their gangster rap CDs.

According to Quarles (1993) the typical gang member has a poor attendance record, is inattentive in class and often exhibits disruptive behaviour. Because of these problems, a high percentage of gang members are frequently suspended and eventually expelled from school. Nevertheless, expulsion is not normally the solution to the problem between them and the school because many of them keep sneaking back on campus causing even more problems for the school and the law enforcement agencies that are required to remove them. Quarles goes on to mention some of the reasons why young people join gangs and to profile those students most susceptible to joining gangs. He mentions that some of the children join gangs mainly for protection: from

extortion from being attacked, and from abuse. He says that these children may also have cultural, emotional and attitude problems. In addition to that, they often are products of a weak family structure, and the gang becomes their family, giving them status, rank, and prestige. These children, as Quarles describes them, often have very poor self-esteem and do not seem to have the ability to understand and cooperate with other children outside their gang.

When dealing with gangs, Quarles says a positive approach to discipline often works with gang members and pre-gang members. He says that fear and intimidation will only make the situation worse. He further claims that there are prevention and intervention strategies that can deter a child from gang activity. He says,

A behaviour code must be created with the input of school officials, students, parents and the community, to maximize the utility of the code. It must be written, posted and distributed ... There should be no room for misunderstanding. Also, disciplinary measures associated with the code should not influence academic grades. If the grades are affected because of rule violations, students will often rebel even more. (p.41)

When investigating gang membership, according to Bob Nations as recorded in Quarles (1993, p.42), there are five important issues to observe:

- (i) Clothing: colour, style and manner of dress
- (ii) Body markings: tattoos, extreme haircuts

- (iii) Signs and symbols: graffiti, hand signs, jewellery
- (iv) Peer associations: who, when and where
- (v) Attitude and behaviour: rebellion (anti-authority), disruptive, drug use/abuse, low self-esteem.

2.5 The Feminist Movement, Female machismo and Female Violence

Kirsta admits that there has been some promotion of the ethos of independent, aggressive, post-feminist machismo/female machismo. She says what has undoubtedly helped promote this is, among other areas, the area of art. Her premise is that female actors portraying the new generation of hard, "ballsy killer broads" are not far removed in spirit and attitude from their characters. She continues to say,

It is only within this context of social alienation and the anger, frustration and intolerable physical and psychological stresses that result from it that it becomes possible to understand how being cast as a permanent member of the underclass in the world's wealthiest nation may turn an ordinary woman into a potentially lethal criminal. (p.87)

However, she says that the claim that feminism has given birth to a new breed of criminals is false. She points out that women's aggression and violence is born of, and nurtured by a diversity of complex environmental and

psychological factors, usually originating in childhood. She claims that they (women) commit acts of violence for numerous reasons which may include poverty, boredom, isolation, fear, greed, kicks, desire for attention, power and dominance, self defence and protection and day-to-day survival.

To support her argument that women become violent just to survive, she says that

Women's peak years for active offending from assaults to homicides begin later and last longer than that of the average white male. (p.92)

According to her,

Findings such as these could be interpreted as evidence of women's ongoing need to support themselves and their younger children and of their ability to 'space' their crimes and, when necessary, to adopt a more pragmatic and resourceful approach to offending, unlike men who carry out more unplanned, random crimes as much for sheer kicks as for self-preservation. (pp.92, 93)

Kirsta claims that none of the above have yet registered in the minds of most criminologists, law enforcement officials and psychologists. She goes on to say,

Instead, in the growing agonized outcry over soaring crime rates, what could be more convenient or expedient than to put the blame for women's increased participation in crime, triumphantly at the door of feminism? (p.101)

She points out that,

Putting the changing face of womanhood simply down to the feminist movement is desperately shortsighted and ignores the influence of many varied and complicated social and economic forces at work in the lives of women. (p.106)

2.6 Women police enjoy using excessive force on women suspects?

According to what one woman told Kirsta in an interview-like conversation, not only did the police use far greater force when searching or arresting them, but women police took particular pleasure in putting the boot into one of their own sex.

You get beat up bad. They are gonna stomp on you because they just wanna show you they can do it. be as horrible as the guys, you know? ... These women cops arrested me a while back. They kicked me, they searched to see if I had drugs hidden in my breast. One of them, she had these real long fingernails. She grabbed and squeezed my breast real hard, digging in till she left marks just for the sake of being sadistic. And I was not even giving them a hard time. I was not fighting. You fight back, you get beat up worse, man. The other one had me on the ground and kicked my legs apart to see if I had something hidden. Yeah. The cops put you through all kindsa hell. (p.86)

2.7 Reporting Violence/Acts of Violence

Reporting violence is a problem, not only to the students but to the adults (teachers, school officials, education officials and community members) as

well. Each group has a variety of reasons and concerns for not reporting. Quarles (1993) says that school boards, superintendents and principals often deny the presence and extent of violence in their schools. According to a study conducted by Rubel and Ames (1986) and sponsored by the American Association of School Administration on why administrators and some teachers avoid notifying the police of criminal events, five reasons were found:

- (i) The wish to avoid bad publicity and/or litigation.
- (ii) Fear that they will be blamed or regarded as ineffective.
- (iii) Consideration of some offences as too minor to report.
- (iv) Preferring to rely on their own security and discipline procedures rather than involve law enforcement officials in school based problems.
- (v) Suspicion that police and courts will not cooperate.

Quarles further says that Violent Schools-Safe Schools study showed that very few students and very few faculty members officially report crimes through the criminal justice system. Many do not even report it to school administrators. He says a teacher may reason, "After all if the principal, superintendent or school board is not going to do anything about it anyway, I do not need to be inconvenienced with all this paperwork and bureaucratic hassle." (p.9)

Even though he understands the multiplicity and complexity of the causes

of violence, Quarles argues that neither poverty, nor ethnicity nor drugs, nor gang association makes a crime acceptable. He says,

We paralyze the growth of an individual as an individual when we make him/her less responsible and less accountable to society. We slow down, rather than positively influence, the maturation process. We make the individuals less accountable when we fail to report the crimes they commit ... If they are not responsible for their own crimes, then who is? Society is creating its own vulnerability ... Kids are responsible for their own behaviour. They must be. So are adults. (p.38)

However, according to Drodge (1997) reporting and/or taking action *against violence and violent students is not all cut and dry. He claims that* administrators, teachers and counsellors are confronted with more ethical and legal responsibilities as their professional responsibilities extend beyond the traditional domains. While they are concerned with the safety of all their other students, they must also respect the rights of the individual (the violent student).

Any breach of confidentiality jeopardizes the possibility of the counsellor or teacher establishing a sound working relationship based on trust with students. (p.317)

The ensuing clash of rights and interests poses an interesting challenge for all school personnel, who must strive to attain an ethical position of ensuring confidentiality while having legal responsibility for school safety. (Drodge, 1997, p.320)

2.8 Should schools produce good scholars or good citizens?

According to the brief submitted to the Ontario's Royal Commission on Learning by the Sparrow Lake Alliance, the school should produce both good scholars and good citizens. In an earlier issue of the *Globe and Mail* (October 12, 1993), Michael Valpy for the *Globe and Mail* in an article entitled, 'The 40% Factor', reported, after spending a week inside Canadian schools, that superintendents, principals and teachers accepted as a rule of thumb that about four out of every 10 children they had on their rolls tote the baggage of some sort of subjective dysfunction.

The brief mentioned that the reality was that the education system is poorly equipped to deal with children who attended school undernourished, poorly socialized and lacking parental support. It further stated that schools were unfairly taking the blame for all the problems that children had instead of the community doing a self-examination to determine where the problem was.

...if our children and youth reflect the values of our families and our society, we act as if it is not we – as their parents and members of their communities – who bear responsibility for that, but the schools to which we have mandated so much of what was once considered our contribution to their upbringing. But the schools on their own cannot compensate for the deficiencies of our families and our communities ...

Approaches to the educational needs of children must include consideration of the coordinated use of social services, mental health services, child welfare services, police and courts, along with the education system itself if they are to yield the kind of results that the public expects of the education system. (as quoted in Globe and Mail. 'Don't expect schools to do the family's job' by Michael Valpy, December 1, 1993)

Chapter 3

Methodology

This is a case study combining interviews and a questionnaire. One junior high school from St John's, Newfoundland, was chosen for the study. The Avalon Consolidated School Board¹ was approached and formal written permission sought to conduct the study in one of its schools. The school which was recommended may be described in the following way:

- (i) a junior high, since the researcher's group of interest is of ages between twelve and sixteen years inclusive.
- (ii) attended by children of both sexes.
- (iii) attended by children representing all the kinds of families that exist in St John's, i.e., two parent families, single parent families, etc.
- (iv) attended by children from all the socio-economic levels that are represented in St John's.

¹The name of the school board has recently been changed to Avalon East

Personal interviews and a short questionnaire were used to collect data.

3.1 The Interviews

The interviews were conducted with the adults. They consisted of open ended questions aimed at exploring the adults' understanding of violence, their perception of its seriousness in the schools, their opinion on the school's role in combating violence and any other comments they wished to make on the topic of violence (see attached interview guiding questions).

Ten adults were interviewed. They included:

- (i) the school's principal
- (ii) the school's vice-principal
- (iii) the school's guidance counsellor
- (iv) three of the school's teachers; these were classroom teachers for the three grades in junior high, i.e. grades 7, 8 and 9.
- (v) three parents; help from both the administration and teachers was sought in selecting these parents on the basis of the parents' willingness to participate in this kind of study. These were parents of three different children in each of the three grades of interest.
- (vi) One school board member; I wanted a member who could give the

perspective of both school board member and a community member (the community in which the school was) i.e., one with a genuine concern for violence both at school and in the community among teenagers. Out of the three names that the school board suggested based on the above criteria, the one chosen turned out to be even more than just a school board member and community member. He was a parent too, and very much involved in the youth's sporting activities.

Informed consent letters were sent to the School Board, principal and vice principal and teachers, requesting their permission to conduct the study and requesting their participation in it.

Participants were assured of confidentiality of all information they would give, and advised that at no time would individuals be identified. Participation was voluntary and participants were free to withdraw at any time without prejudice of any kind. They could omit answering questions they did not wish to answer. They were informed of recordings done of the interviews beforehand, and were only recorded with their permission. They were assured that all tapes would be destroyed at the end of the study.

3.2 The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was distributed among students to complete. It was designed to elicit information about the students' understanding of what violence is, what activities may be labelled as violent, how they saw other students who commit violent activities, whether or not they thought violent students needed help, how they could be helped, what they thought drives teenagers to be violent, etc. (see attached questionnaire). The questionnaire was administered to both girls and boys in three classrooms of grades 7, 8 and 9. Boys were included so that they would provide responses against which to compare the girls' opinions and ideas, since much more is already known about boys' violence than girls'.

Since the students were minors, informed consent letters were sent to the parents and permission asked from the parents to have their children participate in the study. Only those students whose parents had signed and returned the consent letters were given the questionnaire to complete. I went to the school on a day chosen and agreed upon by the principal and distributed the questionnaire to the students. After explaining to the students what the parents had already been told in the consent letters, that participation was completely voluntary, that they were free to leave out questions that they

did not want to answer without prejudice, that whatever information they gave would remain confidential and that no one's name would ever be identified, not even their school. I collected 63 completed questionnaires from the students, which represents a response rate of 60%.

3.3 Analyzing the Data

Lotus 1-2-3 was used to analyze the questionnaire responses. After transcribing the interviews. The Ethnograph software from Qualis Research was used for the qualitative analysis.

Chapter 4

Findings

4.1 The Students' Perspective

4.1.1 Introduction

In an attempt to elicit information on students' opinions on school violence, a questionnaire was distributed to three grades in one Junior High School, Croydon Junior High School¹. Both boys and girls were given the questionnaire to complete to allow me to compare and contrast the opinions of boys and girls.

Of the 105 that were originally distributed, 63 students completed and returned the questionnaires, representing a response rate of 60%. Of the 63 respondents, 27 (43%) were males and 36 (57%) were females.

Table 4.1 shows the composition of the respondents by grade.

¹Croydon Junior High is a fictional name

Grade	Male	%	Female	%	Total	%
7	9	14	7	11	16	25
8	9	14	12	19	21	33
9	9	14	16	25	25	40
Totals	27		35+1 ²		62+1	

Table 4.1: Composition of Respondents by grade

The age range of the respondents is given in Table 4.2.

Age	Male	%	Female	%	Total	%
12	3	5	5	8	8	13
13	12	19	12	19	24	38
14	9	14	12	19	21	33
15	3	5	4	22	7	11
16	0	0	3	5	3	5
Totals	27	43	36	57	63	100

Table 4.2: Respondents' Age Range

²One female respondent did not indicate her grade

4.1.2 Students' Definition of Violence

Generally, most students considered an act violent if it was physical. Verbal violence was given lesser consideration as an act of violence. Table 4.3 shows acts that the students considered violent.

Act	Male	%	Female	%	Total
Hurting with a weapon	25	40	35	56	60
Hitting	24	38	36	57	60
Threatening with a weapon	25	40	33	52	58
Bullying others	19	30	31	49	50
Tripping other students	17	27	24	38	41
Name calling	6	10	4	6	10
Swearing	4	6	4	6	8
Spreading rumours	2	3	2	3	4

Table 4.3: Acts considered violent by the students

4.1.3 The Presence of violence and who the Perpetrators are

From the students' point of view, there is no question about it! All 63 respondents said there is violence in their school perpetrated by students.

Approximately 86% of the respondents (of which 37% were male and 63% female), quite a significant gender difference, said both boys and girls acted violently in their school. Only 13% (75% M, 25% F)³ said boys acted violently and only one boy thought girls acted violently.

Responding to the question of why those students commit violent acts, various reasons were given. The most popular reasons seemed to be peer pressure and the need to show that they are not afraid. 75% (45% M, 55% F) of all the respondents indicated that violent acts by students were committed so they could be liked by another group of 'kids'. 60% (39% M, 61% F) of the students indicated that it was to show that they were not afraid; 51% (56% M, 44% F) said it was done for fun.

Interestingly, one girl mentioned that violence is a learned behaviour, and that it could be that the violent students probably see it in their homes and think that it is the way of dealing with differences.

4.1.4 Punishment for Perpetrators of Violence

Approximately 44% of the students said perpetrators of violence would always be given the same kind of punishment. However, 33%, of which about 24% were male and 76% were female, said that sometimes perpetrators would

³F – Female, M – Male

get the same kind of punishment but not always; and about 21% said boys and girls would not be given the same punishment for committing the same violent act.

From the students' comments, four factors play a role in determining the kind of punishment to be given each perpetrator of violence:

(i) Gender (favours girls)

They would only be given the same punishment sometimes because I think they are sexist. (12 year old girl in grade 7)

Most of the time girls get away with more things than boys because people think that girls are more timid and boys are just bullies. (13 year old boy in grade 8)

Because girls, usually, some teachers let them get away with things. ... and boys usually get blamed. (15 year old girl)

(ii) Age of perpetrator

Depends on the ages of the girl and boy and the boy usually gets a harder punishment because they are considered tougher. (13 year old boy in grade 8)

It would depend on the damage they did to the child, their age, etc. (14 year old girl).

