

**JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF  
SCHOOL VIOLENCE: EXPLORATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

**by**

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
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Explorations and Implications**

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**Master of Arts, 2000**

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**Abstract**

The present study investigated junior high school students' experiences and perceptions of school violence. A total of 95 grade 7, 8, & 9 students (45 male, 50 female) from a City of Toronto junior high school completed a questionnaire entitled "Student Perceptions and Experiences of Violence Questionnaire". Students of both sexes & all 3 grades reported similar perceptions of, experiences of, participation in, and willingness to participate in school violence. Differences between reported rates of violence experienced and perceived levels of school violence & safety prompted the suggestion that students' perceptions of the extent of school violence and their safety at school may be impacted as much by their interpretations of violence as by their actual experiences of violence. An integration of principles from ecological, identity, & appraisal theories was recommended and a framework involving stressors, skills, & supports was proposed for understanding, investigating, and intervening in how students form their perceptions of school violence.

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

You never know what students are planning. It is like the shooting at Colorado. No one really expected it. So you never know.  
(Female/13years/grade8).

In recent years, the issue of youth violence has become a frequent topic of social, political, and academic conversation, as well as a regular component of media coverage in both the United States and Canada. Parallel to the concerns about youth violence in general, evidence from school systems across Canada indicates widespread concerns about recent perceived increases in school violence (Artz & Riecken, 1997; MacDonald, 1997; MacDonald & da Costa, 1996b). However, much of the attention afforded to the topic of school violence has centred on the bullying and violence that take place in elementary and secondary school contexts; Few accounts of school violence have focused on junior high schools. This study aimed to explore the existence of school violence in a junior high school in the City of Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

Having worked with junior high school students within both recreational and school-related contexts for numerous years, I have become interested in their exposure to incidents of school violence. My interest was sparked after both learning of and witnessing several incidents of direct and indirect violence at a youth centre I supervised in a particular junior high school in Toronto. Some of the incidents involved gang-like assaults between students of different peer groups or cultural backgrounds whereas other incidents were more akin to

ongoing bullying behaviour (eg. verbal insults, intimidation, etc.). My exposure to these incidents, as well as my own recollection of incidents of violence in junior high school, inspired a number of questions:

1. Firstly, I became interested in uncovering the frequency and extent of violence that occurred in the school with which I was familiar. Specifically, I was interested in documenting the frequency of various types of violent incidents and the percentage of students (of both sexes and of all three grades) who had been involved in such incidents.

Further, my familiarity with similar research by Ryan, Mathews, and Banner (1993) prompted my curiosity about the nature of the students' involvement in the violent incidents occurring at their school. That is, how could their involvement be characterized in terms of experiences of violence, participation in violence, and willingness to participate in violence?

2. Secondly, I was interested in uncovering any relationships that may exist between being a victim and being a perpetrator of school violence. Specifically, I thought that the existence of such relationships might provide impetus for re-conceptualizing our approaches to both the prevention of school violence and intervention with victims of violence.
3. Thirdly, I was curious about students' thoughts and feelings about numerous issues related to the violence in their school. Specifically, students' perceptions regarding the extent of violence, their level of safety, and the administration's awareness and response to violent incidents were of interest.

Influencing all of these queries was my interest in compiling students' opinions about the issue of youth violence as it relates to both their school and their community. I suspected that students' perceptions and comments might provide indications of relevant issues for future conceptualizations of junior high school violence. In relation, it was my hope that my investigation of junior high school violence would contribute both theoretically and practically to future conceptualizations, explorations, and interventions with junior high school students.

Fortunately, the principal of the school was equally interested in exploring students' experiences and perceptions of violent incidents at school and he agreed to embark on a research initiative.

A subsequent review of the literature regarding junior high school violence revealed a limited number of studies (Everett & Price, 1995; MacDonald, 1997; MacDonald & da Costa, 1996b; Ryan et al., 1993; Smith, Bertrand, Arnold, & Hornick, 1995). However, the studies that have been conducted indicate that students are concerned about school violence and that violence, in numerous forms, does occur in junior high schools.

### **Youth Violence: Is it Increasing?**

Youth violence, for the purpose of this paper, refers to incidents of violence which are perpetrated by youth within both the smaller community and society at large. As a general concept, and particularly with respect to statistical records, youth violence may also include incidents of school violence which are perpetrated by youth.

A number of researchers have explored and debated the question of increases in youth

violence (Doob & Sprott, 1999; Gabor, 1999; Miller, 1992; Schwartz, 1992). Some reports in both the United States and Canada have pointed to increases in the occurrence of youth violence and have led researchers such as Garbarino (1999) to characterize the problem of youth violence as an epidemic. For example, FBI reports in the United States indicate that the rates of juvenile violent crime have increased by more than 25% in the last ten years (Chisholm, 1998) and that this increase has evidenced among all races, social classes, and lifestyles (Chisholm, 1998). Pollack (1998) contends that young people, specifically, "have become increasingly involved in and vulnerable to violent crime" (p.341). Similarly, Artz and Riecken (1997) inform us that violent crime by youth in Canada is thought to be on the rise and that for the most part, other youth are the victims of this violence. Statistics Canada reported that incidents of violent crime committed by 12-17 year old males in Metro Toronto increased by 64% over a ten year period between 1987 and 1997 and that reported incidents involving females more than doubled during this time period (Gabor, 1999; Shephard, 1998). Some researchers suggest that reported increases in youth violence may be even larger than suggested because reported incidents of violence reflect only a fraction of the incidents which actually occur (Gabor, 1999).

However, other researchers insist that youth violence is not on the rise (Doob & Sprott, 1999; Miller, 1992; Schwartz, 1992). In Canada, their views are supported by Statistics Canada (1999) data that indicate that the rates of violent crimes perpetrated by youth have fluctuated, but have not increased dramatically over the past five years. For example, 21,629 youth were charged with violent crimes in 1994, compared with 22,145 in 1998. The greatest number of charges was reported for 1996, with 22,521 youth being

charged (Statistics Canada, 1999).

### **School Violence**

Discussions about youth violence in the general community often incite discussions about school violence (i.e., incidents of violence that occur on school grounds) and comparisons of the two contexts of violence often emerge. Not surprisingly, research attempts to discover which type of violence is perceived as a larger problem have revealed mixed findings. Whereas some researchers have revealed perceptions that youth violence in the larger community is a more prevalent problem than the violence that occurs in schools (as cited by MacDonald & da Costa, 1996b), others have found this not to be the case. For example, Smith et al. (1995) explored this issue in their investigation of the perceptions and experiences of 962 junior and senior high school students in Calgary and found that victimization rates were higher while at school than while not at school (except for threats with a weapon and being attacked by a gang or group). Smith et al.'s findings lend support to the notion that violence at school may be a more serious problem for youth than is violence in the community.

A number of investigators of school violence have suggested that schools are simply a reflection of the community in general (Alberta Education, 1993; Lawrence, 1998; Walker, 1994). That is, school violence is situated within a context of community violence; as crime increases within communities, so too does it increase in schools (Lawrence, 1998). Furthermore, some research suggests a general perception that families are largely responsible for increases in youth violence. Among other reasons, these studies cite lack of

parental supervision and lack of parental discipline of children as explanations for students' increasing participation in violence (National School Boards Association [NSBA], 1993).

Despite this community versus school debate, however, there is a widespread perception that incidents of school violence have increased (Gabor, 1995, 1999; NSBA, 1993). A recent survey of police services and school boards across Canada revealed that 80% of respondents felt that the amount of school violence currently occurring is greater than the amount of school violence that existed 10 years ago. Thirty percent considered the situation to be much worse and none believed that there was any evidence of a decrease in the incidence of school violence (Gabor, 1995, 1999). A National School Boards Association survey in the United States found that 80% of all school districts reported that school violence was worse than it was five years before and 35% believed that there had been a significant increase in school violence (NSBA, 1993).