(iii) Perpetrator's reputation

It would depend on if one has a history of doing violent things. If the boy had this history, he would be more severely punished than the girl. If the girl had the history, then she would be punished more severely. (a 13 year old girl in grade 8)

If the boy was always bad, he would probably get a bigger punishment. If the girl was always bad, she would probably get a bigger punishment. (a 14 year old girl in grade 9)

(iv) Academic achievement/performance (i.e. of the perpetrator)

It depends, if the girl was a straight A student. (a 13 year old girl in grade 7).

4.1.5 The Student as a Perpetrator

About 40% of all the respondents, without significant gender difference, admitted to having been involved in at least one act of violence within a period of six months. Of those, all had perpetrated physical violence like fist fights. About 5% of them had also called other people names, and about 2% swore as well. Some of them had made threats.

Out of the 24 students who admitted to having committed an act of violence, only one did it against a stranger. The rest of them committed their violence against people well known to them, other students. One male student perpetrated violence against a teacher.

4.1.6 The student as a Victim of Violence

When asked if any of them had been victims of violence within the period of six months prior to the study, 60% (47% F, 53% M) of the students

responded positively. Again, they suffered mainly physical violent acts. A few mentioned name calling, swearing and threats.

Two other points became evident from this question: It was rare that a perpetrator would attack one of the opposite sex. The tendency was for males to attack males and females to attack other females. About 14% (33% M. 67% F) said their perpetrator was a female student; about 11% of the total female respondents said they were attacked by a group of girls. About 29% (83% M. 17% F) said they were attacked by a male student; only one male respondent was attacked by a group of boys.

Secondly, it seems that all victims were attacked by people who were well known and very close to them. *They were either a family member (sibling or parent), a friend, a neighbour or playmate.* Only one said he was attacked by a stranger.

4.1.7 Reporting Acts of Violence

Reporting violence is the stickiest issue among the students. It is interesting to note as it became evident that reporting violence as a victim is different from reporting it as a witness, one who had seen the violence but was not hurt.

As a Victim:

Approximately 59% (32% M, 68% F) would report violence if they had been hurt in it, basically because they say it is wrong, it has to be stopped and for vengeance.

I wouldn't want it to continue. (12.5 year old boy in grade 7)

If someone hurt me, I would secretly report it without giving my name, because no one should get away with violence. (13 year old girl in grade 8)

...so that the person would be punished. (14 year old boy in grade 8)

Because so I can get them in trouble. (13 year old girl in grade 8)

To get them fixed up. (15 year old boy in grade 9)

About 41% (42%F, 58% M) though, would not report it for mainly three reasons:

(i) *Fear of getting into serious trouble and ridicule.*

... because I know that if I were to report it, I would get into a lot more trouble. (13 year old girl in grade 8)

Because people would call you a wimp and pick on you more. (13 year old boy in grade 7)

(ii) *Reluctance to 'rat' on someone/get someone in trouble.*

I wouldn't because I wouldn't want to be a rat. (12 year old boy in grade 7)

...do not want to get anyone in trouble. (14 year old boy in grade 9).

(iii) *Capability of handling the situation.*

I'm not a rat and I would beat them up. (16 year old girl in grade 9).

Because I would try to resolve it with the person who hurt me. (14 year old boy in grade 9).

Because I can pick up for myself. (16 year old girl in grade 9).

As a Witness:

Only 32% (75% F, 25% M) would report a violent act and 63% (48% F, 52% M) would not. The reasons for reporting and not reporting violence as a witness are overall the same as those given if one were a victim, but one other reason was given: a reluctance to be involved.

No, because it's none of my business and if the other people thought it was important, they would report it themselves. (14 year old girl).

I wouldn't, because I wouldn't want to be involved. (12 year old boy in grade 7).

Because it is not my problem and I wouldn't want to get involved. (15 year old girl in grade 9).

It also became clear that the choice of person to be told about an act of violence was determined by certain factors: trust, power, support and understanding.

About 41% (62% F, 38% M) would tell their friends because they would understand, they are trustworthy and their opinions and suggestions are important.

They would understand. (12 year old girl in grade 7).

They wouldn't make fun of me." (13 year old boy in grade 7).

They would advise me on what to do. (13 year old girl in grade 8).

About 36% (57% F, 43% M) would tell a teacher because teachers have power and are trusted that they would keep the source of information confidential.

About 27% (71% F, 29% M) would tell their parents because they trust them and can count on their support.

Two females (3% of all respondents) would tell the school's Guidance Counsellor because his advice is valuable and whatever he is told is told in confidence.

One male and one female respondent would tell a policeman or police-woman because he has power.

4.1.8 Gangs

Almost all of the respondents (95% (43% M, 57% F)) have heard of a gang. They generally defined a gang as a group of people who hang out together

and do bad things to other people and property. Among the things that gangs do, they mentioned violence, vandalism, smoking, drinking and doing drugs.

When asked if there were gangs in their school area, about 30% (47% M, 53% F) said there were gangs in their school area, about 62% (46% M, 54% F) said there were none; two females (3%) didn't know. 6% (75% M, 25% F) said they belonged to a gang.

To the question of whether they would join a gang if there were gangs in the school area, only about 27% responded to the question. Of those, 94% (94% F, 6% M) said they would not, mainly because they did not like the things that gangs do. However, one girl said she would join a gang so that she could be part of something "and never have to worry". She would like to be a member of a gang because then she would have a sense of belonging and would not have to worry about her safety or financial resources. The gang would protect her.

4.1.9 Weapons

One third (62% M, 38% F) of the students said they would take a weapon when offered, 65% (34% M, 66% F) would not and one girl wasn't sure.

A knife was the weapon of choice. 24% (73% M, 27% F) would take a

knife: 13% (63% M, 27% F) would take a gun; about 10% (50% M, 50% F) would take a screwdriver.

Of the 48% who gave a reason why they would accept a weapon when offered, 57% (71% M, 29% F) they would take a weapon for self-protection.

It's good to carry around in St. John's (where I hang out) in case of an emergency. (16 year old girl in grade 9).

Because if someone tried to hurt or rape or do something bad to me. (12 year old girl in grade 7).

4.1.10 Help for Violent Students

According to the students, violent students need help. 87% (40% M, 60% F) thought that violent students do need help but 13%(63% M, 27% F) did not think so.

Parents and guardians were considered to have the greatest potential to help by 76% (42% M, 68% F) of the students; 56% (43% M, 57% F) thought friends could help; 56% (49% M, 51% F) thought teachers could and 48% thought other people besides parents, teachers and friends could help. Among those people are guidance counsellors and psychiatrists. One girl said that TV could help too.

Nice non-violent TV shows could help them understand that it is wrong. (13 year old girl in grade 8).

Interestingly, however, 7%(75%F, 25% M) said that no one could help them.

4.1.11 Spending Time after School

Responses to how these students spent time after school showed that television played a major role in their lives. Second to watching TV was doing homework. Table 4.4 shows the activities/inactivities that were commonly reported and the distribution of the students.

Activity	Male	%	Female	%	Total	%
Watching Television	12	19	17	27	29	46
Doing Homework	9	14	15	24	24	38
Hanging Out	4	6	14	22	18	29
Sports	12	19	2	3	14	22
Talking on the phone	3	5	8	13	11	17
TV related games	8	13	1	2	9	14
Babysitting	0	-	3	5	3	5
Paper route (delivering newspapers)	0	-	1	2	1	2
Working in the woods	1	2	0	-	1	2

Table 4.4: Spending time after School

4.1.12 Conclusion

There is no doubt that the students say there is violence by both boys and girls, that it is wrong, and that something has to be done to stop it. However, it seems as though, to them, violence is physical and that verbal violence is considered relatively unimportant. Although they did not say so directly, from their comments on weapons and gangs, I got the impression that these

were not, at the time, serious problems at Croydon Junior High.

4.2 The Administrators' Perspective

4.2.1 Introduction

In order to get the administration's opinion in relation to violence in the school, especially the involvement of teenage girls at Croydon Junior High, both the administrators were interviewed independently.

Mr. Cedric Haywood⁴, the principal, is an experienced teacher and administrator. He had 20 years teaching experience, and 14 years as a principal.

He had worked in K-6 level schools, Junior Highs and Senior High schools. Mr Haywood had just joined Croydon Junior High and had been in the school for six months.

Ms. Rosetta McDuff, the vice principal, assumes the school's disciplinary role. She had seven years experience as an administrator. She had been a vice principal in one Junior high for four years and had been vice principal at Croydon Junior High for three years.

She taught high school before taking up the administrative position. She still had colleagues in high schools in both teaching and administrative positions with whom she compares notes.

⁴All names in the thesis are fictional

Besides being a disciplinarian at the school, she indicated that she also taught English.

4.2.2 Types of Violence

Both administrators said positively that there was violence in their school, including verbal harassment, intimidation, spreading rumours, boy problems, girl problems, name calling, physical violence, fights, pushing, shoving, aggressive behaviour.

However, with regard to the presence of weapons in the school, they did not agree. The principal said there were no weapons at all. However, the vice principal did not rule out the presence of weapons in the school, although she said that they had not had a lot of violence involving weapons.

...we haven't had a lot of violence involving weapons. But I think that it would probably be wishful thinking on my part to believe that they do not exist in the school. On occasion we have taken weapons from students ... I guess it depends again on how you want to interpret the items that have been confiscated. Some students would argue that they are not weapons and that can be from rolls of paper and elastic bands and using that to flick at someone. They would often say that is kidding around and those sorts of things. But, of course, if it takes out an eye, we have a totally different interpretation of it. Eh... I guess I have confiscated primarily knives. That is what I have confiscated. ...they range, some of them are pocket knives, some of them have probably 8" - 9" blades. (Vice Principal)

In relation to threats, the principal was not aware of any threats made

by students to teachers. He did mention that it could be because he had just joined the school. However, the vice principal was aware of threats made to teachers.

I haven't had a physical assault against a teacher, but I've certainly seen a number of cases where there's been verbal assaults perpetrated on a teacher by students. And sometimes that may go from things, for example, with the use of profanity to actual threats against a person. It happens both on campus and in the malls. Usually the verbal assault takes place in a classroom . . . The threats of physical assault, we've had a couple of cases where teachers' property had been damaged, but the physical assault threats have never been within the school. They have been outside. Yes. Well, in actual fact, the students were very open about making the threats. (Vice Principal)

As far as the presence of gangs or gang members in the school, the administrators again did not agree. The principal denied their existence, while the vice principal said there were at least a few gang members.

Ah . . . no. I don't. There is an attitude that there are gangs in the community. I've lived in this community now for three years, and I have two children, grade 8 and grade 11. And I haven't seen any evidence of gangs or had any experience with them. And I certainly haven't any evidence of them in school. (Principal)

Oh, I know we do. I know we do. I don't have to think, I know we do. Because I know enough about individual children. The one thing that I have tried to do with children since I've been a Vice Principal is you have to gain their trust. Sometimes I find out things that I cannot act on or else I betray that trust, and I think that I work on the premise of honesty. With a lot of kids, they have been quite honest to tell me that they belong to gangs. So, I'm quite positive that yes, we have members of gangs. I don't know if we actually have a full gang here at school, but

certainly we do have students who are members of gangs. (Vice Principal)

4.2.3 Age and Gender of the Perpetrator and Victim

Both the principal and the vice principal said it wouldn't be easy to generalize on the basis of age and gender as to who the perpetrators are. However, they did say that girls tend to be responsible for the verbal abuse far more than boys and that they are responsible for some physical violence as well.

No. I think, generally speaking, I would say my experience has been that I tend to have more difficulty with the female students when it comes to the rumours, talking about each other, putting each other down, that sort of thing. (Principal)

... that is a really difficult question to answer, because I really don't know if I can generalize. I've seen it in grades 7, 8 and 9. We see increasing violence among females. They tend to be primarily the ones responsible for the verbal violence. They like to use their tongues usually to lash out at one another. However, we've seen a growing physical violence among the females as well. The boys tend to be verbally violent towards the girls. Verbally aggressive towards the girls, usually, not to one another. (Vice Principal)

Although the vice principal had initially said that girls were responsible for the verbal form of violence, when asked if both girls and boys committed the same kind of violence, she said,

... I deal far more with females being involved in physical violence. The males do a fair bit of intimidation, which is the verbal part, violence as well. And I think equally. We have both boys and girls who are involved in the intimidation aspect.

In relation to violence and teenage girls, both the principal and the vice principal agreed that violence by teenagers was on the rise. But on the claim that teenage girls were becoming more violent, the principal did not quite agree.

I agree that violence is on the rise. But I don't think, in my own experience, that I would say I am noticing an increase in girls as compared to what I noticed, say 10 years ago. I think it's the same problems we had 10 years ago. What I do think is that generally, kids are doing a lot more things now younger than they used to. (Principal)

I think that is probably true. I think it is true, and I think that it shouldn't be ignored that it is also on the rise among males. And I think that that has to do with the changes within our society. (Vice Principal)

4.2.4 Dealing with Violence

The school has a very general procedure that they follow in investigating and punishing an act of violence among the students if it comes to the administrators' attention. The vice principal did say that her approach may differ now and then, depending on the circumstances of the case. "No two cases are exactly the same," she said. "...it's very difficult to give you a process that I follow because it is so individualized."

Both the principal and the vice principal said that students were not reporting incidents of violence in the school as much as they would like.

Some students, especially girls, might, according to the vice principal, but even then they are careful about giving names. They usually do not give names of those involved.

The school has a zero tolerance policy for fighting. The normal way of dealing with combatants is done by the administration. Teachers report any acts of violence that come to their attention to the administration. Then the administration takes over, calling the involved students and the witnesses in to be interviewed. Following that, the administration informs parents of both the perpetrator and victim. Parents then generally come in to the school to hear the case, especially if a suspension is unavoidable. Parents of the victim who wish to press charges with the police are encouraged to do so.

4.2.5 Causes of School Violence

As far as causes of violence among teenagers are concerned, the principal and the vice principal had different opinions. While the principal thought that it is mainly tied to the students' frustration emanating from their background and how they perceive themselves, the vice principal thought it is as a result of the change in social system and the Young Offenders' Act.

Obviously, if kids are hungry and not clothed properly and not rested properly and all the rest, they're going to be frustrated. Their self confidence is going to be down, their self esteem is going

to be low and they're going to heat out and that's when they get frustrated and then they strike out. Quite often, that's what we found. (Principal)

I think it's primarily the changing social system, I think the young offenders' act has had an impact because the values are different and the children know that they have to do a fair number of things in order to end up in a court. (Vice Principal)

4.2.6 The School's Responsibility and Role

Neither the principal nor the vice principal thought that the school intentionally encourages violence in the school. The principal did say that class sizes could be the school's unintentional contribution to the violence.

Sometimes we contribute to it. We put them in class sizes of 38, 39, 40. We put kids who are having reading difficulties, math difficulties, in regular classes. We can't provide support services and extra help for them because of the staff We have kids with problems, medical problems, attention deficit problems and all the rest of it who are very disruptive. We don't have the student system support to be able to work with them. There are a whole lot of things that come together. And the end result of a lot of it is violence, different types of violence and vandalism against the school. (Principal)

...to be honest with you. I don't think we're intentionally responsible. Unintentionally, I don't know if we're not a bit of a victim because of the fact that there is not a whole lot that we can do. (Vice Principal)

Having acknowledged that the school may be unintentionally contributing or encouraging violence, the administrators did not think that the school

could do anything to correct the situation. In fact, the principal felt that the school did not have to correct it. He expressed frustration at the expectations placed on the school and the many other things that the school was already involved in besides teaching.