### **Media Coverage of Youth Violence and School Violence: Influences and Considerations**

Television and media can be powerful sources of influence and information regarding the issue of violence. According to Haney and Manzolatti (1988), the television may serve as our primary source of information regarding crime and criminal justice because our society provides few alternative opportunities for learning about crime, criminal justice, and law enforcement. In fact, Haney and Manzolatti contend that "television tells us what crimes to fear most, who commits crime and for what reason, and how law enforcement officials can, do, and should respond to it" (pp. 120-121). Gerbner and Gross (1976, as cited in Haney & Manzolati, 1988) have found that television increases people's fear of crime and inflates their

estimates of the likelihood that they will be victims of crime.

Television media attention devoted to the issue of school violence appears to have increased in recent years. Most notably due to the devastating school shootings which have occurred in Springfield, Oregon, Jonesboro, Arkansas, Littleton, Colorado, and Taber, Alberta in the past eighteen months, this media attention has raised widespread public concern about both youth violence in general, and school violence specifically.

However, there are a number of problems with our reliance upon the media and television for information regarding youth violence and school violence. Firstly, adults in the media - and many adults in general - tend to perceive the entire generation of teenagers as a homogeneous subculture (Bibby & Posterski, 1992). Teenagers are wrongly assumed to hold the same beliefs, experience the same troubles, and cause the same problems in our society. In fact, adults tend to blame and hold all teenagers responsible because of the behaviour of those who get into trouble. The generalizing and stereotyping which results provokes frustration and anger in many adolescents who are ardently opposed to being pigeonholed and labeled because of some members of their generation (Bibby & Posterski, 1992).

Secondly, a Canadian-specific problem with obtaining information through the media exists because of the bombardment of details from American news coverage. It is critical to acknowledge that American programming, particularly in terms of television news coverage, is not always relevant to Canada. As has been pointed out by Bibby and Posterski (1992), "[i]n Canada, we do not have the same big-city or inner-city problems...The fear that is fostered because big-city crime is a major problem for Americans is only a minor concern for Canadians" (p.288). "Young people are feeling the weight of our own country's problems

without adding more from south of the border (Bibby & Posterski, 1992; p.288). Bibby and Posterski suggest that responsible media should "consciously filter what is American from what is Canadian" (p.288).

Finally, our reliance upon the media for information regarding school violence limits our understanding of the true nature and extent of the violence. Media attention focusing on school violence has concentrated primarily on the highly shocking, unexpected, and extreme events like the school shootings. However, these types of violent incidents are far less common within schools. Few media reports have paid attention to the less extreme, but daily occurring forms of violence such as verbal insults, threats, and physical assaults. These events are likely perceived to be less serious, and therefore, less deserving of regular television media attention.

However, in October 1998, the Toronto Star published a series of articles regarding school violence and school gangs. Journalist Michelle Shephard had surveyed 1,019 students in 29 public and Catholic high schools across the Greater Toronto Area (i.e., Toronto, Durham, Peel, Halton, and York) and discovered a widespread perception by students that the problems of youth gangs and school violence were escalating. Collectively, students reported the existence of 180 youth gangs and 22% of students reported having felt unsafe at school. This report immediately initiated discussions within schools, communities, and political realms about the issue of school violence. In fact, the Mayor of Toronto was prompted to "call for action on school violence" and "vowed to organize a meeting with the police chief and heads of Toronto's public and Catholic school boards, aimed at finding ways to combat violence" (Shephard, 1998). Nevertheless, media attention to the issue of school violence

quickly dissipated and the topic remained largely ignored until the occurrence of the school shootings in Colorado the following April.

### **Investigations of School Violence in the Academic Realm**

In the academic realm, the issue of bullying has been a topic of investigation at the elementary and secondary school levels for several decades. Defined as an ongoing, repetitive type of victimization, bullying was first given considerable attention in the early 1970s by researchers in Scandinavia (Olweus, 1993). In the past fifteen years, bullying has also been explored in depth by researchers in Canada, the USA, the Netherlands, Japan, England, and Australia (Olweus, 1993). Researchers have sought to uncover a multitude of related issues such as the bully-victim cycle, self-esteem issues, family characteristics, and gender differences.

### **Violence in Junior High School**

Despite the increased attention - both in academic research and in media coverage - to violence in elementary and secondary schools, information is scant regarding the experiences of junior high students, the students who are in transition from elementary school to secondary school. This is surprising given that the co-occurrence of their entering a new school and their entering adolescence makes the study of junior high school students exciting with respect to numerous issues, and particularly with respect to the issue of school violence. In fact, exposure to violence during the junior high school stage may have unique theoretical and practical implications because this time-period is so critical to adolescent development.

Indeed, the psychological literature is replete with theories and accounts of the challenges facing adolescents as they make the transition from childhood to adulthood. Elkind (1998), describes adolescence as "a unique life passage" (p.18) and explains that "no other transition is witness to the extraordinary physical, physiological, and psychological transformations of this period" (p.18). In addition, adolescence can be a period of "great vulnerability and fragility" (Elkind, 1998; p.18).

One of the greatest challenges of adolescence is identity formation, a task that involves the integration of various aspects of the adolescent's development such as his/her cognitive ability, moral reasoning, social functioning, and self-concept. As Garbarino (1999) explains,

[e]leven-to-fifteen-year-olds are as much children as they are adolescents, and their ability to engage in reality-based moral thinking is still very much 'under construction'. Some children have erected a solid internal monitor, a prosocial conscience, by the time they enter adolescence...Some are still mainly responding to external messages about what is right and what is wrong. And some have a great emotional emptiness inside that drives them to seek extreme solutions to their problems...and their ability to appreciate the consequences of their behavior is often quite limited. (Garbarino, 1999; p.137).

Descriptions of the challenges of early adolescence akin to that of Garbarino (1999) lend support to the relevance of investigating issues of violence in junior high school.

### **Students' Experiences of Violent Incidents at School**

Various types of violent incidents, both direct and indirect, have been explored in previous investigations of junior high school violence and these studies have documented that violence does, indeed, occur at the junior high level (Everett & Price, 1995; MacDonald,

1997; MacDonald & da Costa, 1996b; Ryan et al., 1993; Smith et al., 1995). Most commonly, researchers have investigated incidents such as teasing, bullying, hitting/punching, having items stolen, verbal threats, threats with weapons, assaults with weapons, sexual harassment, and sexual assault (Everett & Price, 1995; MacDonald, 1997; MacDonald & da Costa, 1996b; Ryan et al., 1993; Smith et al., 1995).

Findings from previous research demonstrate that students frequently report verbal harassment and insults as the most common type of incident experienced at school (Everett & Price, 1995; MacDonald & da Costa, 1996b; Ryan et al., 1993). Percentages of students reporting this experience have been found to range from 31% (Ryan et al., 1993) to 63% (Everett & Price, 1995). Students have also been found to report having something stolen as a common experience and these rates have also varied from study to study (14% in Ryan et al., 1993; 39% in Everett & Price, 1995; and 55.6% in Smith et al., 1995).

A number of students have reported being threatened by other students at school. Ryan et al. (1993) have reported that 23% and 29% of students had been threatened, Everett and Price (1995) reported a rate of 28%, and Smith et al. (1995) reported findings of 42.3%. The percentage of students reporting experiences of being physically hurt by other students at school are similar. Everett and Price reported that 36% of students surveyed had been pushed, shoved, or grabbed while 16% of students had been kicked, bitten, or hit with a fist. Smith et al. found that 37.1% of students had been slapped or kicked, and Ryan et al. reported findings ranging from 13%-16% for students' experiences of being beaten up while at school.

A small percentage of students have reported threats and assaults with weapons such

as knives or guns. For example, Everett and Price (1995) reported that 4% of students had been threatened with a knife or gun and 1% had been assaulted with such weapons.

### **Students' Perceptions of Additional School Violence Issues**

There is no doubt that students experience various types of violent incidents at school. However, these rates are never absolute, they vary from study to study, and it is conceivable that researchers will be able to debate the increase/decrease conundrum endlessly. Therefore, investigations of school violence, and comparisons between various investigations, should not focus exclusively on the frequency of violence in schools and the rates of violence experienced by students. Rather, since regardless of frequency, it has been established that violence at school does exist, it is critical that research also explore the impact of this violence on the students.

Hinton-Nelson, Roberts, and Snyder (1996) have suggested that witnessing violence can have a devastating and long-lasting effect on children's internalized perceptions. Similarly, it can be proposed that experiencing (or witnessing) violence at school is likely to impact on students' internalized perceptions.

There are numerous justifications for exploring students' perceptions of school violence. Firstly, students' perceptions may provide us with more information regarding the impact of school violence. Secondly, since perceptions can often be linked to behaviour, understanding students' perceptions of violence may provide some insight regarding their impetus to participate in violence. For example, it may be discovered that students' participation in violence is linked to their perception of personal threat. As Guest (1997)

found in his police work with the street crime unit in Toronto, students may be prompted to engage in violent acts against others because they perceive the others as rivals or as posing a threat to them (for a complete story, see Guest's account of Chris, 1997; pp. 26-35). Finally, investigating students' thoughts and feelings about the violence in their school may provide indications for prevention and intervention.

Indeed, in addition to exploring the types of violent incidents students have experienced at school, previous research has also investigated students' perceptions regarding numerous factors related to school violence. Researchers have delved into students' perspectives regarding the extent of the problem of violence in their school, their perceptions of their safety while at school, and their feelings regarding the school administration's awareness of and response to the extent of school violence. In addition, some researchers have asked students to reflect upon why other students their age engage in violence at school.

### **Students' Perceptions of the Extent of School Violence and Their Safety While at School**

In their investigation of students in grades 7 to 9, Ryan et al. (1993) found that approximately 63% of students felt there was "a moderate amount" to "a lot" of violence in their school. Similarly, Ryan et al. found that approximately 45% of the grade 6 to 8 students surveyed felt that there was "some" to "a lot" of violence in their school. MacDonald and da Costa (1996a) found that over 50% of students regarded bullying as a "very big" or "big" problem at school.

With respect to perceptions of safety, previous research has found that large numbers

of students do not consistently feel safe at school. For example, in their investigation of students in grades 6 to 8, Ryan et al. (1993) found that only 38% of the students reported feeling safe at school all of the time. Thirty-one percent indicated that they felt safe "most of the time", 23% stated that they only felt safe "sometimes", and 6% never felt safe at school. In their investigation of students in grades 7 to 9, Ryan et al. found that 18% of the students felt safe "all of the time", 52% felt safe "most of the time", 25% "sometimes" felt safe, and 5% "never" felt safe at school. MacDonald and da Costa (1996a) found that 4% of students never felt safe at school. Everett and Price (1995) reported somewhat higher rates of perceived overall safety with 41% of students feeling very safe and 52% of students feeling somewhat safe at school. However, 19% of students were very worried or somewhat worried that they would be physically attacked or hurt while at school.

### **Students' Perceptions of Administrative Awareness and Satisfaction with Administrative Response to Violent Incidents**

Previous studies indicate a perception among students that their school's administration is not fully aware of the problem of violence within the school and that the incidents of violence are often not dealt with to students' satisfaction (Everett & Price, 1995; MacDonald & da Costa, 1996b; Mathews, 1994; Ryan et al., 1993). MacDonald and da Costa found that students were not always confident in their teachers' and administrators' awareness of the extent of the violence occurring at school. Ryan et al. found that 37% of the grade 6 to 8 students polled in one school and 45% of the grade 7 to 9 students surveyed in a second school were not satisfied with the way violence was handled at school. Everett and

Price found that 25% of students were unsatisfied with the steps their school had taken to deal with the violence that had occurred.

MacDonald and da Costa (1996b) describe the existence of a "perception gap" between administrators and students and suggest that there is "either an intentional or unconscious underplaying of the extent and effective management of school violence" (p.15). Similarly, Mathews (1994) suggests that a "code of silence" exists within schools which serves to downplay the nature and extent of school violence. MacDonald and da Costa explain that "an important challenge for educators is to recognize that school violence may affect far more students than is realized" (p.15).

### **Why Students Participate in Violence and Suggestions for Responding to Violence in Schools**

In addition to exploring students' experiences and perceptions of school violence, researchers have also endeavored to understand why students engage in violence at school and how they would like to see violent incidents handled.

Everett and Price (1995) asked their sample of 726 students in grades seven through twelve why they felt students commit acts of violence. Among other explanations, gang/group membership and lack of parental supervision at home were both identified as possible explanations by 35% of the students surveyed. Boredom/lack of motivation to learn was identified as plausible by 18% of students.

Ryan et al. (1993) asked students in grades 6 through 8 for suggestions on dealing with violent incidents at school. Approximately 49% of the respondents indicated that the

school should impose more suspensions, detentions, and punishments and 32% suggested that the police and courts should be involved in dealing with school violence. Grade 7 to 9 students in a different school were asked what students, school staff, and the police could do specifically to deal with violence at school. The participants suggested that students should stop harassing others, should avoid violent situations, and should report incidents to either school staff or the police. Furthermore, they suggested that school staff should try to be more aware of the violence occurring, should spend more time helping students deal with the violence, and should be more strict with the perpetrators. With respect to the role of police, students suggested that police be more involved in preventative strategies such as speaking to students about violence at school. They also suggested the use of interventions such as the laying of charges and arrests.

### **Are Victims and Perpetrators of Violence Mutually Exclusive?**

Although it may be assumed that offenders and victims in schools are typically mutually exclusive, this assumption has not been supported by previous research (Mathews, 1993; Ryan et al., 1994; Walker, 1994). Rather, some studies have found that the same students may be both victims and perpetrators of school violence (Mathews, 1993; Ryan et al., 1994).

### **Grade**

As is often the case for research conducted within school settings, investigations of

school violence have been analyzed with respect to grade. Interestingly, previous research on school violence has demonstrated that while students in higher grades tend to report more experience with violent incidents, they also tend to regard school violence as being less of a problem than do students in lower grades (MacDonald & da Costa, 1996b; Ryan et al., 1993).

Ryan et al. (1993) found that students in grades 7 and 9 reported the highest incidence of having experienced violence while at school. Grade 7 students were more likely to be physically threatened, beaten-up, assaulted with a weapon, and sexually assaulted whereas grade 9 students reported more experiences of having their lunch money taken, being threatened with a weapon, being picked on, being verbally harassed, and being sexually harassed. While students in grade 8 perceived violence at school to be a more serious problem than did students in grades 7 and 9, students in both grade 7 and grade 8 felt less safe from violence at school than did the grade 9 students. Ryan et al. hypothesized that older students may perceive violence as a "normal" part of their experience at school; The longer students attend school, the more they begin to "accept" the occurrence of school violence.

MacDonald and da Costa (1996b) found that students in grade 7 were consistently more confident in their teachers' awareness of the extent of school violence than were their grade 8 or 9 counterparts. However, students in all grades generally did not perceive that their teachers and administrators were regularly aware of the violence at school. In addition, more than half of the students expressed dissatisfaction with the way the school treated both victims and perpetrators of violence. The researchers concluded that students demonstrated both frustration and a belief that the violence occurring at school was often ignored.

## Sex

Perhaps the most widely investigated issue related to school violence is that of sex differences in experiences and perceptions. Previous research has demonstrated the existence of sex differences in both students' experiences with and their attitudes toward school violence (Artz & Riecken, 1997; Everett & Price, 1995; MacDonald, 1997; MacDonald & da Costa, 1996a; Ryan et al., 1993). In general, male students have been found to both experience more violence than female students and to endorse the use of violence more readily. Of all the types of violent incidents which are generally studied, female students have tended to rate higher only in the experience of sexual forms of violence such as harassment and assault (Artz & Riecken, 1997; MacDonald, 1997; MacDonald & da Costa, 1996b). As has been poignantly expressed by Pipher (1994), "girls receive two kinds of sex education in their schools: one in the classroom and the other in the halls" (p.206).