The vice principal thought that rectifying the situation was society's role.

I am not sure the school could do anything to correct that. As a matter of fact, I would argue that the school should not have to correct it. And I have argued that for years. I think the school is already involved in too much. I really do. The school should do what the school is equipped to do, to take kids and teach. (Principal)

I don't know if there is a simple answer because I think there has to be . . . , but I think society has to take a look at itself. And I think society has to be aware of the problem. But in being aware of the problem, they also have to be prepared to see that the problem just doesn't exist with the neighbour's child next door: that their own child is responsible. eh...you know. (Vice Principal)

4.2.7 The Administrators: Closing Comments

At the end of each interview, both the principal and vice principal made some personal closing comments. From the comments, certain points were made on the subject reinforcing what the principal/vice principal had said in his/her comments.

1. Violence was alive and well, not only in this school, but in other schools as well.

Oh, certainly, I think we have the entire scheme of violence. It's predominantly verbal ... Quite often, things that they say are very hurtful to others. In my conversations with other administrators and other guidance counsellors, I think this is something that is being seen over a lot of schools. (Ms. McDuff)

Yes it is, yah The most difficult level, in my experience, I find, with a lot of problems, difficulties with each other and socializing and all that goes with that, I find it is at the Junior High. (Mr. Haywood).

2. There was a tendency to concentrate more on the negative than on the positive. Students needed to be encouraged to be nice to people and to display positive mannerisms and good behaviour. They should not feel embarrassed by showing positive behaviour.

... unfortunately some of those things (violent acts) get concentrated on much more than the positive things. And children, needless, tend to not want the positive accentuated because they feel embarrassed. They stand out from their peers.

... So, we have to create an awareness that it is inappropriate. We have to create an awareness of what is correct behaviour ... And there has been, I think a loss of public confidence in the education system, which means that there is also lack of public support in terms of what we are doing. And that goes back again to: instead of recognizing what is positive, we have a tendency to see only what is negative. (Ms. McDuff)

3. Junior high students tended to have more problems: hence more violence happens in junior high than in senior high where students tended to be more mature, such that having about 700 teenage students together in one building was not a good idea. It definitely did not help the situation.

...the high school that I spent 8-10 years teaching and as principal at, I find in the high school that kids were much more mature ... The most difficult level, in my experience, I find with a lot of problems, difficulties with each other and socializing and all that goes with that, I find is at the junior high. There are a lot of things going on, and we have taken all of these kids, in this particular case, put them all together in one building, a large number (about 700 students) in just grades 7, 8 and 9. So, we really, I think, compounded the problem. And we put it in one building. (Mr. Haywood)

I have not taught in the elementary system, but I did teach in the high school for a long time. And there is no comparison. ... at this age level (junior high), it is very emotionally demanding. It really takes a toll on energy, and I think that the one thing that you always have to be aware of is that these kids are very impulsive and live for the day. (Ms. McDuff)

4. The school needed to work in partnership with parents and other agencies if it was to fight violence. What was taught in school should be reinforced at home as well.

...I think that there are things that could be done. But I think that they have to be done in cooperation, with the support of other agencies. I think that there has to be a regaining of some of the respect that has been lost. A lot of parents, unfortunately, will allow children, or will support children that say things which, really, are inappropriate. And I think that there has to be a partnership in solving any of these problems.

...I think that there has to be the parent, the school, the child, other agencies, in partnership. There has to be partnership of all of the bodies so that if something can be developed, it can also be instituted in each of these bodies. There is no point in putting it in the school and not practice it at home. I can talk to children all I want about the inappropriateness of violent behaviour, but if they go home and see it, then, certainly it negates

anything we have done. And as children will say, 'it is okey for you, you do not have to go through it'. (Ms. McDuff)

5. Parents needed to take responsibility of their children and show some cooperation and support for the school.

I think because of the demands on parents at times, that there is too much of a willingness (from the parents) to accept what the child says. So, the child says, 'No, that is not true. I did not do that', and the parent says, 'that is not true; my child did not do that'. And I do not think that they (the parents) are necessarily realistic about it. I do not think they have a good sense of where their children are, what their children are doing. Some of them do not care, some of them do care, and do not have the energy to put into it. And some of them do not have the parenting skills. (Ms. McDuff)

6. While children learned of their rights, they should also be taught responsibility because rights go hand in hand with responsibility.

I believe quite honestly, and I do not care whether it is educational or whether it is anything else, rights, certainly, are deserved and may be granted. But once they are abused, then they become privileges, not rights. (Ms. McDuff)

7. The school was already too overloaded with programs that it had no business being involved in, according to the administration, because the school was not equipped for them and the programs took up too much of the school time and teachers' energy.

I think the school is already involved in too much. I really do. The school should do what the school is equipped to do — to take

the kids and teach There are an awful lot of expectations put on the school that the school is just not equipped to deal with. Teachers today have to be mom, dad, the doctor, the social worker. And that is one of the problems. It is because we become so diluted and we are expected to do so much that we are not doing a good job at what we were meant to do in the first place. Yet we are spending so much time in the other things. I really feel that. (Mr. Haywood)

I think too often we have become dependent on putting children in school and letting the school assume the role of parent, doctor, teacher, social worker, you know. Those roles are too demanding. We are feeding children, we are clothing children, we are intervening in counselling children, we are taking children home, we are babysitting children. And I think that given all of that the roles are so demanding that you cannot focus. You end up not doing a good job on any; yet they all need to be addressed. They all need some time to be addressed. I think the system is overburdened and I think that a lot of parents have given up. (Ms. McDuff)

4.3 The Teachers' and the School Counsellor's Perspectives

4.3.1 Introduction

Three teachers and the school counsellor were interviewed for this study. All three teachers were homeroom teachers for the homerooms of the 63 students who completed and returned the questionnaire.

Ms. Sandy Groening³ is a physical education teacher. She also teaches a course in adolescence. She had been teaching for 10 years, and had been at Croydon high school for two and a half years. She has children of her own.

Mr. Gordon Vermark had 22 years of teaching experience. He, too has children of his own.

Mr. Rudolph Pagart had been teaching for six years.

Mr. Cyril DuPont, the school counsellor, had 20 years of experience as a counsellor. He had been counsellor at Croydon High School for ten years.

Both the school counsellor and the teachers were asked specific questions to elicit their opinions on the subject of violence by teenagers, especially teenage girls in their school. Among the questions asked were how they defined school violence, whether violence was a problem in their school,

³All names in the thesis are fictional

if weapons were ever involved in the violence, whether or not boys and girls committed the same kinds of violence, if teachers were ever threatened/assaulted by students, how the school dealt with violence, what the school's responsibility and role was in all this, what the causes and some of the solutions to school violence were.

In addition to those questions, I wanted to know from the school counsellor on the basis of his experience if it was possible for him to profile the perpetrators and the victims, if the two sides (perpetrator, victim) would come for help, if there was in place a program to help them and how effective such a program was.

In the end, each participant was given an opportunity to make personal comments on the subject of violence if they so desired.

4.3.2 Types of Violence, Weapons and Threats

Together the teachers generally defined violence as any act or behaviour that interferes with other students in terms of their academic work or their social life around the school.

All the three teachers and the school counsellor admitted to the presence of at least some violence in their school.

Most definitely, I have seen some examples myself and others

I have heard through other teachers and other students who have come to me and have told me things that have happened to them. So, I am confident that it is in our school for sure. (Ms. Groening)

Oh, most definitely. Always has been, always will be. (Mr. Vermark)

Yes, and in every school. (Mr. Pagart)

We have a low level of violence in this school. (Mr. DuPont)

They gave examples of verbal and physical violence: actions and behaviours like spitting, pushing, intimidation, swearing, name calling and actual fighting. Intimidation, fighting, pushing and name calling were identified as the most prevalent types of violence at Croydon Junior High School.

I think probably the most prevalent form of school violence is the actual intimidation, especially when you get new students coming to the school or someone that seems to be outside of the group. There is a lot of bullying, pushing, name calling. Making them feel very, very worthless is mostly what I see around the corridors, leaving them out of the group and tending to isolate certain students. (Ms. Groening)

Well, we are exposed to the occasional fights, fist fights, that sort of thing. Occasionally, some kid gets picked on for whatever reason and they are bounced against the locker or something of that nature. And it is sometimes perceived as just a casual opinion ... you know. And other times, it is a little bit of intimidation. I mean if you do not do this for me, I will get you later. (Mr. Pagart)

The teachers were not aware of any weapons involved in the incidents of violence in their school: however, the school counsellor recalled an incident where the victim produced a knife to scare the perpetrator off.

Not that I am aware of. I do not think so. There may be some of them. There are a lot of cases that I would not know about, you know. (Mr. Groening)

Never in this building that I am aware of. Never. Mr. Vermark)

Eh ... not that I know of. I do not know of any weapons, actually knives, guns or anything of that nature. I do not know of anything so far. So far, I say. (Mr. Pagart)

Yes, yes. One incident where there was a weapon involved. Yes, it was a knife. It was a hunting knife. It was isolated in the sense of one child who was being threatened produced a knife and put it up to the person who was the perpetrator and said, well, if you do not leave me alone, you are going to get this. (Mr. DuPont)

In relation to threats and assaults perpetrated towards teachers by students, I found that it was apparently not a comfortable subject to talk about. Teachers commented on it with caution. Despite all the caution, however, it seemed clear that teachers do get threats from students.

I have never been threatened or assaulted. I can't even say ... not even really verbally. I've been probably one of the fortunate ones... But, you know, I can't really speak for my colleagues because things happen and they may report it. You may hear it and you may not, you know. But I have never seen other colleagues verbally abused, but I'm sure that it happens. (Ms. Groening)

There are some isolated incidents. I'm only speaking of this building. That's all I can speak of. I can't speak of anything outside this building. There have been some isolated incidents where teachers have been threatened. (Mr. Vermark)

I have never been threatened or assaulted. there's a few people that have probably been told to go, or something of that nature, verbally. And I seem to recall one person abruptly getting up, slamming the door, leaving the room in a rather obnoxious manner, that sort of thing; rather violently doing it but not doing anything personally to the teacher, you know. I don't remember any teacher being either physically assaulted or whatever. That stuff you probably wouldn't know about. I don't know of any. (Mr. Pagart)

4.3.3 The Combatants

All three teachers and the school counsellor said that contrary to general belief that boys are more aggressive than girls and tend to perpetrate most of the fights, their school was having more problems with female students engaging in fights that year. When asked if boys and girls commit the same kinds of violence equally, they responded by saying:

Oh, definitely. Eh generally, I'm sure it is believed that boys tend to be the more aggressive type and that girls tend to mature more quickly at the Junior High level and that the boys tend to kind of drag behind with puberty; it doesn't kick in until a little later, right. But no, we have had cases as well where girls have been evocative, verbally especially in intimidating other children. It's not just limited to the male population. Girls are involved as well. (Ms. Groening)

It seems to be lately that girls are getting into it. One time, it would be name calling would be the worst the girls would get into, now girls are getting into physical fights. (Mr. Vermark)

Eh... up until this year, I would have said girls are more subtle about it. And generally speaking, we have seen the boys' fist

fights and the girls who are more into writing dirty notes to each other and this kind of thing, you know, threatening notes and such things. This year, we probably experience more of the girls' physical violence, you know, not a lot of it, but proportionate to what we've seen before, I think this year we probably have more concerns with girls fighting than boys. (Mr. Pagart)

This year, as I said earlier, it seems that there's more girls who are violent. If, again, I don't keep close contact of what happens in the administration of the school, but what I understand is that the number of fights that have been taking place in this school this year has been more girls than boys. (Mr. DuPont)

The teachers said that the majority of the perpetrators had a certain pattern or characteristics common to all of them: lower social and economic background; families with both parents working outside the home; single parent families; anger control problems; and problems with the law. They also indicated, however, that there are other students with rather "decent" family backgrounds who are becoming violent as well. Thus, they felt that while the family background might still be an issue, there are other issues involved as well.

Yah, there seems to be speculating. You'd have to speculate because we may know of homes. But every case home falls into a perfect category, you realize that of course. But I find that homes of single parents and homes where both parents are there but because of the standards of society, both parents are working. And children go to homes where their parent(s) is working and there's no one there to monitor their program. I find that makes a big difference to monitor their behaviour. And to apply consequences to any behaviour that might have happened during the day. Because there seems to be very little consequences and

also I find that homes of low income, social services types seem to be in the majority of perpetrators. But, see, you can always speak again generally because that's not always the case. And I hate to stereotype. Because I don't really believe that works. (Ms. Groening)

I think today we have an awfully lot of financially, relatively, well off families with mother and father working. I think we have kids who are probably experiencing family circumstances equivalent to single parents most by having two parents working in jobs that require them to be away from their kids so much that they're not providing parental leadership. Now, don't read that to say I don't believe both parents should be working, because I firmly believe that they have the right to do that. And I have no problem with that But you have two parents who are working quite frequently who are not providing the leadership, and they are ... I can use the words, buying off the kids. (Mr. Pagart)

Generally speaking, they are students who are what we'd call lower social and economic background. Who have parents who have similar problems, come from backgrounds of unemployment or even single parents. Or kids who are living in an environment where they are already in trouble with the law, you know, if they are in probation, for example, and may have anger trouble, aggression problems. (Mr. DuPont)

Mr. DuPont described a pattern of common factors with the victims as well. He found that victims were generally perceived by the other students as underlings and weaklings. He said that there were two types of victims: (i) students who were quiet and bright and (ii) students who were with the crowd, doing the fighting but where the delinquency and anti-social behaviour had reached a turning point and who decided they wanted to get out of that group.

When asked about the claim made in the literature that youth violence is on the rise, and specifically that teenage girls are becoming more and more violent, all three teachers and the school counsellor indicated that they believed it to be true.

Yah. I would. I've been here at this school about 2.5 years now. I've been teaching 10 years. But even noticeably so at this school since I arrived in my first year that there's more violence now than there was 2.5 years ago. And more cases of girls being involved. I've seen more girls at the office or comparable to the number of boys that go there. So, I don't believe that it's limited to boys anymore. (Ms. Groening)

Definitely. As I said in the last couple of years I have seen more girls. I mean usually girls, you know. They call each other names, that kind of thing, or they say something demeaning to them to quick cut. But now they out simplistically get into the ... we've had 3/4 girls in this school in the last couple of years suspended for fighting and so on: which is, and that would have been, 5 years ago, a rarity. But now it's almost, you know, if the boys do it, why can't we do it. I don't know if it's a unisex thing or not but something has changed... But there's definitely more girls involved in actual fist fights now. I mean physical violence; if you want verbal violence, they've been involved with that since, you know, [forever].