Artz and Riecken (1997) conducted a study of students in grades 8 to 10 in four junior secondary schools. They found a "clear gender-based split on the topic of violence in terms of both students' experiences with it and their attitudes and values toward it" (p.294). Specifically, they found that

violence is a bigger part of boys' lives than it is for girls, with boys being 2.5 times as likely to report having 'beaten up another kid in the past year', 1.5 times as likely to report being the victim of a gang, and twice as likely as girls to report being attacked on the way to and from school. (p.294).

This gender split was also evident in school incident reports for 1995-1996, as the majority of violent incidents occurring at school involved boys (Artz & Riecken, 1997). Artz and Riecken concluded that the nature of the violence one encounters is largely determined by

one's gender; Boys live in a cultural milieu that exposes them to more violence, and ultimately, they accept violence more readily.

Pipher (1994) suggests that girls learn to express anger indirectly, through cattiness and teasing. Unlike the physical violence that is evidenced by boys, girls tend to scapegoat, harass, and shun other girls in their efforts to exert social control. Pipher cautions that this "pain often drives adolescent girls to despair" (p.68).

However, contrary to findings by Artz and Riecken (1997), Pipher (1994), and others, some research has discovered that males and females generally report similar experiences with and participation in school violence. For example, Ryan et al. (1993) found that males and females in grades 7 through 9 reported similar overall rates of experience with violence at school. With respect to participating in violence at school, male students in grades 7 and 8 reported higher rates than their female counterparts however interestingly, female students in grade 9 were more likely to commit violent incidents at school than were the male students in grade 9. In addition, the female grade 9 students tended to commit offenses which were physical in nature, such as making threats of physical violence and the use of weapons (Ryan et al., 1993).

Violence among females appears to have increased in recent years (Artz, 1998b; Mathews, 1998) and - as is demonstrated by Ryan et al.'s (1993) finding regarding grade 9 girls' participation in school violence - more current investigations of female students have revealed new insights regarding the nature of their experiences and participation in violence. According to Mathews (1993), girls appear to be participating in deviant peer groups and gangs at an increasing rate. In addition,

research on youth crime, self-report surveys of students and teachers in Canadian middle level and high schools provide evidence that girls can and do use violence and aggression at levels comparable to their male peers, though it can sometimes take different or less obvious forms. (Mathews, 1998; p.1).

Clearly, further research is necessary regarding male and female students' experiences of violence at school.

### **The Present Study**

The purpose of this study is to gather and record junior high students' perceptions and experiences of school violence. A major aim of this investigation is to contribute to and enhance the limited available literature regarding violence in junior high school. Although this study is largely exploratory in nature, there are a few general expectations of findings.

### **Sex Differences in Students' Experiences and Perceptions of School Violence**

In accordance with findings from the majority of previous research, it is expected that males and females will report different experiences and perceptions of school violence. Specifically, males are expected to report more overall experience of, participation in, and willingness to participate in violent activity than females. However, female students are expected to report some experience of, participation in, and willingness to participate in violent activity and they are specifically expected to report a higher incidence of "sexual harassment" and "sexual assault".

**Grade Differences in Students' Experiences and Perceptions of School Violence**

Another general hypothesis is that some grade differences will emerge with respect to experience of, participation in, and willingness to participate in school violence. Specifically, it is expected that grade 9 students will report a greater overall experience of and participation in the more "major" forms of violent activities such as "threats with a weapon", "assault with a weapon", "sexual harassment", and "sexual assault". Students in grade 7 are expected to report higher rates of experience with the more "minor" forms of violence such as "lunch money taken", "other items taken", and "verbally harassed/picked on/bullied/intimidated" than they are with the more major types of incidents expected of the grade 9 students (such as "threats with a weapon", "assault with a weapon", "sexual harassment", and "sexual assault").

**The Relationship Between Being a Victim and Being a Perpetrator**

Given the findings from some studies that students may be both victims and perpetrators of school violence (Mathews, 1993; Ryan et al., 1994), this study aims to begin uncovering the nature of the relationship between being a victim and being a perpetrator. Specifically, this study will endeavor to find out if a relationship exists between students' experience of violent incidents at school and both their likelihood of participating in and/or their willingness to participate in school violence. It is expected that there will be a relationship between violence experienced and violence participated in as well as between violence experienced and willingness to participate in violence.

## CHAPTER 2

### Method

#### The School

The present school is a City of Toronto junior high school comprised of students in grades 7, 8, and 9. The school has a very large new Canadian population due to immigration and settlement patterns in the area. In fact, the school profile for the 1997-1998 school year indicated that only 26% of students had been born in Canada and that 88% of students and/or their parents had immigrated to Canada. Specifically, 31% of students had immigrated within the previous 2 years, 22% between the previous 2-5 years, and 22% more than five years prior. In addition, students' birthplaces represented 32 countries, there were 30 languages represented in the school, and 71% of the students had a primary language other than English.

In November 1998, as this study was being planned, the following demographic overview of the school emerged: A breakdown by country of birth indicated that 147 students were born in Canada, 18 were born in Iran, 49 were born in Israel, 20 were born in South Korea, 50 were born in Ukraine, and 245 were born in the U.S.S.R. A breakdown of the students' first languages indicated that 159 spoke English, 45 spoke Hebrew, 21 spoke Korean, 21 spoke Persian/Farsi, and 296 spoke Russian.

#### Participants

Male and female students in one City of Toronto junior high school (grades 7, 8, and 9) were invited to participate in this study. The maximum number of potential participants

was 605, as this represented the total number of students in the school. However, not all students were interested or permitted by their parents to participate in the study. The final sample consisted of 95 students. Of these students, 45 were male and 50 were female. With respect to grade, 20 students were in grade 7, 60 students were in grade 8, and 15 students were in grade 9.

### **Procedure**

During the month of May, two information assemblies were held at the school in order to recruit student participants. The school Principal and I introduced the purpose of the study along with our thoughts regarding its importance and relevance to the school. Students were informed of the consent and administration processes and were asked to consider participating. They were informed that participation was entirely voluntary and that there were absolutely no consequences for choosing to abstain from participating.

An information letter and consent form were made available to all students and their parents. Both of these were translated into Russian in order to avoid excluding as potential participants the large numbers of students whose primary language was Russian (i.e., approximately 50% of the school). Consent of both the parents and the students themselves was required for participation in the study. Students were given two weeks to return completed consent forms to either their staff advisor or the school office.

Administration of the questionnaire took place over two days during the second week of June. Students were surveyed in the school cafeteria one grade at a time. In order to ensure confidentiality while completing the questionnaire, students were seated two per table,

approximately four feet apart.

### **Questionnaire**

A questionnaire entitled "Student Perceptions and Experiences of Violence" was developed for the purpose of this study. It was adapted from the "Student Perceptions of Violence Survey" which was developed and used by Ryan et al. (1993). The questionnaire takes approximately 45 minutes to complete and was administered to all students who consented to participate in the study.

The questionnaire consisted of a variety of questions regarding students' experiences and perceptions of school violence. The first set of questions asked students about their experiences with, participation in, and willingness to participate in nine different types of violent incidents (i. lunch money taken, ii. other items taken by force, iii. verbally harassed/picked on/bullied/ intimidated, iv. threatened to be beaten up, v. beaten up, vi. threatened with a weapon, vii. hurt with a weapon, viii. sexually harassed, ix. sexually assaulted). Three columns of responses were provided, with a "yes" or "no" choice of response for each column. The columns were "To You", "To Someone You Know", and "By Gang/Group of 2 or More". In addition, a space for open-ended comments and explanations was provided for each of violence experienced, violence participated in, and willingness to participate in violence. Students were asked to base their responses on experiences which had taken place only "between September and June of this school year (i.e., September 1998 to June 1999)". For the purposes of this study, only students' *personal* experiences of, participation in, and willingness to participate in violence were analyzed (i.e., only their

responses to the "To You" column).

The next series of questions asked students to indicate if they were more afraid of students from their school when they encountered them at school or when they encountered them in the community and if they were more afraid of violence by students in their own school or by students/youth from other schools. Once again, a space was provided for comments and explanations.

A number of questions asked students about their perceptions regarding the extent of violence in their school, their feelings of safety while at school, their perceptions of the teachers' and principals' awareness of the amount of violence, and their satisfaction with how incidents of violence are handled at school. For the question regarding the extent of violence in school, students were provided with four response choices ranging from "No - no problem at all" to "A lot of violence". Students were also given four response choices for the question regarding their perceived level of safety at school. These response ranged from "Yes - I feel safe all of the time" to "Not at all - I never feel safe". With respect to the questions regarding teachers' and principals' awareness of the amount of violence and the students' satisfaction with how the incidents are handled, the response choices were "Yes", "Somewhat", and "No". All questions also allowed for open-ended comments or explanations to be made.

Students were also asked to indicate why they thought students in their school take part in violent acts. Six choices were provided and students were asked to indicate "yes" or "no" to each possible reason. They were also invited to list any other reasons that might explain why students participate in violent acts.

Finally, students were asked for their ideas about how incidents of violence should be

handled at school and what students, school staff, parents, police, and the community could do to prevent violence at school. These were entirely open-ended questions.

## CHAPTER 3

### Results

Frequencies and percentages were computed for all responses as a function of the total sample, as well as for sex and for grade. In order to investigate differences in responses by sex and by grade, a series of Chi-Square tests was performed on each type of violent incident for each of violence experienced, violence participated in, and willingness to participate in violence. Due to the number of related tests being performed, a more conservative alpha level of .01 was used as the cutoff in determining significance. A series of independent t-tests (for sex) and ANOVAs (for grade) was performed for all other questions. As these were independent tests, an alpha level of .05 was used to determine significance.

#### 1. Violence Experienced, Violence Participated In, and Willingness to Participate In

##### Violence

###### Violence Experienced

There are some people who are being constantly abused by others.  
(Female/14years/grade8).

The number and percentage of students who reported each type of violent incident experienced (i-ix) at school is reported in Table 1. "Verbally harassed/Picked on/Bullied/Intimidated" was the most frequently experienced type of incident between September 1998 and June 1999, with 46.3% of students reporting this experience. Total reported percentages

for other types of violent incidents ranged from 4.2% for both "assaulted/hurt with a weapon" and "sexually assaulted" to 30.5% for "threatened to be beaten up".

A Total Violence Experienced score (TV-E) was calculated for each participant by summing the total number of "yes" responses for the nine types of violent incidents experienced. When the distribution of TV-E scores was graphed, it was found that most responses were concentrated in the 0-5 range and few students indicated having experienced more than five types of incidents. In order to normalize the distribution, the TV-E scores were collapsed/categorized into three levels: "none", for a TV-E score of 0, "low", for a TV-E score of 1-2, and "moderate/high", for a TV-E score of 3+. The frequencies of students assigned to each of the three TV-E categories are presented at the bottom of Table 1. Of the total sample, 33.7% of students fell into the "none" TV-E category, 44.2% of students had a low TV-E score, and 22.1% of students had a moderate/high TV-E score.

The number and percentage of students reporting was also calculated by sex and by grade for each type of violent incident and for the Total Violence Experienced. The breakdown of results by sex are reported in Table 1 and the breakdown of results by grade are reported in Table 2. Interestingly, "verbally harassed" and being "threatened to be beaten up" were the most frequently reported types of violent incidents experienced by both males and females as well as by students in all three grades.

Twenty-six of the students provided comments regarding the types of violent incidents they had personally experienced or witnessed a friend experience at school. Several students indicated that they had not experienced any violence at school, and a number of students who responded to this question provided general comments about school violence.

I was threatened to be beat up by some girls for personal reasons, and some guys I know always say stuff to me and touch me. (Female/13years/grade8).

I saw a boy my age being bullied one day about two months ago by a group of 4-6 older kids. They were threatening him and were not letting him get away. Another day I saw another boy with a bunch of older kids. I noticed that they were following and threatening him. (Male/13years/grade7).

My friend got threatened by 3 people who are in grade 9, and my friend got cut under his one eye by those three people with a knife.  
(Female/13years/grade7).

A series of Chi-square analyses was performed on each type of violent incident in order to explore any differences by sex and by grade. The results by sex and by grade were nonsignificant for each type of violent incident and for the total violence experienced.

**Table 1****Frequencies, Percentages, and Chi-Square Results for Violence Experienced as a Function of Sex**

<b>Violence Experienced</b>	<b>Total n=95</b>	<b>Male n=45</b>	<b>Female n=50</b>	<b>Chi-Square</b>	
	<b>% (n)</b>	<b>% (n)</b>	<b>% (n)</b>	<b><math>\chi^2</math></b>	<b>p</b>
i. Lunch money taken	7.4 (7)	8.9 (4)	6.0 (3)	.290	n.s.
ii. Other items taken	11.6 (11)	13.3 (6)	10.0 (5)	.257	n.s.
iii. Verbally harassed/picked on/bullied/intimidated	46.3 (44)	42.2 (19)	50.0 (25)	.576	n.s.
iv. Threatened to be beaten-up	30.5 (29)	37.8 (17)	24.0 (12)	2.120	n.s.
v. Beaten-up (kicked/punched)	12.6 (12)	20.0 (9)	6.0 (3)	4.206	n.s.
vi. Threatened with a weapon	7.4 (7)	8.9 (4)	6.0 (3)	.290	n.s.
vii. Assaulted/hurt with a weapon	4.2 (4)	4.4 (2)	4.0 (2)	.012	n.s.
viii. Sexually harassed	5.3 (5)	.0 (0)	10.0 (5)	4.750	n.s.
ix. Sexually assaulted	4.2 (4)	2.2 (1)	6.0 (3)	.838	n.s.
<b>Total Violence Experienced</b>					
none	33.7 (32)	28.9 (13)	38.0 (19)	-	-
low	44.2 (42)	53.3 (24)	36.0 (18)	-	-
moderate/high	22.1 (21)	17.8 (8)	26.0 (13)	-	-

**Table 2**

**Frequencies, Percentages, and Chi-Square Results for Violence Experienced as a Function of Grade**

Violence Experienced	Total n=95	Grade 7 n=20	Grade 8 n=60	Grade 9 n=15	Chi-Square	
	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	$\chi^2$	p
i. Lunch money taken	7.4 (7)	5.0 (1)	10.0 (6)	.0 (0)	1.966	n.s.
ii. Other items taken	11.6 (11)	15.0 (3)	11.7 (7)	6.7 (1)	.583	n.s.
iii. Verbally harassed/picked on/bullied/intimidated	46.3 (44)	40.0 (8)	45.0 (27)	60.0 (9)	1.492	n.s.
iv. Threatened to be beaten-up	30.5 (29)	40.0 (8)	26.7 (16)	33.3 (5)	1.324	n.s.
v. Beaten-up (kicked/punched)	12.6 (12)	20.0 (4)	10.0 (6)	13.3 (2)	1.367	n.s.
vi. Threatened with a weapon	7.4 (7)	.0 (0)	11.7 (7)	.0 (0)	4.408	n.s.
vii. Assaulted/hurt with a weapon	4.2 (4)	.0 (0)	3.3 (2)	13.3 (2)	4.089	n.s.
viii. Sexually harassed	5.3 (5)	5.0 (1)	5.0 (3)	6.7 (1)	.070	n.s.
ix. Sexually assaulted	4.2 (4)	.0 (0)	6.7 (4)	.0 (0)	2.436	n.s.
<b>Total Violence Experienced</b>						
none	33.7 (32)	35.0 (7)	35.0 (21)	26.7 (4)	-	-
low	44.2 (42)	40.0 (8)	43.3 (26)	53.3 (8)	-	-
moderate/high	22.1 (21)	25.0 (5)	21.7 (13)	20.0 (3)	-	-

**Note.** Total values are repeated from Table 1 to facilitate ease of comparison with Grade values.

**Violence Participated In**

Some people always get picked on. I'm not the bully type myself, but sometimes picking on someone is the only way to fit in. (Male/13years/grade7).