..... Not more than one month ago here where actually a girl was in my basketball team was a good kid. She took an awful, some verbal stuff from a girl; she hailed out and smacked her right in the mouth. I mean, she did some damage to her tooth. The parents of the other kid came back at her. I don't know where it's gone now, it's gone to a court system somewhere now. (Mr. Vermark)

Well, according to what I see, I think that's a true statement. I have seen more girls in a violent or in an aggressive situation, in a physically aggressive situation. I've seen more in the last 2 to 3 years than I've seen before. Eh.... they just seem to be dealing with their problems in that particular way. (Mr. DuPont)

4.3.4 Dealing with School Violence

The teachers echoed the administrators as far as reporting violence among the students is concerned. They said that the students do not report violence as much as they would like to see. The few that do report would be girls and younger boys who get picked on.

I suspect girls would be more prone to report if they're being picked on or whatever. Eh.... the younger boys tend to do the same thing. As they get older, I think there might be an image involved, and they learn what is socially acceptable or something. And as they get older, I think, they tend not to report to the same extent, unless it's serious stuff. (Mr. Pagart)

... We indicate to parents that we have no objections to them pressing charges if they feel they want to, and they have the right to do that. If they want to do that, that's not a problem. And in some cases if it was fairly serious, we would encourage them to do it because we feel that needs to be dealt with. Some cases kids need some counselling, not generally too much of a problem, but we've had a few cases where some cases where kids feel threatened and they're intimidated, little kids in grade 7 maybe, who said the wrong thing or did the wrong thing to somebody some point, you know, then they get quite upset, whatever, and we've had to deal with them. (Mr. Pagart)

The interviews indicated that the teachers were not too happy about the way the school deals with perpetrators of violence. They would like to see some improvements.

.... to say that it's really working, I'll have to say No. But I don't know. That one I can't really say because we don't really do enough follow up, I don't think, or the follow up is not coming back to the teacher. (Ms. Groening)

Ah ... ah it's a bandage on an open heart surgery, that's what it is. (Mr. Vermark)

It's typical for any program to work for some. I would prefer to see the anger control - some kind of counselling in that area

....

It's okay, but it probably needs to be a little bit more formalized, a little bit more laid out in a little more formal manner. (Mr. Pagart)

However, the school counsellor thought it was effective and working.

Among some of the improvements teachers would like to see being made in the way the school deals with perpetrators of violence would be for the administration to communicate with teachers and give them some feedback on the decisions made and consequences. Teachers would also like to see the procedure formalized, with programs to help the students deal with anger. One teacher thought that the school should not be dealing with the violent students at all. He felt that police should be called in, and that charges be laid on those students and have them dealt with by the legal system and the parents.

... let the legal system handle that and then, if that doesn't work, then say, Okay, look, your child is obviously having a lot of problems. Mr X/Mrs. X it's your problem. Until this child has been examined by a psychiatrist or some medical person, stating that this child has major behavioural problems, then we'll let him but until then, he's yours. Put the onus back to the parents where it belongs. (Mr. Vermark)

According to the school counsellor, both the perpetrators and the victims would normally approach him for help.

Eh ... pretty well so. Yes. More so of the victims than the perpetrators. (Mr. DuPont)

It appeared that students who seek help in the form of counselling do get it even though the school does not have anything that is formally set up to deal with the situation – especially for the victim.

Exactly there is nothing that I know of that takes care of the victim. (Mr. Vermark)

... We have counselling and we try and set up ... we try and establish some kind of trust and respect between our students and our teachers so that they feel that they can go to someone that they could trust and tell things. (Ms. Groening)

For the perpetrator, however, there is an education therapist who counsels them. The feeling, though, was that she is too busy to see all the students that need her help. Thus, like the school counsellor, she ends up dealing with the extreme cases.

We have an education therapist who can speak with some of the students. A lot of her students would be the type of student that would be a perpetrator, like the have that general type of behaviour, generally speaking, of course . Not all of them. She would talk to them about their behaviour and then try and teach them that this is not something that they should be doing. (Ms. Groening)

Formally, probably not. I do know that some kids have been dealt with by the guidance office, by Mr DuPont, who is the guidance counsellor. And I know he has done some work with some of the kids on anger control and that sort of thing. I can't tell you that it's been ongoing or there's a program in place or class every Wednesday afternoon or something, you know. But I do know in the extreme circumstances and I do know of a couple of instances where the kids have got counselling when it comes to anger control and that sort of thing. (Mr. Pagart)

There's no ... they don't have to go to any type of a therapy session or have any people visit homes, you know, or anything like that that I know of in our policy here or the school boards. I know it's a matter of suspension because there's a zero tolerance on fighting. (Mr. Vermark)

4.3.5 Causes of School Violence

Causes of teenage violence include a variety of factors and situations, according to the teachers in this study. Among those were:

(i) *The Media and Society*

I think it's probably societal, unfortunately because when you say society you're speaking so generally that it's almost like it's an excuse rather than a reason. But society in terms that violence seems to be an ongoing acceptable type of thing and videos, movies, the media in general. (Ms. Groening)

Mr DuPont, the school counsellor, thought that teenagers have a hard time differentiating what is real from what is unreal on television, movies and the media. They seem not to perceive their violent actions as violence. He said,

... I think a lot of it has to do with what they perceive as violence. Eh.... either real or unreal, either on TV, in the media generally.

(ii) *Home/Family Background (Learned Behaviour)*

... eh some of them have faced violence from the time they were little kids themselves and that's the only way they know to express themselves or to exert themselves or to get their way. They've never seen verbal persuasion, whatever.... (Mr. Pagart)

The children today are under pressures for alcohol, pressures for drugs, for sex..... a lot of demands are put to them or whatever and then they react to them. (Mr. DuPont)

(iii) *Frustration*

... children who are also very frustrated from an academic perspective. We are not meeting their needs from an academic perspective and they're just on the edge all the time. their emotions are on the edge. (Mr. DuPont)

(iv) *Violent Sporting Activities*

We've had incidents in the school where, one of the other factors, one of the reasons, I think, in this community, probably within Canada, but in this community there is a real big hyperness about boys involved in sports that are perceived to be violent. But nobody sees them as violent. For example, hockey. (Mr. DuPont)

I think it's a matter of kids attempting to exert themselves. Some of them are power trips. I don't think that makes girls any different than guys. (Mr. Pagart)

Also, machismo and gender equality seem to be contributing factors to the escalating rate of violence among teenage girls. Apparently, the teachers feel that there seems to be an attitude among these girls that if they are to be deemed equal to boys, they must be violent just like some of the boys are and show some spirit of machismo, at least according to one teacher.

As I said in the last couple of years I have seen more girls, I mean usually girls, you know. They call each other names But now they out simplistically get into the ... we've had 3/4 girls in this school in the last couple of years suspended for fighting and so on; that would have been, 5 years ago, a rarity. But now it's almost, you know, if the boys do it, why can't we do it. I don't know if it's a unisex thing or not but something has changed ...

... I don't know. I'm not certain ... I'm just observing from my own perspective, but I mean it's the macho search. You have to have this macho image. A lot of girls are now getting tattoos and so on, which is becoming ... And that's just basically much of. I can take the pain of a needle going through my arm 13/15 hundred times, whatever it takes to get a tattoo. I don't know... I think it is more of the facade of I am a tough guy and the girls wearing these leathers and all that kind of stuff with their collars up. That goes back to the early '60s with the motorcycle gangs. (Mr. Vermark)

Another purported cause of teenage violence is the use of drugs by teenagers. Alcohol was reported as the number one drug of choice by these young people. Following is what the teachers said about drugs among students:

I knew it was there and I knew it was a serious problem. But I didn't realize that it was so serious until I hear a drug bust around the school and, you know, students involved at the Junior and Senior High level, selling drugs.

... and I know that some of our students are taking drugs. You just hear other students saying it. I think it's getting more serious. (Ms. Groening)

It's definitely related to drugs and alcohol. But not so much drugs, unless drugs are coming back, but I think alcohol is the drug now, isn't it? I think so. When we grade this community, I don't think any of the emphetamines, or maybe there may be some marijuana around. I'm sure there is. You know, hashish and stuff, but I don't think it's like the heavy drugs. The blame is alcohol because it's so easy to get, right. (Mr. Vermark)

Ah.... I don't think the drugs as much as alcohol. Well, if you put alcohol under the drug category, yes, I'd have to say yes. But in this community, in the community of Mt Pearl, I'm probably convinced that it is the alcohol abuse that is the number one problem. (Mr. DuPont)

Girls are no exception to the drug use and the alcohol abuse. They participate in it as well. When asked how involved girls were, some teachers were positive that they were as involved as the boys.

Yes, and sometimes I don't think they realize just how serious it is. If they buy these drugs, they don't know where they are coming from. They don't know what's mixed in with them. And they just bought them and they used them. But I think the biggest problem is with drinking - alcohol. Now I know that they're using, you know, other drugs, but alcohol is probably the most abused drug, I would think. (Ms. Groening)

Yes, oh yes. We had an incident here 3 years ago, the child, well, 2 years, was in grade 7 then is now in grade 9, of a child who was raped within a situation with all her friends observing, but they were all drinking. And they were observing this girl's boyfriend, who was 17, she was 12. Now, the parents had a part to say there. They were having sexual relations, but all of her

friends were around the room watching her but they were all drunk. To them it was like a dream....

We had another incident where another child was knocked down in a traffic accident 2 years ago, and it was a bunch of our students who were drinking. They were in grade 8 at the time. So, they were about 13. And they were all out drinking beer, then they walked across an intersection in Mount Pearl. And it just so happened the driver was drinking as well. He came down and he hit into the group of them. They all scattered and one girl was hit and she had both of her hips broken. She was lucky she wasn't killed. (Mr. DuPont)

4.3.6 Dealing with School Violence

The School's Responsibility and Role

Two of the teachers, including the school counsellor, felt that the school bears some responsibility for the violence that happens within it.

... It encourages bad behaviour to begin with. When you take those many students, 22 home rooms, and you put those students together under one roof, then you're automatically encouraging conflict because every personality there is different. And, all of those students come from a variety of backgrounds. There has to be conflict. That in itself encourages violent behaviour in some cases. (Ms. Groening)

Ah in a small way we contribute to a lot of frustrations. If we do not have adequate programs to deal with the children who are academically challenged. Because we just perpetrate their frustration and their embarrassment and their failures; and then consequently, the resulting negative feelings towards the school. (Mr. DuPont)

The other two teachers did not think that the school bears any responsibility for the violence that happens within it. They believed that it was society's problem and that the school was only a mirror of the society it is in.

Let's see. I'm not certain that the school does anything to contribute to it. To me the school is a microcosm of society. (Mr. Vermark)

We've talked about what do we do from here in terms of how do we teach kids that violence is not the right answer, how do we teach kids that respect for each other is important. It's societal and it comes in here. And we are one part of the big microcosm that community itself. I think sometimes we need the big picture. And we're trying to solve the community's problems in the school, which makes it very frustrating sometimes. (Mr. Pagart)

The teachers felt that there is a role that the school could play in curbing some of the violence. Some of the ideas were still to be translated into action and some of them were already being tried out at the time of the study.

(i) *Downplaying bad behaviours*

And I bet you we all know the names of those who are causing us grief and the best students in our school are kind of overlooked. You know, there's something not right there. And it's our responsibility to downplay those bad behaviours and try and fix them as much as we can, but we have a bigger responsibility to the majority of our students who are good kids. And I think sometimes we lean too much the other way. We spend too much time with the perpetrators. (Ms. Groening)

(ii) *Reinforcing proper behaviours*

I think we are responsible to reinforce proper behaviours that we hope are being taught at home. Just general good manners and general respect for people and property. And that it's okay to be nice to be nice to people, it's okay to treat people well. You're not going to be looked at like a weak girl, a wimp or someone who's not noble because you're a nice person. (Ms. Groening)

(iii) *Involving other agencies for the long term solution of violence*

I think it's the big picture in the long term of all of this is not let's do something in our school. I think the long term of it is to get society involved. To get out there, to start on the big picture. Eh if we as one institution in the community can say, let's provide some leadership. Let's get some other schools involved, let's get the community involved. Let's get the police involved, let's get the churches involved, let's get the families involved; and if we can get at that end of it, I think the long term of that would be a positive one. (Mr. Pagart)

(iv) *Making the school attractive and keeping students interested*

We can improve our physical plans to make the school attractive and get students more involved in saying that. If I have a part to play in this school, then I'd probably have respect for the school, and therefore respect for the people who are here in the school. (Mr. DuPont)

(v) *Controlling the student population (who come to the school, to do what)*

Eh.... personally, I think we have to do more to control our own population, as regards, who is in the school. We have a problem outside of our school with other kids who hang around here. And who may be bringing in a lot of the influence; they are trying to sell cigarettes, they are trying to sell drugs. They are selling outside the building, but then the kids whom they are selling to are coming into the building and then they are reacting to the situations. (Mr. DuPont)

(vi) *Reorganizing the programs*

We can change the academic programs to solve some of that frustration [fashion the programs such that they meet students' needs]. (Mr. DuPont)

(vii) *Changing the classroom structure and movement in between classes*

... we're planning to do some regrouping of our students in the class structure to try to break down some of those barriers as well, to try and help the academic frustration. We are going to initiate a policy that says: The teachers will move between classes, not the students. So, every time the bell goes in this school, 700 kids normally move and you are having 700 teenagers interacting, pushing, poking and pinching and talking and whatever. We're going to try for a year and see whether we can leave the students in the rooms and the teachers will do the moving. That will cut down the corridor activity... (Mr. DuPont)

(viii) *Supervising areas prone to harmful situations*

Eh passport teacher supervision; that's another big issue. To have teachers in certain places where they can control what could be potentially harmful situations like our cafeteria, for example. (Mr. DuPont)

The Youth's Role

The school counsellor did not think that they could do much because of their age and maturity when it comes to planning social activities versus the use of school time. The students serving in the student council were prone to suggesting out of class social activities to take place during school time. That, to Mr. DuPont, showed that they were immature.

Eh.... this level, unfortunately, not very much, that's my opinion. We do have a student council here in our school, and there are 22 elected students from each one. But the trouble at JH is that the majority of them are not mature enough to take on any big responsibility.

... a lot of times they want to plan an out of class activity. "Let's not have Maths today, we'll have volleyball". or, "lets take of the afternoon" or whatever. And you really have to get them focussed in what they are supposed to be doing. Then they'll start looking at things in a mature manner.

The Parents' Role

According to the teachers, parents need to initiate strategies to keep their children in line at home and to support and reinforce what is done at school. They need to be observant, assist with homework, and listen to their children.

... we probably need the parents to support what we're doing: Knowing where their children are, assisting the child with work, listening to them. Quite often, the attitude is, "I'm not going to listen to a 14 year old because they have nothing worthwhile to say" or giving them the opportunity, giving the teenager an opportunity to at least express some feeling and to get some frustrations of feelings out in the open before they just build up and they end up coming to school and doing something or saying something out of absolute, total frustration. (Mr. DuPont)

The Government's Role

According to Mr. DuPont, there are two ways the government can help: first, it can help by directly providing personnel to the school.

Ah well, if they are able to do any thing, it's to give us personnel to deal with it, instead of talking cut backs and going to lay off people or whatever, to allow students to be able to have the personnel in the school to deal with the concerns that are there. And in a lot of cases, people who are appropriately trained with child development courses, child psychological type of courses.

Government can also help indirectly by providing more services to the community.

They can do something indirectly not to directly do with the school, but to have more services within the community in the social services sector, and the mental health sector. Social workers, mental health workers who we can refer a child to who has a problem. And that's very lacking in this community as well. For example, a child in this school right now, we have a child here who is going through a lot of flashbacks from a sexual assault. She is now 15. The incident happened when she was 8. The parents didn't deal with it. It was dealt with legally. The perpetrator was charged and sentenced and whatever. But at that time, the parents refused ultimately any type of intervention for their child. They said their child didn't need it, but now the child is having the flashbacks and the emotional stress because of the assault. So, when I make contact to try and get some help, professional help, to deal with sexual assault. I am told I have to wait 4-6 months.... eventually she will reach the age where, technically, social services has no legal responsibility at all; when you're 17 or 18 years of age, there is a real grey area.

4.3.7 Conclusion

Although the teachers claim that there are many good students and the school appears to offer an excellent academic program, the teachers seem

frustrated by the violent students.

And it totally makes you feel very useless when your hands are tied and you're not able to help those students who are being picked on, and to change the behaviour that's not happening. Sometimes I come to school and I leave very frustrated because I know all these things are happening, but I don't know what to do about it. And I feel like I am out of control and I don't know what to do. (Ms. Groening)

It appears as though there is conflict as well in relation to the seriousness of violence in school, at least according to one of the teachers. He seemed to be giving conflicting statements on the subject; at some point, he sounded as though he accepted violence among the students at school as a normal phenomena.

In Junior High, it's a normal thing. It's a normal part of growing up in society. Now, unfortunately, there's weapons being involved which I guess that's what brings it into the violence business. But I don't know. But I haven't seen it. I have been teaching 22 years. I haven't seen any increase, decrease in school violence ever. It's always been there ... No, no, I certainly agree that female violence has been increasing. With regards to violence being a serious problem, no ... Usually the violence is at the beginning of the year when the kids got to get their pecking order, then they get to see who's the crocodile, then they get to find out who's the hard case in school. So, you know, this is followed by the highest prestige or girl. (Mr. Vermark)

For some teachers, the issue on children's rights has been taken too far and in the process removed all rights from adults (parents, teachers). For example, according to Mr. Pagart, there is a need to balance the two sides.

I think our society has hit the extreme, we've overreacted. And I don't mean just Newfoundland because really right across North America, probably we've tended to overreact in favour of the child at this point. Now, I'm not sure if I want to apologize for that. Initially, you know, I think the child does need the protection We need to deal with it and there has to be laws in place that give the child the right to have somewhere to go to deal with those issues. On the other hand, eh.... what it is done maybe as an overreaction, maybe there will be a little bit of common sense down the road somewhere, but as an overreaction I think what we've done is taken away the rights of the adults, period Hopefully, down the road somewhere along the way, they'll start to balance it out again. (Mr. Pagart)

Besides agreeing that there is a dire need in both the school and community systems for more qualified personnel to deal with children at risk, the teachers feel that the school is a reflection of the society that it is in. Thus, dealing with the problems at the society's level would take care of the situation in school.

I think the big picture is societal and if we can get out there in society and make everybody do what you're doing now, and some other people are doing to try to bring to society's attention some of the concerns out there, then we would wake up at some point and try to do something about it. If we can get the bigger picture change, I think the school situation would take care of itself quite nicely. (Mr. Pagart)

A final point worth noting is that all the teachers in the study admitted to not being familiar enough with the Young Offenders' Act. However, they felt that it is overly protective of the youth; and also that the young people know it too well and they manipulate it.

I'm not really familiar with the YOA to be truthful. I'm not even sure if I could comment on it and be correct. The only thing I know is probably they protect the child more than adults sometimes. I don't necessarily agree with that. No. I don't think that if a child is committing crimes of an adult age which is 18, then they should be treated that way. They should be treated as an adult.

... It seems that they know that they are protected. They are protected by their rights. They know that. But, I will be very strong and say if someone does something that they know is against their rights or someone else's rights then they should lose the right that goes along with that. I don't think they have rights anymore to such an extent and no matter what their age. And no one can convince me that when you're 13/14 years old you don't know what's right and what's wrong and what's bad behaviour and what's not bad behaviour. You do. Sure you do. And you have to be responsible for your behaviour. And a lot of these children are not responsible. They're passing it along to someone else. (Ms. Groening)

Well, you see, these kids know the YOA, something to it, better than we do. And they know they're untouchable, they know, unfortunately, there's people explaining that too: getting these kids involved in some very shady things, because they know that those kids cannot be touched. The worst of them go to Witbourne or to the youth centre in Witbourne and that's about the worst that can happen to them. Some of these kids know that they can get away with murder, hopefully it never gets to that here. It's obviously happening in the States. (Mr. Vermark)

When I made mention of the 2 or 3 kids that we have here who tend to be repeat, in their conversations, they'll often mention their friends who are also repeat offenders. And they'll smile and say, well, you know, he's only 15 so you'll only get about 2 months for this anyway, you know, this kind of comment. And they know the YOA extremely well. They know exactly what they can get. And they'll also make comments like, well, if they can get treated under the YOA maybe 16.5, where they'd probably be treated as a 17 year old, depending on the crime, if they can get treated as

a kid, treated under the YOA he'll be great, he'll be fine, he'll only get 6 months or a year or 2 months ... But if he goes in as an adult and gets charged in the adult court, he's in trouble, you know this kind of thing. And the kids know it. So, I think they feel somewhat protected by it, and use it ... (Mr. Pagart)

4.4 The Parents' Perspectives

4.4.1 Introduction

Three parents who were recommended by the principal participated in this study. All three of them were members of the Parents Advisory Committee.

Theodorah Thistle⁶: Mother of two boys who attended this school.

Julian Friesen: Mother of two boys, one of whom was involved in a serious fist fight with another student on their way to school. She has been serving in this committee for three years since it was founded.

Cleopatra Bromley: A single parent with two children. Her elder boy attends Croydon Junior High. He was in grade 7 at the time of the study. The other one was still at home, too young to attend school.

4.4.2 Types of Violence, Gender of Perpetrators and Victims

These parents described violence as any act done verbally or physically to another student or person with the intention of hurting his/her feelings.

Eh.... school violence could be one of; described as verbal abuse, you know, among peers. If there's a child that is not as aggressive, that child is going to be picked on. (Theodorah)

I guess anything ranging from intentional rough handling to intentional hurt another person. Right from that on I guess to

⁶All names in the thesis are fictional

the ... you hear knives, swarming, things like that. But starting from even hurting somebody's feelings intentionally.

... Sort of an invasion of somebody's person with the intent to hurt. (Julian)

I'd think someone picking on someone else with no reason or maybe small eh... eh... the bully type. There's always those in school. And I guess just these teenagers out there who want to prove that they're superior to some other kid. (Cleopatra)

Two of the parents said violence was definitely a problem in this school.

The third parent did not think that violence was as much a problem in the school as in the underground tunnels the school had.

Not so much violence as such that we've had a problem with the tunnel down there connecting our 2 schools. Because the problem that we have down there is that there's a certain group of students that hangs out there; not necessarily Junior High students, there are 2 High Schools and a Junior High here, and they hang out and there's a lot of drugs being sold there and smoking going on there and alcohol being sold and cigarettes being sold. (Theodorah)

Among the prevalent types of violence, bullying and verbal abuse ranked highest.

Ah... I've heard of instances, eh.... buses, the school buses, where 10,11 year olds I guess, grade 7 are pushed around by older kids, say grade 7's pushed around by grade 9's, their lunches taken away from them, they're forced to hand over when they get on the bus money, whatever money they have left in their pockets from the day, things like that. If they had a bar in their pocket, you know, give me that. I want that. So, I would call that violence, too. (Julian)

Eh... I don't know too much about here because this is my son's first time. Eh... it's more of the bigger kids pushing the younger kids. There's a lot of not very nice language used. Eh... put downs, you know. Not words that you'd like to hear a very young child use, but they're subject to it all the time, and they pick it up. So, it is verbal and physical violence. (Cleopatra)

Aggressive kids. Kids that were ...eh ...if you may, doing things like 4 or 5 kids together, probably causing fights ... There was a fair amount of this at the Junior High ... had a kid who was very big for 13 or 14 and they were bullying some of the smaller kids. That was the major violence that was expressed to me. Bullying, yes. (Theodorah)

It was established that both boys and girls are responsible as perpetrators of violence. However, some parents felt that the males were still by far the most violent of the two, even though two of the parents agreed that boys and girls commit the same types of violence.

I think it is generally the male ... I cannot say that they (girls) are not involved, but not involved as much. (Theodorah)

When I say that they (girls) are tough, I mean that they have the potential I guess, to commit the same violent acts (as boys). I wouldn't say there is a certain act that a girl would not do. (Julian)

No, I think boys are far more violent than girls from what I've seen ... I've heard some things about what's going on out here. It don't happen. I don't think it's as extreme as boys.

... We've mostly got boys in our community and the girls they're all younger and they seem to play fine; but the boys, there's always a lot of pushing and shoving and stuff like that. (Cleopatra)

According to Theodorah, the attacks are always made against the same sex, that is, boys attack other boys and girls attack girls.

4.4.3 Gangs

To two of the parents a gang was generally perceived as a group of children hanging out together, generally up to nothing constructive. One of the parents did say that sometimes the term gang is used to mean or refer to a group of children hanging together, not necessarily doing something bad or disruptive. Among the activities the parents mentioned that gangs do are stealing, drinking and vandalism.

... I define a gang, I guess, as a group of kids who, eh... have their own agenda. Some of them I guess are probably angry with the world, eh ... don't like some of the kids as a group in another school, for example and each gang agrees to fight ... (Julian)

... I guess the most recent thing you think of is the gang out at Beacons Field, kids picking on other kids or one specific kid.

I'd say there's a gang in most schools. I mean whether they're bad kids or just a gang that hangs around together because that is another term like, hang around with the gang' that's not necessarily always a bad thing. (Cleopatra)

... I know they steal. I've heard of an incidence where they get together and steal cars even though they don't have a licence. They steal cars either downtown or they get together and drink. they get together and vandalize property, especially if they're on the walkway and, you know, this neighbourhood backyard property. (Theodorah)

Concerning the presence of gangs in their communities, these parents had different views.

No. We do not ... That's not true because we used to have gangs in our neighbourhood. When we lived in a wooded area

like the area behind us was all woods. And there would be gangs of about 15 boys, girls that go out there especially on a Thursday and a Friday and a Saturday night. (Theodorah)

Bad gangs? We've got a couple of bad kids on the street here. Eh.... I don't know if they qualify for a gang ... (Cleopatra)

4.4.4 Drugs

The parents had concerns about the students buying, selling and using drugs.

They were concerned that they were becoming a problem in the school. that it was becoming easy for the students to get them.

... the problem that we have down there (in the tunnels) is that there's a certain group of students that hangs out there: not necessarily Junior High students, there are 2 High Schools and a Junior High here, and they hang out and there's a lot of drugs being sold there and smoking going on there and alcohol being sold and cigarettes being sold. (Theodorah)

Oh, I think a lot of kids are using them (drugs). They are becoming earlier all the time earlier age. They're becoming more accessible to the kids ... last year they had a drug bust not just in the school, it was a combination of the 3 schools ... I would think that it would be maybe older associates, maybe elder friends and they're bringing it to school and pushing it here. Well, I don't know if it's in the school but on the grounds outside I would think, yah. During lunch time, before school, after school, whenever. (Cleopatra)

4.4.5 Parents' Concerns

At one point, all of these parents had had concerns about their children's safety, either in the neighbourhood, on the school grounds and surrounding area, or on their way to or from school. For all three, the concerns were based on experiences that their children had gone through or had told them about.

For example, when asked if they had had any concerns about their children's safety, they said:

(i) *In the neighbourhood and along the way to school:*

Yes, in the neighbourhood. (Cleopatra)

That was part of the incident that I ran into about a year and a half ago when my son was smoking and had admitted to me that he was smoking and promised not to smoke anymore. And came home very ill one day at dinner time/supper time and told me that he had smoked 2 cigarettes on his way home ... I believe that there was something in the cigarettes. And even to this day, he would say, Mom I bought them from somebody. He wouldn't tell me who. And according to how sick I was, maybe there was something in it ... And I got up the next morning and I went to work. And on hindsight I should have stayed at home, but he walked to school the next morning; and he was still feeling sick from the night before. And on his way to school, it was arranged along the pathway that he would be made to fight somebody. And this was his so called friend who had arranged this situation and he had to fight. I was called from work to come to the school ... (Julian)

I don't think there's any problem. He comes on the bus. So, he gets on the bus at the door and gets off at the door. So, I don't think there's any problem here coming to school. (Cleopatra)

(ii) *On the school grounds/surrounding area:*

Yes. My first son was a little bit more passive, quieter, kept to himself more. He was always afraid of going through the tunnels alone, but that wasn't during Junior High. That was like when he was in younger grade where he was always afraid of the bigger children. And that could be when he was about 9 or 10 and the bigger children ... The bigger children that he kept referring to could have been, you know, not that much older, like 12, 14 years old. But to him they were bigger children and he was afraid of them. They intimidated him. They never did anything to him, physically, but it's just the fact that he wouldn't walk past them, just the fear that they would do something to him. (Theodorah)

... like the kids here (at school) go to the store. A lot of kids go to the store and my son goes to that store down there. He says, you know, it's not safe to go a certain way because you're going to get picked on, you're going to be hurt ...

... He has been attacked. He and his friend last, I guess maybe late October, early November, him and his friend both of them are very small, very skinny and short. They were walking to the store and one kid came up behind them and pushed both of them in the mud at the same time and they were covered from head to toe in mud. And the kid just ran off. (Cleopatra)

These parents felt and believed strongly that it was just as important to be aware of their children's whereabouts when they were not at home as knowing the friends they kept and the activities they were involved in. Some of them said they make an effort even to be in touch with the parents of their children's friends. They felt it was very important to do this in an endeavour to keep their children out of trouble.

Yes. Most of the time, I make it a point of trying to get to meet their parents through telephone calls, telephone conversations ... I get good indications when parents call me about their

child. So that ...try to establish ...where they ...what they think about it. (Theodorah)

Yes. Generally, I do. Eh there was a time during that fall when I began to become suspicious because after school he wouldn't come right home and he'd say he was hanging around the school with some friends. And he was generally, I don't know, a little bit dulled. Eh... not really with it some days and his work started to drop off. And that is what made me suspicious about smoking and I asked him and since that time, pretty well know where he is and generally what he's doing. His friends are a pretty good bunch ...at that particular time he was hanging around with a few people that I did not really think too highly of. And after that incident he was told that he was not allowed to be friends with this person or group anymore, and he agreed. And since then, there hasn't been any problem and I think a lot depends on who they are friends with ... (Julian)

Yes. Most of them I know. Not by name, but by sight. A lot of them come to the house. Some of them sleep over Some of them I approve of. You do not always approve of all your children's friends. (Cleopatra)

4.4.6 Dealing with Violence in the Community

These participants were not quite sure how the community dealt with perpetrators of violence. They lacked examples to use in describing the procedure followed because, as we talked, it became apparent that people in the community were not very keen to report violence.