Verbal harassment happens everywhere, between adults, teens, or even children. (Male/13years/grade8).

Sometimes people hurt others because they feel anger. Even a nice person can just get out of control if they get pissed off. (Female/12years/grade7).

Responses for each type of violent incident participated in (i-ix) were calculated for the entire sample. These are reported in Table 3. Similar to violence experienced, "verbally harassed" was the type of incident most frequently participated in this year, with 36.8% of all students admitting to having verbally harassed another student. Rates of participation in other violent incidents ranged from 0% for both "sexually harassed" and "sexually assaulted" to 20.0% for "threatened to beat up".

A Total Violence Participated In (TV-P) score was calculated for each participant by summing the total number of "yes" responses for violence participated in. These TV-P scores were then categorized into the "none", "low", and "moderate/high" categories by the same criteria used for the TV-E scores. The frequencies of students assigned to each of the three TV-P categories are presented at the bottom of Table 3. The "none", "low", and "moderate/high" TV-P categories were comprised of 56.8%, 30.5%, and 12.6% of students respectively.

Frequencies of violence participated in were calculated by sex and by grade for each type of violent incident and for the Total Violence Participated In. The frequencies for sex

are reported in Table 3 and the frequencies for grade are reported in Table 4. Once again, males and females in all three grades reported the highest incidence of participation in "verbally harassing" another student and "threatening to beat up" another student.

Twenty-two students provided comments regarding participation in violence at school. Once again, comments reflected personal participation in violence, non-participation in violence, and general comments regarding students' participation in violence at school. Several of the responses included some form of "rationale" for participation in violent incidents.

Me and two more people were calling a girl names only because we didn't have anything to do. (Female/12years/grade7).

I used to know a couple of guys that lived in my area that would simply bully people around and there was nothing any of us (meaning my other friends) could do about it. (Female/14years/grade8).

I have never participated in any violent activities. I did not take part in it even though my friends would because I was afraid of the punishment and I knew that violence is not the answer and it's wrong. (Female/13years/grade8).

Chi-Square tests were also performed for Violence Participated In. Significant sex differences were found for students'"threatening to beat up" another student ( $\chi^2=6.597$ ,  $p\leq .01$ ) and "beating up" another student ( $\chi^2=7.126$ ,  $p<.01$ ). For both of these types of incidents, males reported a higher degree of participation than females.

**Table 3**

**Frequencies, Percentages, and Chi-Square Results For Violence Participated In as a Function of Sex**

	Violence Participated In	Total n=95	Male n=45	Female n=50	Chi-Square	
		% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	$\chi^2$	p
i.	Taken lunch money	4.2 (4)	.0 (0)	8.0 (4)	3.758	n.s.
ii.	Taken other items	5.3 (5)	6.7 (3)	4.0 (2)	.338	n.s.
iii.	Verbally harassed/picked on/bullied/intimidated	36.8 (35)	37.8 (17)	36.0 (18)	.032	n.s.
iv.	Threatened to beat-up	20.0 (19)	31.1 (14)	10.0 (5)	6.597	.010**
v.	Beat-up (kicked/punched)	12.6 (12)	22.2 (10)	4.0 (2)	7.126	.008**
vi.	Threatened with a weapon	2.1 (2)	4.4 (2)	.0 (0)	2.270	n.s.
vii.	Assaulted/hurt with a weapon	1.1 (1)	2.2 (1)	.0 (0)	1.123	n.s.
viii.	Sexually harassed	.0 (0)	.0 (0)	.0 (0)	-	-
ix.	Sexually assaulted	.0 (0)	.0 (0)	.0 (0)	-	-
Total Violence Participated In						
	none	56.8 (54)	53.3 (24)	60.0 (30)	-	-
	low	30.5 (29)	28.9 (13)	32.0 (16)	-	-
	moderate/high	12.6 (12)	17.8 (8)	8.0 (4)	-	-

\*\*p≤.01.

**Table 4**

**Frequencies, Percentages, and Chi-Square Results For Violence Participated In as a Function of Grade**

Violence Participated In	Total n=95	Grade 7 n=20	Grade 8 n=60	Grade 9 n=15	Chi-Square	
	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	$\chi^2$	p
i. Taken lunch money	4.2 (4)	.0 (0)	6.7 (4)	.0 (0)	2.436	n.s.
ii. Taken other items	5.3 (5)	5.0 (1)	5.0 (3)	6.7 (1)	.070	n.s.
iii. Verbally harassed/picked on/bullied/intimidated	36.8 (35)	40.0 (8)	36.7 (22)	33.3 (5)	.166	n.s.
iv. Threatened to beat-up	20.0 (19)	35.0 (7)	15.0 (9)	20.0 (3)	3.750	n.s.
v. Beat-up (kicked/punched)	12.6 (12)	20.0 (4)	8.3 (5)	20.0 (3)	2.726	n.s.
vi. Threatened with a weapon	2.1 (2)	.0 (0)	1.7 (1)	6.7 (1)	2.000	n.s.
vii. Assaulted/hurt with a weapon	1.1 (1)	.0 (0)	.0 (0)	6.7 (1)	5.390	n.s.
viii. Sexually harassed	.0 (0)	.0 (0)	.0 (0)	.0 (0)	-	-
ix. Sexually assaulted	.0(0)	.0 (0)	.0 (0)	.0 (0)	-	-
<b>Total Violence Participated In</b>						
none	<b>56.8 (54)</b>	40.0 (8)	60.0 (36)	66.7 (10)	-	-
low	<b>30.5(29)</b>	50.0 (10)	28.3 (17)	13.3 (2)	-	-
moderate/high	<b>12.6 (12)</b>	10.0 (2)	11.7 (7)	20.0 (3)	-	-

**Note.** Total values are repeated from Table 3 to facilitate ease of comparison with Grade values.

### **Willingness to Participate in Violence**

If no one can catch you, you will do lots of wrong things, but sometimes you just don't feel it's right to do something. It then becomes more difficult if your friends are making you do something you don't want to do.  
(Female/12years/grade7).

Responses for each type of violent incident the students were willing to participate in (i-ix) were calculated for the entire sample. These are reported in Table 5. Similar to findings for both violence experienced and violence participated in, "verbally harass" was the type of incident that students most frequently reported they would be willing to participate in (31.6%). It is interesting to note that 12.6% of students reported that they would be willing to "beat up" someone at school and this percentage is consistent with the percentage of students who reported that they had beaten someone up (12.6%, see Table 3) and with the percentage of students who reported having been beaten up this year (12.6%, see Table 1). Rates of willingness to participate in other types of incidents ranged from 0% for "sexually assault" to 22.1% for "threaten to beat-up".

A Total Score for Willingness to Participate in Violence (TV-WP) was calculated for each participant by summing the total number of "yes" responses for willingness to participate in violence. These TV-WP scores were then categorized into the "none", "low", and "moderate/high" categories by the same criteria used for the TV-E and TV-P scores. The frequencies of students assigned to each of the three TV-WP categories are presented at the bottom of Table 5. The "none" category was comprised of 58.9% of students, the "low" category was comprised of 24.2% of students, and the "moderate/high" category was comprised of 16.8% of students. Students' responses regarding their willingness to

participate in violence at school were calculated by sex and by grade for each type of violent incident and for the Total Willingness to Participate in Violence score. These results are reported in Table 5 (sex) and Table 6 (grade). In regards to the Total Willingness to Participate in Violence score, results were fairly consistent among the sexes and the grades with a majority of students from both sexes and each grade falling into the "none" category.