Well, lots of times if it's not your child, you probably try to avoid anything to do with it. Because you don't want them to do anything on your property if it's a gang. Eh... the authorities, I think, try to deal with children and ten of course parents try to solve the problems. I haven't had personal experience. So, I don't know what they do really. (Theodorah)

Well, the one thing where there are gang fights I know that the police or the RNC are involved and they get involved if they're there on time to get involved and to break it up. I don't know if there's a gang, I guess that exists say; in this school we haven't heard too much about it; well, there must have been up to very much, you know what I mean. So, I don't know what you'd do in that situation or if you need to do anything.

I would say that each member who is actually caught would be charged or whatever. (Julian)

...I don't know because a lot of the time, I mean, neighbourhood violence is not always reported. And usually when it is reported, it may be only the one that, you know, the one instance which is nothing really done about it ...

...a lot of times there's violence in the home, the parents don't want to press charges against their kids. I know of incidences where the kids have abused parents and the parents ...just will not press charges ... They feel responsible for their child. They feel that this is not going to help the child, that it would have more negative than positive influence on the child ...they just feel guilty that they didn't do the job that they should have done and therefore it's their fault that the child is behaving like that. (Cleopatra)

When asked if there were programs to help both the victims and the perpetrators in their community and school, they did not think there was any and if there was, they said that they were not aware of them. Some did think help was available, perhaps, in the school through the guidance counsellor and the vice principal.

For the victim:

I don't think so well, the guidance counsellor is here and I think they work with some of the kids and the Vice Principal.

Lynn does a lot with the problem kids, but I don't know if there's a program as such. (Julian)

For the perpetrator:

I do not think so, or aware of what goes on here at school if they have any, you know, classes on getting along or anything like that. I certainly don't think in the community itself.

...I can't come right out and say no, because I didn't read the outline from cover to cover. I read through the basics to see what each course consisted of. But that was September and I wouldn't be able to say no, there's nothing here. (Cleopatra)

She thought something could be put in place for the victim.

I think they could be educated more on what these things do to other people and how they affect other people's emotions. Eh... they could become more aware of other people's feelings. (Cleopatra)

4.4.7 Causes

According to the parents in the study, youth violence, specifically violence perpetrated by girls, is caused by a complex variety of factors. Causes include insecurity, self-perception, external pressures, family background, the media, money, working parents. They did mention some other factors as contributing factors to the escalating rate of violence by teenagers. A discussion of their views follows.

(i) The Young Offenders' Act

None of the parents could confidently comment on the YOA without mentioning that they were not quite familiar or did not know much about it. However, they did think that the YOA was too protective of the young people to the point of letting them off the hook of responsibility for their actions.

I know that they protect the young offender to a point now where I think, I could be wrong, they're now thinking about, in our province, making the parents responsible for the acts that are done by the young offenders. I don't know if this is past talking about doing it because a young offender, you cannot punish a young offender to that degree of extent because of their age and you can't develop their name because of their age ... (Theodorah)

Not very. I'm really not familiar with the YOA. Well, I think today I don't really know what the consequences of some of the violent acts are in whatever age group, and I don't think kids do either. I don't think they know very much about the YOA. I could be wrong but I really don't know a big lot about it. (Julian)

Not very at all. From my understanding of the YOA, I think it could be like they protect these kids too much. We've got really violent kids who are being protected just by the fact that they are young offenders ... Definitely, they know. Kids know. I mean, you've got the kids here in school who know that the teacher can't touch them or they'll call the police over whoever.. They know all their rights. They know. (Cleopatra)

(ii) Single Parenting

Single parenting was also mentioned as a factor contributing to youth violence. However, as I talked with the parents, it appeared to me that the

problem was perceived as not having one parent bringing up and taking care of the children *per se*, but that the real problem was prioritizing, spending time with the children and being observant as a parent, knowing or making attempts to know or at least have an idea of where your children are and what they are doing.

I am a single parent. I think there's a big problem with the kids, the change of having two parents in the home rather than just the one. I think it depends on the parent. Some parents, single parents, don't take the time because there are a lot of other things going on in their lives, they don't make the kids their priority. But I think, you know, there are as well some good single parents out there who probably are more effective than a two parent situation. (Cleopatra)

One parent thought that family background was a contributing factor to youth violence:

Oh, yah, sure. And I think today they see more of it because so many families are broken up, I think. There are so many single parent families. People don't have the time to have your eyes open and be continually on the watch for kids. Everybody is so busy with responsibilities, especially in homes where there's one parent I think it's quite a challenge. I'm not saying that all the troubled kids come from a one parent family. But I know I wouldn't want to have a one parent family ... (Julian)

(iii) Home Experience

Another contributing factor mentioned had to do with what the teenagers experience in their own homes. These were experiences with violence directed

or inflicted on them, or on their parents. Some of the children who are exposed to violence learn that violence and confrontation are the only ways of dealing with conflict, and having control/power over a situation or someone else.

When asked if she thought home experiences had anything to do with the problem of teenage violence, Cleopatra, the single parent, said.

I'd think so. And a lot of kids are subject to violence at home. I don't know what the average is but kids who see violence at home as a way of getting control then they're going to use it themselves. I am not aware of the statistics, but I know there is quite a bit of violence at home. Between spouses and kids, yah.

(iv) Drugs

Young people were reported to be using drugs very early in their lives. Some of their violent acts were deemed as a result of the drugs. One parent said:

I would say it would take a big part, yah. Because from my understanding of drugs, you are not always aware of what you are doing. You are not in your right mind ... (Cleopatra)

The other two parents did not have anything to say that was directly in response to the question of youth violence in relation to drugs.

(v) Gender Equality

According to Julian, in their desire to prove that they are equal to boys, girls turn to violence to show that they can be just as tough as boys.

I think that some girls want to be seen as just as rough and tough as you are if you are a boy. 'And I can stand up to you and I can equal you and ...' I think girls are a lot more assertive today. Not all of them, I'd say. But there's a certain percentage of girls who want to be equal with boys. (Julian)

4.4.8 Dealing with Violence

From what the parents said, since violence affects the whole community, they (the parents) were calling for a joint effort from individual community members, groups and clubs that exist in the community as well as other agencies to successfully deal with violence. Parents were asked to comment on the agencies, organizations and individuals and the role they could play in the fight against teenage violence. They named five: the school, police, social services, government/politicians, parents and the youth.

(i) The school

The school could lay down clear rules of what is expected of the students and stick to them. And with them should be corresponding punishment for not conforming to those rules. It could also put into place programs on anger

control, respect for each other. Peer counselling was another program that the school could set up.

I think try to have rules to follow in the school as much within reason. If children know, if teenagers know that they have a set of guidelines to follow they'll follow them. There's going to be deviations of course, but I think rules should be set and enforced ... then children will know what's expected of them ... If you do not conform, this is not acceptable behaviour so there will have to be ways to deal with it. (Theodorah)

I think quite now the school is playing a part in putting out a lot of fires, handling so many incidents on a day to day basis. I think Lynn 70 what she had said. Eh... kids need to be taught to respect each other. (Julian)

Maybe some kind of lectures or classes on anger control ... (Cleopatra)

(ii) Social Services

Two of the parents were not quite sure of what the social services department does. Thus, they did not feel comfortable commenting on them. However, one parent felt that social services could offer some help to the school as per its need in setting up some of the programs in the school.

They could be involved in setting up some kind of giving some guidelines for programs in the schools if the schools needed them. Because in the social services there are trained psychologists there in the department. (Theodorah)

I do not know how social services are involved and I haven't heard of anything ... I do not know if I can comment on social services. (Julian)

I am not really aware of what social services does. I know they're terribly understaffed as well. They're struggling just to meet the basic needs of people ... (Cleopatra)

(iii) Police

It was brought to my attention that in the community the police were already involved in alleviating some of the problems. The parents had no objections to them going in the school to help and talk with children. They could help by being visible in the school and community, and by running programs in the schools and community for children.

Be more visible for one thing in the school ... Because if they are visible and they are part of the school and they become well known to the students more like a friend or someone they could go and talk to ... They also are good at setting up programs, setting up awareness programs for the children. (Theodorah)

They are becoming more and more involved. There's the community based policing program now that they have in effect and the fact that the RNC officers like assigned to specific schools, it increases the awareness of the kids of the presence of the RNC. They come in, not everyday. (Julian)

I think having police in the school would be beneficial; if they came in here maybe in a not as police officers but as friends. That's what would get kids to trust them and then maybe more kids would come forward with information if they felt safe. (Cleopatra)

(iv) Government/Politicians

Politicians could encourage the already existing programs that deal with violence, be it in the school or community, to make these places safe.

... I suppose through the social services department, the police department just really getting in, enabling these departments

to do the things that they can by, you know, providing them with the funds and whatever. (Theodorah)

...they could like make these programs a priority instead of putting them on the shelf, you know, give more support the social services department, give more support to the school and to their police in the neighbourhood. Otherwise, there's a lot of money being wasted in government that could be redirected to the schools. I think schools should be a priority for government. I think kids should get good education. (Cleopatra)

(v) Parents and Youth

All the parents believed that parents could help by being involved in their children's lives at home and away from home. They could be more observant and live up to their responsibilities as parents for their children, especially by being aware of their children's whereabouts.

As far as the young people are concerned, the parents thought that they could help by being willing to take responsibility for their actions. They could also help by standing up for themselves against violence (break the code of silence as far as reporting violence is concerned).

I think a lot of parents should be more aware of their children's activities. Eh.... they should be more aware of their kids' behaviour, who their friends are, you know, different behaviour from say one month he's a great kid and 2 months later he's withdrawn and here we've got to check out what the problem is with this child. (Cleopatra)

...parents and the child to be responsible and accountable
...hold your kids accountable, responsible. (Julian)

I think they (children) have to start taking responsibility for themselves of what they're following. If the guidelines are set down by the school, then they have to take responsibility and follow those guidelines and if not, then they've to take responsibility for it ... (Theodorah)

I think they (the children) could play a big role. They seem to want to, maybe it's more worse thinking that it's going to go away. They could stand out as most of them didn't do, be more sure of themselves, to say, well, this kid did this to me. They could become more involved ... But they need some support. They need to be to think that they are part of the majority when they're speaking out against people. They feel like they are being singled out, getting along with each other, maybe more understanding of other people's situations or lives, what they're going through. (Cleopatra)

4.4.9 Conclusion

In concluding the interviews, personal comments were made by the parents.

Out of those comments came these points which seemed crucial:

(i) Parental Involvement

Although the school and teachers are open to having parents come in to the school and be involved in their children's education and take part in some programs put up to help parents in their parenting skills, a minority of them takes advantage of those opportunities.

Some do ... I would say in a percentage probably a low percentage to what the number of students are here, probably 1/3

of the parents take advantage of the fact that, this is open, you come in; not really open but I mean the teachers are willing ... (Theodorah)

... And the majority of parents are not really involved with the school. (Julian)

I think the opportunity is there for the parents to be involved. I think a lot of the parents either don't want to find the time to be involved or they just don't care ... I am involved in a parenting course here at school. We've been doing it for about 10 weeks. I think we've got about 700 kids here and there's practically 12 people in each class. So, you're talking about 24 parents out of 500 parents that come to be educated about what they can do to help their child get through the teenage years. I think that's pretty sad. (Cleopatra)

(ii) Parents and Teachers Frustration (the famous 'our hands are tied' statement)

Contrary to the claim made by some parents and teachers that as a result of government's intervention on how they discipline the children, they cannot do anything, one parent thought the claim was an excuse on the parents' and teachers' part to avoid responsibility and sound, acceptable ways of disciplining children.

I think when people use that statement they must be thinking physical violence themselves. I mean there's a lot of things you can do at home, there's lots of things that could be done here at school. There has got to be consequences for actions. (Cleopatra)

(iii) The School-Government Relationship

At least one parent said that there was a good relationship between the school and government.

...as far as the school and the government, they have to go through the School Board before they hit the higher level of the government. From what I can get out, I think, they have good contact with members of the School Board ... (Theodorah)

From the above points, it appears to me that the youth need guidance and direction from the adults, people that they look up to. Thus, grown ups generally and parents in particular, need to be and must be involved in these young people's lives. They must make an effort to show that they care, not only when everything is going well, but even when these teenagers are going through problems. They should talk to them, show an interest in hearing about what they do, where they go, with whom. Ask them about their fears and, above all, listen to what they have to say.

4.5 The School Board Member's Perspective

4.5.1 Introduction

Among the people interviewed for this study was one school board member. Mr. Ambrose Kemp had 17 years of experience in the board. He was also a member of the Bickford⁷ community in which the school, Croydon Junior High, is located. Mr. Kemp, a father of two grown boys who went through the school system, had an experience with youth violence, whereby his son beat up another boy. He is very much involved in sports, and he travels a lot within North America and abroad.

To elicit his opinion on youth violence, Mr. Kemp was asked several questions in relation to the youth in his community and the schools, especially Croydon Junior High, under the jurisdiction of his board. Among the questions asked were: his description or definition of school violence, whether or not violence was a problem in their schools, how he would rate those schools, especially Croydon Junior High, in terms of both academic achievement and safety, if he would have principals report every incident of violence to the board, the role of teenage girls in school violence, the causes of teenage violence, the community's responsibility to teenage violence and the role of that

⁷Bickford is a fictional name

the school board could play in fighting violence by the youth.

Mr. Kemp rated the schools in Bickford under his school board among the best on both academic and safety standards.

There are five schools in this community that are involved in the school board ... That involves one junior high, one senior high and three elementary schools ... All the buildings provide excellent, every single one of them, excellent programs. They are very well constructed and well programmed buildings. They are some of the best we have in the whole system. ... Very safe, extremely safe. Everyone of the schools has plenty of playground space around the building and the elementaries all have fences around the buildings as well. So, the safety factor is very much enforced.

4.5.2 Violence: Definition

According to Mr. Kemp, violence is whatever causes any kind of fear or duress in a student, for example aggression and bullying.

I would think anything that the teacher would do that would put any kind of fear or duress in a student. But more importantly, I think the violence comes from aggressive young men, and some young women who probably have grown in stature much bigger. And they bully them, and they do everything, I suppose, from asking for money and give them a very hard time ...

Based on that definition, he said violence was a concern and a while growing concern, not yet a problem:

... I would not say it is a problem. I would say it is a concern, but would not say it is a problem. I would say drugs are

a problem, ... I would not want you to think it is not existing, ... different teachers who I speak to and others have told me of concerns. So, I would not say it is a problem, I would say it is a concern, one that we have got to watch.

Among the prevalent types of violence, he mentioned fights and bullying.

Aggressive kids. Kids that were ... if you may, doing things like four or five kids together, probably causing fights or at the Junior High and there was a fair amount of this at the junior high where, as you say, had a kid who was very big for 13 or 14 and they were bullying some of the smaller kids. That was the major violence that was expressed to me ...

Responding to the question of whether the board had received any reports or complaints from any of their principals about threats and/or assaults by students against teachers, Mr. Kemp said that they had not. His response was very strong and adamant.

Not to me yet, no. Never. No, no.

He did, however, talk about cases of students whom he said had been abrasive to teachers. He said:

... that is an interesting point. We've had our share of kids who have been abrasive to the teachers by way of being somewhat unruly or their language is being profound. We've had some of that. I would not call that violence ... I would say that is more of one of unruliness ... it had a lot to do with the home environment of some of these people ... I am sure that involves every school of today because of the structure in our schools now where we have no capital punishment at all in the schools.

4.5.3 Drugs

Mr. Kemp said that drugs were a more serious problem in their schools compared to violence, which he termed a concern.

When asked why he felt that way about drugs, he said that the previous year, 15 people were caught selling drugs, mostly marijuana, in both the Junior and Senior High schools. He was not aware of any of those drugs in the elementary schools then.

Oh, mostly marijuana, yah. Some drugs, but on the other side, still it was here and we'd be foolish to think that we're any different than any other..... I mean, drugs are something that is a problem and you've got to be prepared for it.

4.5.4 Reporting violence to the School Board

The decision by principals to report cases of violence to the board was referred to by Mr. Kemp as a professional call [principals should use their professional judgement to determine what cases of violence to report to the board]. He would not say what principals should or should not report. He did say, though, that personally he would want to know about those cases if there was a pattern that had been established.

...I think that is a professional call. I would not be wishing to hear about every case of violence, no. I would want to know if there is a pattern.

When asked if the board had a policy on violence, he said that the board had one.

... we do have a policy on violence that it if there's a pattern of violence that's being shown by a group of students or a student, or if there's excessive violence, I'm talking about use of a knife, threatening or a metal bar, something that they had that must be reported and that must be immediately addressed by the principal and/or the teacher or a combination of them. We do not want to have things that nature unchecked. We want to have them looked after immediately and the parents, of course, there's a whole policy there, need to be contacted immediately. The parents and the students have to be brought together to be counselled and discussed with as to what took place and thereupon if the principal or the guidance teacher thinks that this was excess, beyond or this was a pattern that had gone on on several occasions, then disciplinary action will be taken. And the board will enforce it. (Mr. Kemp)

4.5.5 Girls and Violence

The board member, Mr. Kemp, thought that girls posed as the "number one problem" in a number of things, including violence. He not only spoke of girls in his community, but of girls in North America, in general.

... And in so far as girls 20 years ago, girls did not smoke like they do now. The biggest rise of smoking and drugs in North America is with girls. Why? It's the macho thing to do ... The biggest problem today in society that we have in North America is the 12-15 year old girl ... They are smoking more, they're having sex more, they're more violent. And they are trying to be like the guys. (Mr. Kemp)

4.5.6 Causes

Mr. Kemp blamed part of girls' violence to the gender inequality that existed half a century ago. He thought that with the newly found equality of genders, girls were making up for the past time when they were not considered equal to the male species.

I suppose it is part of the fact that 50 years ago they did not vote. And a woman was not thought of the same as a man. And they have come through a whole evolution ... they (males) have been doing it, why haven't we? ... (Mr. Kemp)

He also mentioned that television, two working parents, money (the fact that some have it and others do not have it yet, but want it), society (by way of changes it has undergone) and the promiscuity that was not there a few decades ago, all cause teenage violence.

A second cause of violence, according to Kemp, is the family background (not necessarily poor families as traditionally believed) contributes to teenage violence.

... the structure is breaking down ... I am involved in soccer, for example, you'll see so many young unruly girls today in the soccer program that don't give a damn for anything. And their language is terrible, their structure is terrible in terms of how they want to practice. They don't give a damn and they're not kids coming from poor families. They're kids coming from families with two people working that have lost control of these girls. I see it all the time. (Mr. Kemp)

He did say that family poverty could also be another factor contributing to teenage violence.

The YOA was seen as another factor – Mr. Kemp was not too happy with the way the young people and their crimes are treated under the YOA. He felt that the Act's procedures encouraged the youth to offend. He appreciated the thought behind the YOA but he was skeptical of its ability to reform the young offenders. He said,

I truly believe that the YOA only ... and helps to keep young people on that skid-row and despair. You don't permit their names to be produced. You keep it all hidden. What we don't do is put them into any we don't have any, we try to think we have, we don't have a well structured program to help them back into society ...

... So, I think the thought was right. But I'm not sure that the YOA is going to end up having the young kids getting back into the main part of society as constructive citizens of the future. I hope it would. I hope it will, but I have my doubts. (Mr. Kemp)

Sports was seen as another issue. Even though he was involved in sports and a committed sports lover, he admitted that some of the sports had a violent aspect which is encouraged and rewarded, for example, hockey. He said sports like those do send mixed signals to children as to what is violence, about when an action ceases to be good and acceptable and moves to being violence and unacceptable.

... If you have your coach saying go out and hit that person in the hockey rink as hard as you can, and ... then they come back

to school and they come up against somebody in the lockers and give them a hit.

He mentioned that those kinds of sports were no longer restricted to boys, but girls were involved too: and they got the same order from the coach. to go hit and destroy the opponent player as hard as they possibly could.

...I am so heavily involved in sports, and I believe sports should be taught. I will say to you, there was a time when we used to say, and I was part of it, we cannot have girls play hockey, we cannot have girls play football because they are weaker, and they cannot do these things and they are not as strong as men; and they should not be doing this. Now, girls are doing all of that and are being as aggressive as boys. And it is helping bring aggressiveness and violence into girls.

...So, women doing sports, I mean, involved in fitness of the highest level that was not there 25 years ago, is there now ...to bring the women through that system, you now have women and young girls in all these sports. So, they become more aggressive whereas 25 years ago it was, let them play field hockey, no contact. Now we are having girls play contact. And if you play contact, it has got to lead to aggressiveness. It has got to lead to some hostile action afterwards ... (Mr. Kemp)

Society's responsibility for some of the youth violence, according to Mr. Kemp, is also significant.

I have to feel that society, as I said earlier, definitely helps violence in all aspects of it if you do not have controls and regulations and rules ...

4.5.7 Dealing with violence

As far as the role that the school board could play in dealing with teenage violence, Mr. Kemp said that they, as a board, had done quite a number of things from providing personnel to conducting seminars to help the teachers identify troubled children early. He said that the community had made some effort towards that cause, too, by putting up recreation programs for the young people.

However, with all that, he felt that violence was still a problem in society, especially the problem of tolerance of violence and the lack of desire among the members of society to get involved directly. He said,

Well, we've done all the bandage by putting guidance teachers there, having seminars for all of the problems, to identify all the problems, to know when somebody is showing signs that they might be on drugs or they're being aggressive, the teachers and the psychologists that we have in the system are doing this all the time. And we're also doing many things in the school and the community is doing many things to help deviate violence by way of recreation programs and other things . . . I want to tell you what the problem is. The problem is that we as a society have learned to be extremely tolerant of everything. And if it doesn't affect me, so, I contribute \$10. I did my thing, and now I go on my own way. We are no longer a society that messes in everybody else's business.

He mentioned other organizations and agencies that could also play an important role in dealing with teenage violence. Among these were:

(i) *The religious community/churches*

(ii) *The police* — He said police were already involved. He said for several years in Bickford, they have had police on bikes working in the community.

They are “not hard core police”, he said, but:

They are police on bikes working in the community, spending time where kids hang out, rapping with them and hopefully helping in that way. ...in the summer time, they go around ...and they have a lot of workshops with the kids. They do a number of things.

(iii) *The politicians* — He felt that they could help by encouraging the constructive programs to ensure safety in the community. In fact, he said that some politicians were already at work.

They try very hard to put as many recreational programs of all kinds in place and to have school discussions ... So, they are trying to work with the schools, with the teachers, with the churches and the sports groups to make sure that the young people are taking the best road.

(iv) *The sports coaches* — Being a staunch believer in and a committed fan and advocate for sports, Mr. Kemp admitted that the coaches' role in dealing with violence that was sports related was the toughest. He said that they, coaches, needed to separate the two arenas (the sports arena and mainstream society) and tell the young people that certain practices were accepted as part of the sport but in mainstream society, those practices should not be carried over because they were unacceptable.

You have got to be some kind of a coach and teacher to be able to divide (separate) those two things. Now, I would have to say that for the most part, most of those kids adopted that very well (the difference between a sports arena and mainstream society), but even if it was 1% that did not, that is a lot of people.

4.5.8 Conclusion

Throughout the interview, Mr. Kemp consistently maintained that teenage violence was on the rise. The point he kept emphasizing was that the violence among young people was a consequence of the changes that have taken place in society. The changes, according to him, have led to the removal or slackening of certain basic, governing rules.

...society, as I said earlier, definitely helps violence in all aspects of it if you do not have controls and regulations and rules ... You must have rules in a house, you must have rules in a church, you must have rules in a school and you can't break them. You can tolerate them and we can forgive people but you've got to get back on the track again.

He also commented on the "one sided talk" on childrens' rights, referring to the lack of emphasis on the responsibilities that go hand in hand with them. He said because of that imbalance, other people were frustrated, especially parents and teachers.

In a rather sad tone, he said,

... Go to church today, and all the people you'll see in church today are old people. Go to a school today and everyone of the

teachers, everyone of them, privately, will tell you, 'God, I can't wait for retirement.' Speak to most parents and they'll say, 'Gee, it was so easy to raise Johnny 20 years ago. I got this young girl now she nearly got me out of my mind.'

Chapter 5

Summary and Conclusions

This study set out to explore the validity of the claim that teenage girls are becoming more and more involved in school violence. All the research questions revolved around, and solicited information from the participants of the study to determine the validity of this claim. In this chapter, I shall put forth the main findings of the study, how the findings relate to the literature and what the practical implications of the study are.

I shall also highlight the main similarities and differences between the various perspectives given in the study. In conclusion, I shall point out the limitations of the study and offer some recommendations for further research.

5.1 Summary of the Main Findings

These findings are very much consistent with what the literature indicates on the subject of school violence. I have to point out, though, as previously mentioned, that not much has been written on the involvement of girls in school violence here in Canada. Nevertheless, the little that is available is so consistent with my findings that at times during the interviews as I listened to the participants, it felt like I was just listening to a taped version of the books, reports and newspapers I had read. Following is a brief summary:

1. Unfortunately, violence is a reality among teenage girls. They are involved in both physical violence (fights) and verbal violence. Perhaps the worst part is that they do not consider the verbal violence as being violence. Also, because of some stereotypes about gender and violence, and the manner in which they conduct some of their violence, it is difficult to detect and they manage to get away with it. As Bergsgaard (1997) says,

...less physical behaviour typical of conflict involving female students may be more difficult for observers to detect and less likely to be targeted for resolution through program strategies.
(p.33)

2. Reporting violent acts is not easy for students or for adults. For students, reporting violence as a victim is very different from reporting as a witness who was not hurt. The same applies to adults. Witnesses often do

not want to be involved. Adults in positions of authority appear to avoid reporting violence for fear that it will be a bad reflection on them and their effectiveness as leaders.

3. Students felt that, although they would not go out of their way to look for weapons, if offered a weapon, it would not be a bad idea to accept it for self-protection against other students.

The possession of weapons is a serious problem in many schools [in Canada], and incidences of trespassing on school property have recently increased. (Walker, 1995, p.3)

4. There are not many violent students in the school, but the few violent ones keep repeating their violent acts over and over. They frustrate everyone in the school, especially the teachers.

5. While the perpetrators may, and by and large be children with low social and economic background, students from families with both parents working outside the home or from single parent headed families, there is a growing number of children from what some adults in the study referred to as "decent" families who are perpetrators of violence.

6. Drugs are an issue. There was evidence that some students were taking or doing drugs, including alcohol. In fact, Mr Kemp, the school board member, told me that while violence was a "concern" in their schools, drugs were a "problem". Regnery's (1994) study, as it is quoted in Quarles (1993)

found that the proportion of 7th grade students reporting being high on drugs or alcohol at school ranged from 2.2% at some schools to nearly 10% at others.

7. As far as gangs are concerned, both the students and adult participants in the study had some knowledge about gangs in terms of what they do. One of the administrators told me that she knew students in the school who were gang members. However, because that information was given to her by those students in trust, she was not at liberty to make it public.

The ensuing clash of rights and interests poses an interesting challenge for all school personnel, who must strive to attain an ethical position of ensuring confidentiality while having legal responsibility for school safety. (Drodge, 1997, p.320)

8. Most of the students spend their time after school watching television. In fact, it was established that 60% (47% F, 53% M) spent their time after school watching television and playing television related games.

9. Although the school had a zero-tolerance policy for fighting, the teachers felt that the school administration could still do better by keeping them informed of the whereabouts of their suspended or expelled students. Teachers also felt that it would be much better if the school had a formal program put in place on anger management and control and counselling for both the perpetrators and victims of violence.

10. Parents were concerned about their children's safety in their neighbourhood, along the way to and from school and on the school grounds. Their concerns were founded on incidents that had occurred before, either to their children or to their children's friends.

11. It was succinctly expressed by all three parents participating in the study that there was an urgent need for parents to get involved in their children's lives in and out of school by means of knowing the company they keep, where they go, and what they do when they are away from home.

12. Parents and teachers were engulfed with feelings of frustration and helplessness: not knowing precisely how to deal with their children/students when it came to discipline and keeping them in the 'narrow path' without overstepping their bounds and being accused of illegal behaviour.

5.2 Similarities and Differences in the Various Perspectives

The various perspectives represented indicated agreement on some major issues. For example:

(i) *Violence in general:* All participants condemned violence as being wrong and claimed that its perpetrators, no matter what the situation was, had no right to be violent.

(ii) *The presence of violence in Croydon Junior High:* All participants agreed that there was violence in Croydon Junior High, even though they could not agree on the level or severity of violence.

(iii) *Contributing factors to violence:* Peer pressure was mentioned by students and adults as one of the factors. In addition, the various perspectives given by the adult participants also underline the role of the YOA and lack of responsibility and respect for other people and other people's property.

On the other hand, there were differences as well.

(i) *Defining violence:* While the adults categorized verbal violence as serious a form of violence as the physical form, the students did not consider verbal violence as being violent.

(ii) *Reporting acts of violence:* This issue was not easy for both students and adults. For both, there was the reluctance to get involved. For the students, it was also the fear of being hurt further by the party they told on and for some, the conviction and belief that they could handle everything on their own.

(iii) *Presence of gangs in the school:* The principal denied the presence of gangs/gang members in the school and said, "There is an attitude that there are gangs in the community. ... I have not seen any evidence of gangs or had any experience with them." The vice principal, however, said she knew they

had gang members in the school because they (the students who were gang members) had confided in her.

(iv) *Safety in the school*: Parents had concerns about their children's safety, even inside the school, despite that Mr Kemp told me that their schools (Croydon Junior High included) were very safe. "...the safety factor is very much enforced."

5.3 Implications of the Findings

As I went through the perspectives provided by the various groups of people represented in this study and comparing the research questions set at the beginning of the study against the study's findings, I began to recognize that they painted a vivid picture of humanity in general and specifically of the Bickford community, Croydon Junior High, its administration, teachers, parents and students, and the stereotypes on issues like gender and violence.

The willingness and desire to be there for the students/children, contrasted with the frustration of not knowing how to help and the feelings of failure expressed by both parents and teachers were profound.