Twenty-one students provided comments regarding their willingness (or unwillingness) to participate in violent incidents at school. Similar to violence experienced, and violence participated in, these comments also included general comments regarding violence at school (e.g., other students' willingness to participate in violence if they could get away with it).

I know a couple of guys that don't care about anybody, not even themselves, so if they had the chance to do something they'd get away with, they would (Female/14years/grade8).

I think even if you know you could get away and would not be caught, it's terrible. Not just for a person you are doing it to but also for you, especially for you (Female/14years/grade8).

It's not that someone else would know or not, it's that I would know (Female/13years/grade8).

Chi-square analyses were also performed for Willingness to Participate in Violence. The only finding that approached significance was for would "threaten to beat up" by sex ( $\chi^2=6.260$ ,  $p=.012$ ), with more males (33.3%,  $n=15$ ) than females (12.0%,  $n=6$ ) indicating that they would be willing to beat up another student if they could get away with it.

**Table 5**

**Frequencies, Percentages, and Chi-Square Results for Willingness to Participate in Violence as a Function of Sex**

	Total n=95	Male n=45	Female n=50	Chi-Square		
				% (n)	$\chi^2$	p
<b>Violence Willing to Participate In</b>						
i. Take lunch money	11.6 (11)	13.3 (6)	10.0 (5)	.257		n.s.
ii. Take other items	13.7 (13)	13.3 (6)	14.0 (7)	.009		n.s.
iii. Verbally harass/pick on/bully/intimidate	31.6 (30)	31.1 (14)	32.0 (16)	.009		n.s.
iv. Threaten to beat-up	22.1 (21)	33.3 (15)	12.0 (6)	6.260		n.s.
v. Beat-up (kick/punch)	12.6 (12)	17.8 (8)	8.0 (4)	2.052		n.s.
vi. Threaten with a weapon	3.2 (3)	4.4 (2)	2.0 (1)	.463		n.s.
vii. Assault/hurt with a weapon	2.1 (2)	4.4 (2)	.0 (0)	2.270		n.s.
viii. Sexually harass	1.1 (1)	.0 (0)	2.0 (1)	.910		n.s.
ix. Sexually assault	.0 (0)	.0 (0)	.0 (0)	-		-
<b>Total Willingness to Participate in Violence</b>						
none	58.9 (56)	57.8 (26)	60.0 (30)	-	-	
low	24.2 (23)	22.2 (10)	26.0 (13)	-	-	
moderate/high	16.8 (16)	20.0 (9)	14.0 (7)	-	-	

**Table 6**

**Frequencies, Percentages, and Chi-Square Results for Willingness to Participate in Violence as a Function of Grade**

	Total n=95	Grade 7 n=20	Grade 8 n=60	Grade 9 n=15	Chi-Square	p
Violence Willing to Participate In	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	$\chi^2$	
i. Take lunch money	11.6 (11)	5.0 (1)	15.0 (9)	6.7 (1)	1.885	n.s.
ii. Take other items	13.7 (13)	10.0 (2)	15.0 (9)	13.3 (2)	.319	n.s.
iii. Verbally harass/pick on/bully/intimidate	31.6 (30)	30.0 (6)	30.0 (18)	40.0 (6)	.585	n.s.
iv. Threaten to beat-up	22.1 (21)	35.0 (7)	18.3 (11)	20.0 (3)	2.466	n.s.
v. Beat-up (kick/punch)	12.6 (12)	15.0 (3)	11.7 (7)	13.3 (2)	.159	n.s.
vi. Threaten with a weapon	3.2 (3)	.0 (0)	1.7 (1)	13.3 (2)	6.167	n.s.
vii. Assault/hurt with a weapon	2.1 (2)	.0 (0)	1.7 (1)	6.7 (1)	2.000	n.s.
viii. Sexually harass	1.1 (1)	.0 (0)	1.7 (1)	.0 (0)	.590	n.s.
ix. Sexually assault	.0 (0)	.0 (0)	.0 (0)	.0 (0)	-	-
<b>Total Willingness to Participate in Violence</b>						
none	<b>58.9 (56)</b>	<b>50.0 (10)</b>	<b>61.7 (37)</b>	<b>60.0 (9)</b>	-	-
low	<b>24.2 (23)</b>	<b>35.0 (7)</b>	<b>20.0 (12)</b>	<b>26.7 (4)</b>	-	-
moderate/high	<b>16.8 (16)</b>	<b>15.0 (3)</b>	<b>18.3 (11)</b>	<b>13.3 (2)</b>	-	-

**Note.** Total values are repeated from Table 5 to facilitate ease of comparison with Grade values.

**Total Violence**

Mean scores were calculated by sex and by grade for each of TV-E, TV-P, and TV-WP. These are reported in Table 7. The mean scores across the total sample, sex, and grade were very low (i.e., all less than 1.0) for each of TV-E, TV-P, and TV-WP. Independent t-tests (for sex) and ANOVAs (for grade) were performed for the TV-E, TV-P, and TV-WP scores and these results are also presented in Table 7. Results by sex and by grade were nonsignificant.

**Correlations**

Correlations between violence experienced and violence participated in were performed for each of the nine types of violent incidents and for the total violence scores. The results are reported in Table 8. Interestingly, positive correlations were significant for having lunch money taken and taking one's lunch money, being verbally harassed and verbally harassing someone, being beaten up and beating someone up, being threatened with a weapon and threatening with a weapon, being hurt with a weapon and hurting someone with a weapon, and total violence experienced and total violence participated in.

Correlations were also performed between violence experienced and willingness to participate in violence for each of the nine types of violent incidents and the total violence scores. These results are reported in Table 9. Correlations were significant for verbal harassment/picked on/bullied/intimidated, threatened to be beaten up, hurt with a weapon, sexual harassment, and total violence.

Table 7

Means, Standard Deviations, and t-test/ANOVA Results for Total Violence Scores as a Function of Sex and Grade

		TV-E	TV-P	TV-WP
<b>Sex</b>				
Male (n=45)	<u>M (SD)</u>	.8889 (.6816)	.6444 (.7733)	.6222 (.8059)
Female (n=50)	<u>M (SD)</u>	.8800 (.7990)	.4800 (.6465)	.5400 (.7343)
t-test	<u>t(1,93)</u> <u>p</u>	.058 .954	1.128 .262	.520 .604
<b>Grade</b>				
Grade 7 (n=20)	<u>M (SD)</u>	.9000 (.7881)	.7000 (.6569)	.6500 (.7452)
Grade 8 (n=60)	<u>M (SD)</u>	.8667 (.7471)	.5167 (.7009)	.5667 (.7890)
Grade 9 (n=15)	<u>M (SD)</u>	.9333 (.7037)	.5333 (.8338)	.5333 (.7432)
ANOVA	<u>F(2,92)</u> <u>p</u>	.053 .948	.505 .605	.118 .889
Total	(n=95) <u>M (SD)</u>	.8842 (.7418)	.5579 (.7103)	.5789 (.7660)

Note. TV-E = Total Violence Experienced; TV-P = Total Violence Participated In; TV-WP = Total

Willingness to Participate in Violence.

**Table 8****Correlations Between Violence Experienced and Violence Participated In**

Violence Experienced	Violence Participated In									
	i.	ii.	iii.	iv.	v.	vi.	vii.	viii.	ix.	TV-P
i. Lunch money taken	.342***									
ii. Other items taken		-.085								
iii. Verbally harassed/ picked on/ bullied/ intimidated				.385***						
iv. Threatened to be beaten-up					.183					
v. Beaten-up (kicked/punched)						.237*				
vi. Threatened with a weapon							.239*			
vii. Hurt with a weapon								.492***		
viii. Sexually harassed										
ix. Sexually assaulted										
TV-E										.366***

Note. TV-E = Total Violence Experienced; TV-P = Total Violence Participated In.