The implications of these findings go far beyond wanting to teach a lesson to an individual teenage girl who is unruly and rebellious. Instead, the

findings suggest that society, parents, school officials, students and both government and private agencies need to put a stop to the finger-pointing and shifting of blame, and begin pulling together for the good of their community. Perhaps responsibility and accountability are the key words.

(i) *Implications for the parents:* Parents must take charge of their children's learning and be involved in their lives. However, their expression of helplessness in this regard needs to be taken seriously by educators. Parents should be able to provide guidance to the teenagers, take advantage of all opportunities available to them to reach out to teachers for advice and assistance when necessary.

As well, *parents must read the YOA and ask for explanations on issues* that they do not understand. By so doing, they will be able to confirm and/or dismiss any misconceptions about this act. Consequently, their feelings of fear that the act takes away parents' rights and enshrines children with unwarranted rights and protection would be eased or even cleared entirely.

When administrators and teachers invite parents to "drop in at any time at the school", they must genuinely mean that. Communication between the school-parents-teachers must be kept honest and simple. Parents would appreciate being told clear and specific instructions/suggestions as to how they could be of assistance to the school and to their children.

Above all, teaching by example works better than, “do as I say, and not as I do”. Hence, preventing family violence is a key issue. Also, reinforcing at home the positive behaviour and practices that are taught at school and in other activities such as church, at boy-scouts/girl-guides activities, may help strengthen the relationship between home and those agencies.

(ii) *Implications for the school system’s “gatekeepers”*: School officials, administrators and teachers must make an effort to work together with parents. Who else would know a child better than the parents? School rules, regulations and policies must be clearly put in writing and followed. Consistency, fairness and firmness should be ensured in enforcing these rules.

Perhaps school officials need also to re-examine the idea of a Junior High School. The idea of having so many teenagers, in the case of Croydon Junior High about 700 teenagers, crammed together in one building, interacting, pushing and shoving each other in-between classes, seemed to compound the problem of violence. Maybe doing away with Junior High schools would be a partial solution.

(iii) *Implications for the students*: Students must be ready and willing to stand up for themselves against violence, to break the code of silence that exists among them and report acts of violence.

While they learn about their individual rights, they must also learn and

embrace the fact that one's rights go hand in hand with responsibilities; and that when abused, rights may cease to be rights and become privileges. Privileges may be removed/taken away from a person. There is a need to explain to students that verbal violence is potentially as harmful as physical violence. Encouraging them to report violence would also help. Of course, this calls for a clear and fair way of dealing with the perpetrators. Students need to be reassured that they will be protected from further violence from the people they reported. I believe that guaranteed protection will encourage them to report and make them realize that they do not need to carry weapons for self-protection.

(iv) *Implications for the government, public and private agencies:* with all the cutbacks on education, government, government agencies and private agencies in the province must weigh the advantages against the disadvantages of investing their finances in education and in the future of its students. The government and other private agencies need to put money into the education system, so that the desperately needed personnel and programs in the school could be provided. With the personnel in the school, most of the problems that aggravate violence such as crowding, lack of programmes etc., would be taken care of, at least partially. Students with special needs would also be taken care of and counsellors and therapists would be available to help

students who need counselling.

(v) *Implications for society*: Since television is a vital part of the students' lives, and it manages to reach them so effectively, society must use it positively and constructively to its advantage by organizing and showing educational and non-violent entertaining programs. As Dykes in an interview with Palmer for the *Globe and Mail* says,

It does not matter if they are watching David Suzuki or Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. The point is that children are challenged through TV in some way that they are not in real life, and we want to use that to our advantage. (1993, September 6. p.6)

5.4 Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Further Research

I cannot make a strong claim of objectivity in the findings of this study because of my own biases as a human being and as a woman from a foreign culture.

Secondly, since this was a case study in one junior high in a city setting, the findings are not generalizable to a larger population. It was a small sample of all the represented groups that participated.

Nevertheless, this study clearly indicates the need for further research. Very little information is available in the literature, yet the interest in girls' violence is growing and intensifying. I therefore recommend that it be repli-

cated in more Junior High Schools in and out of the city and that it be replicated in High Schools as well.

5.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, I will go back to my research questions in relation to the findings of this study.

Girls are involved in school violence. This study shows that violence among girls is escalating and that there is lack of clarity and agreement among them as to what actions are violent. They give verbal violence lesser consideration than physical violence. They consider an act violent if it is physical and they think of verbal violence as “horsing around”.

While there seems to be some relationship between family background, socio-economic level and the perpetrators of violence, there is also the issue of peer pressure that pushes most of these teenagers into violence. Many want to be liked and accepted by their peers. Unfortunately, this acceptance comes at a high price, meaning that they have to prove themselves as tough, macho girls who are not afraid of fighting. Some of them feel that violence, even to the point of carrying a weapon, is the only alternative they have to protect themselves from being bullied by other students.

This study also shows that in some unintentional ways, the school and the community contribute to this violence. Representatives of both the school and community recognize their mistakes, leading to the complication of this problem. By the lack of and/or relaxation of rules and regulations, being unable to adequately listen to and meet the youth's needs, the community and the school fail these teenagers.

Nevertheless, the study also shows that beneath the tough skin that these girls put on for various reasons, they are just children. They could still be reached and helped, and they want that very much. They want people that they can look up to to help them; people in positions of authority and trust, people who care. These are their parents, teachers and friends. By listening to them, providing guidance, showing them that they care about them and that they love them, they may be able to help them.

School violence in general and violence by teenage girls in particular has apparently not yet escalated in this province to the levels that it has reached in other Canadian provinces or the United States, but the point is, we do not want it to get worse. If we believe that, "Prevention is better than cure", dealing with it now will be a lot cheaper and worthwhile than waiting for the problem to be fully blown and reach crisis levels.

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APPENDIX A - GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR ADULT INTERVIEWS

Interview Guide for the Principal and Vice Principal

1. How would you define school violence?
2. Based on your definition of school violence, would you say that violence is a problem in your school?
3. What kind(s) of violence are prevalent in your school?
4. Of the cases of violence (if any) in your school, did any of them involve weapon(s)? What kind of weapons?
5. In terms of gender and age, who are the perpetrators and victims of violence in your school?
6. Would you say that boys and girls commit the same kind(s) of violence equally? Please explain.
7. Have any of your teachers complained or reported to you about threat(s) or assault(s) by students against them? What were the circumstances (happened during the day/evening; on/off campus; did it have to do with school work)?
8. Among students, who are more likely to report violent act(s): girls or boys? To whom?
9. How do you generally deal with perpetrators of violence and victims of violence in your school?
10. Do you think you have gangs in your school? Why? Why not?
11. Generally, youth violence is reported to be on the rise; but it is also specifically said that teenage girls are becoming more and more violent. Would

you say that this is true about teenage girls in your school as well? Please explain.

12. (a) Overall, what do you think causes school violence?

(b) Do you think that somehow intentionally/unintentionally the school is responsible for some of the violence in your school? If yes, how?

13. What could be done to correct that? Specifically, in your view, what is the school's role?

14. Is there anything else that you would like to add to your comments before we finish the interview?

Interview Guide for the School Counsellor

1. How would you define school violence?
2. Do you have the problem of violence in your school?
3. What kind(s) of violence are prevalent in your school?
4. In terms of gender and age, who are the perpetrators and victims of violence in your school?
5. How do you generally deal with perpetrators of violence and the victims of violence in your school? Do you think your way is effective? Please explain.
6. Would you say that boys and girls commit the same kind(s) of violence equally? Please explain.
7. From your experience as school counsellor, would you say, on the issue of violence, that perpetrators and victims come for help equally? Please explain.
8. Would you say that there is a pattern or common factors that can be traced in the perpetrators' lives, e.g. socio-economic status, gender, family background, etc? If yes, what are the shared factors? Would there be a pattern for victims, too? If yes, what would it be?
9. Based on the cases of violence in your school for the past 5-10 years, how would you react to the claim that girls are more and more becoming active participants in violent activities? Please explain in detail.
10. (a) Overall, what do you think causes school violence?
(b) Do you think that somehow intentionally or unintentionally the school is responsible for some of the violence in it? If yes, how?

11. What could be done to correct that; specifically, what is the school's role?
12. What role do you think the following can play to curb teenage violence:
- (a) the youth
 - (b) parents
 - (c) government
13. Is there anything else that you would like to add to your comments before we finish the interview?

Interview Guide for Teachers

1. How would you define school violence?
2. Would you say then, based on your definition, that violence is a problem in your school?
3. What kind(s) of violence are common in your school?
4. Do boys and girls commit the same kind(s) of violence equally? Please explain.
5. Who are more likely to report violent act(s); boys or girls? To whom?
6. Have you or any of your colleagues ever been threatened or assaulted by your students? If yes, please explain the circumstances surrounding that threat or assault.
7. Of the cases of violence (if any) in your school, did any of them involve weapon(s)? What kind of weapon(s)?
8. How does your school generally deal with perpetrators of violence and victims of violent activities? Are you happy with your school's approach? Do you think it is effective? If not, why? Please explain how your school's approach could be improved.
9. Generally, youth violence is reported to be on the rise; but it is also specifically said that teenage girls are becoming more and more violent. Would you say that this is true about teenage girls in your school as well? Please explain.
10. (a) Overall, what do you think causes youth violence, specifically by teenage girls?

(b) Would you say that somehow intentionally or unintentionally the school contributes to some of the violence in your school? If yes, how?

11. What can be done to correct that, specifically, what role can the school play?

12. *Is there anything that you would like to add to your comments before we finish the interview?*

Interview Guide for Parents

1. How would you define school violence?
2. Do you have the problem of violence in your community?
3. What kind(s) of violence are prevalent in your community?
4. Generally, in terms of gender, who are the perpetrators and victims of violence in your community?
5. Would you say that boys and girls commit the same kind of violence equally? Please explain.
6. Have you ever had the impression or been led to believe by your child(ren) that s(he) does not feel safe in the neighbourhood, on his/her way to and from school or even around the school yard? Please explain.
7. Do you always or most of the time have an idea of where your child(ren) is when s(he) is not at home?
8. What about your child(ren)'s friends: do you know who they are and what they do? Do you approve of your child(ren) hanging out with them?
9. Do you think you have gangs in your community? Why? Why not?
10. How would you explain what a gang is?
11. What kind of activities do gangs do?
12. How does your community deal with perpetrators of violence and victims of violent activities?
13. How involved are teenage girls as initiators of violence in your community?
14. What do you think causes youth violence; specifically, violence by teenage

girls in your community?

15. What specific roles can the following play in fighting violence in your community:

- (a) the school
- (b) social services
- (c) police
- (d) government/politicians
- (e) parents and youth?

16. Is there anything else that you would like to add to your comments before we finish the interview?

Interview Guide for School Board Member

1. How long have you served in this Board?
2. Generally, how would you gauge the schools under your board, particularly School X (name of school in which study shall be conducted) on the basis of academic achievement and safety?
3. How would you define school violence?
4. Based on your definition of violence, would you say that violence is a problem in your schools or at least in some of them?
5. What kind(s) of violence are common in your schools?
6. Have any of your principals complained or reported to you as a board, threats of violence or assault(s) by students against teacher(s)? Please explain what the circumstances were.
7. Do you think principals should report every incident of violence to the School Board? Why? Why not?
8. Does your board have a policy on violence? If no, why not? If yes, what is the policy?
9. As a community member, what do you think causes teenage violence in general?
10. What role do girls play in violence in this Board community?
11. Do you think that somehow intentionally or unintentionally the community is responsible for some of the violence by its youth? If yes, how?
12. What can be done to correct that, specifically, what role can the School Board play in that correction?

13. Is there anything else that you would like to add to your comments before we finish the interview?

APPENDIX B - STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRES

Thank you for agreeing to help in this study. Your responses will be kept totally confidential. At no point will your name or school ever be disclosed in any report written on this study.

Please complete this questionnaire as faithfully as possible. However, please feel free to leave out any questions you wish. Should you have any problems or questions on this questionnaire, do not hesitate to ask me.

Your co-operation will be highly appreciated. Thank you.

Zanele Khumalo (Tel: 745-3304)

1. Sex

Male

Female

3. Grade:

—

4. Which of the following do you think is violence?

- ☐ Spreading rumours
- ☐ Threatening with a weapon
- ☐ Calling someone names
- ☐ Hitting
- ☐ Bullying other students
- ☐ Other

5. Do any of the things listed in number 4 happen in your school?

No

Some of them

All of them

6. Why do you think students in your school do the things in number 4?

- ☐ to have fun
- ☐ to show that they are not afraid
- ☐ to be liked by another group of students
- ☐ because they are angry and mean
- ☐ to defend themselves from other students
- ☐ for other reasons (please explain)

7. In your school, who acts violently?

☐ Boys

☐ Girls

☐ Boys and Girls

8. If a girl and a boy kicked a younger child, would they be given the same punishment?

☐ No

☐ Always

☐ Sometimes (please explain)

9. (a) In the past 6 months, have you done anything violent to someone else?

☐ Yes

☐ No

(b) If your answer to number 9(a) is yes, what did you do?

(c) If your answer to number 9(a) is yes, who was the violent act against?

☐ a female student

☐ a male student

☐ my teacher(s)

☐ a stranger

☐ other (please explain)

10. (a) In the past 6 months, has anyone done something violent to you?

☐ Yes

☐ No

(b) If your answer to number 10(a) is yes, what happened to you?

10. (c) If your answer to number 10(a) is yes, who did it to you?

_____ a female student

_____ a male student

_____ a group of boys

_____ a group of girls

_____ a stranger

_____ other (please explain)

11. (a) If you had been hurt in a violent act, would you report it?

_____ Yes

_____ No

_____ If yes, why?

_____ If no, why not?

(b) If you had seen some violent act(s) done in your school, would you report it?

_____ Yes

_____ No

_____ If yes, why?

_____ If no, why not?

12. If you reported, who would you tell about it? Why?

_____ a teacher in my school because

_____ my parent or guardian because

_____ my friend(s) because

_____ other (please mention who) because

13. (a) Have you ever heard of a gang?

_____ Yes

_____ No

(b) What is a gang?

_____ A gang is

14. Do you have any gangs in your school or area?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If yes, what are some of the things they do?

15. Do you belong to any gang?

☐ Yes

☐ No

16. If there were gang(s) in your school or area, would you join them? Why? Why not?

☐ Yes because ☐ gangs give money and other good stuff to their members

☐ I will always have friends

☐ no one will bully me

☐ other (please explain) _____

☐ No because ☐ my parents would not allow me

☐ I don't like the things they do

☐ I don't like to get in trouble with the police

☐ other (please explain) _____

17. If someone gave you a weapon, would you take it?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If yes, what kind of weapon would you take?

☐ screwdriver

☐ knife

☐ gun

☐ other (which one) _____

18. Why would you take the weapon?

☐ it is neat to have a weapon

☐ when you have a weapon, other kids respect and don't mess with you.

☐ to protect myself from kids who would hurt me.

☐ other reason(s) (please explain) _____

19. Do you think kids who do violent acts need help?

☐ Yes

☐ No

20. Who do you think can help them?

___ parents and guardians

___ their friends

___ teachers

___ other (please explain) _____

21. How do you spend your time after school?

You may write any other thing you would like to say in the space provided below.

Thank you for your time.