\*p<.05. \*\*\*p<.001.

**Table 9****Correlations Between Violence Experienced and Willingness to Participate in Violence**

Violence Experienced	Willingness to Participate in Violence									TV-WP
	i	ii.	iii.	iv.	v.	vi.	vii.	viii.	ix.	
i. Lunch money taken	.024									
ii. Other items taken		.047								
iii. Verbally harassed/ picked on/bullied/ intimidated				.368***						
iv. Threatened to be beaten -up					.253*					
v. Beaten-up (kicked/punched)						.142				
vi. Threatened with a weapon							.179			
vii. Hurt with a weapon								.334**		
viii. Sexually harassed									.438***	
ix. Sexually assaulted										-
TV-E										.306**

**Note.** TV-E = Total Violence Experienced; TV-WP = Total Willingness to Participate in Violence

\* p<.05. \*\*p<.01. \*\*\*p<.001.

## **2. Additional School Violence Issues**

### **Are Students More Afraid at School or in the Community?**

Older kids don't know who I am so out of school they would ignore me. In school, they know where to look if they want to find me.  
(Male/13years/grade8).

I'm afraid while I'm in the community because even in school bullies are afraid of teachers. Some bullies wouldn't attack you on school property but they would attack you somewhere else. (Female/12years/grade7).

Students were asked to indicate if they are more afraid of students from their school when they are at school or when they see these students out in the community. Of the entire sample, 26.3% indicated that they were more afraid at school whereas 69.5% indicated that they were more afraid of the students when they encountered them in the community. These results, along with a breakdown by sex and by grade, are reported in Table 10. The following is a sample of the comments provided by students:

I'm more afraid of seeing them in the community because there might be no one to help me deal with it, but when I'm in school there is always someone there who you can ask for help. (Female/14years/grade8).

In the community you can walk away or ignore them but at school they are going to have more friends with them and you can't just leave.  
(Female/13years/grade7).

At school, teachers and classmates can help stop the fight. In the community it's harder to ignore the problem or not be in a fight with a person.  
(Female/13years/grade8).

In school, we are fully supervised and incidents would be quickly dealt with but in the community, there is less attention paid to individuals and students are able to do things without any consequences.  
(Male/13years/grade8).

ANOVAs (for grade) and independent t-tests (for sex) were performed with respect to participants being afraid of students while at school as opposed to when they encounter them in the community. Results were nonsignificant for both sex and grade.

### **Who Do Students Fear More?**

"People you don't know usually won't mess with you, but you never know about people you know" (Female/13years/grade8).

Students were asked if they were more afraid of students in their own school or youth from other schools. The results indicated that 37.2% of students feared students from their own school more whereas 59.6% were more afraid of youth from other schools. The following comments reflect the students' fears:

Students from nearby high-schools are constantly seen after school and try to intimidate younger groups. (Male/13years/grade8).

Because students in this school are nothing. They just stick their knives up and threaten. They pretend that they are mafia but they're not even close to it. (Female/13years/grade7).

It is almost equal, but at least I know the people at my school and what they are capable of and who to stay way from. Other kids, I don't know what they can do. (Female/15years/grade9).

Frequencies, percentages, and a breakdown by sex and by grade are presented in Table 10. It is interesting to note that grade 7 students were the only students who indicated a greater fear of students from their own school (65.0%) as opposed to youth from other schools (35.0%). Independent t-tests (for sex) and ANOVAs (for grade) were performed and significant differences were found for grade,  $F(2,91) = 4.494$ ,  $p < .05$ . The post-hoc analysis (Tukey HSD) indicated that students in grade 7 differed significantly from students in grade 8.

**Table 10****Frequencies and Percentages for Where Students are Most Afraid and Who Students Fear More as a Function of Sex and Grade**

	Total n=95	Male n=45	Female n=50	Grade 7 n=20	Grade 8 n=60	Grade 9 n=15
	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)
<b><u>Where Students are Most Afraid</u></b>						
School	26.3 (25)	33.3 (15)	20.0 (10)	25.0 (5)	25.0 (15)	33.3 (5)
Community	69.5 (66)	64.4 (29)	74.0 (37)	75.0 (15)	71.7 (43)	53.3 (8)
Both	1.1 (1)	.0 (0)	2.0 (1)	.0 (0)	1.7 (1)	.0 (0)
Neither	3.2 (3)	2.2 (1)	4.0 (2)	.0 (0)	1.7 (1)	13.3 (2)
<b><u>Who Students Fear More</u></b>						
Students in this school	37.2 (35)	45.5 (20)	30.0 (15)	65.0 (13)	30.5 (18)	26.7 (4)
Youth from other schools	59.6 (56)	54.5 (24)	64.0 (32)	35.0 (7)	64.4 (38)	73.3 (11)
Both	3.2 (3)	.0 (0)	6.0 (3)	.0 (0)	5.1 (3)	.0 (0)

**Note.** For Who Students Fear More, Total n=94, Male n=44, and Grade 8 n=59.

### **Students' Perceptions of the Extent of School Violence and Their Safety While at School**

There always might be a problem because someone didn't agree with the other person, or a group of students just feel like beating up a person weaker than them or because of rumors. (Female/14years/grade8).

People at my school could at any moment try and hurt you for no reason. So I rarely feel safe but I'm not every second afraid of people. (Female/15years/grade9).

Students were asked to indicate the extent to which they felt there was a problem with violence in their school. Of the total sample, 8.4% (n=8) felt that there was "a lot" of violence at school, 49.5% (n=47) indicated that there was "a moderate amount of violence", 41.1% (n=39) indicated that there was "rarely" a problem (very little violence), and 1.1% (n=1) indicated that there was "no" problem at all. A breakdown of responses by sex and by grade is presented in Table 11. It is striking that 85.0% (n=17) of grade 7 students felt that there was "a moderate amount" or "a lot" of violence. The following is a sample of students' responses regarding the extent of the problem of violence at school:

There is some violence but a lot of people never really hear about it because it doesn't seem like a big deal. I think a lot of it is just threatening and not acting. People say stuff but don't do it. (Male/13years/grade8).

We sometimes have violence. There are a lot of times the police came to our school because of violence. (Female/14years/grade8).

I don't think that there are any sexual assaults in this school, and nobody uses weapons. I think this is a quiet school. (Male/13years/grade8).

Independent t-tests (for sex) and ANOVAs (for grade) were performed for students' perceptions of whether or not a problem with violence exists in their school. The ANOVA for grade was significant,  $F(2,92) = 6.895$ ,  $p < .005$  and the post-hoc analysis revealed that

grade 7 students differed significantly from students in both grade 8 and grade 9.

When asked about their perception of safety at school, 24.2% (n=23) of students indicated that they "feel safe all of the time", 63.2% (n=60) indicated that they "feel safe most of the time", 10.5% (n=10) indicated that they feel safe "sometimes", and 2.1% (n=2) indicated that they "never feel safe". These results, along with a breakdown by sex and by grade, are reported in Table 11. The independent t-test analyses by sex and the ANOVAs by grade were nonsignificant.

In their general comments, a number of students expressed that they feared groups of grade 9 males:

I get a little scared whenever I walk by the group of grade 9 boys because if I turn my head they may do something but if I look at them they may do something. (Male/13years/grade8).

Most of the time I feel safe. But if I'm walking through an empty hallway and there's a bunch of grade 9 guys sitting on the floor, I start to worry and kind of walk around them. (Female/12years/grade7).

I'm in grade 9, top of the school, not that many people cause acts of aggression towards grade 9s, except for the grade 9s themselves. (Male/15years/grade9).

**Table 11**  
**Frequencies and Percentages for Student Perceptions of the Extent of School Violence and Their Safety at School as a Function of Sex and Grade**

<b>and Grade</b>	Total n=95	Male n=45	Female n=50	Grade 7 n=20	Grade 8 n=60	Grade 9 n=15
	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)
<b>Extent of School Violence</b>						
A lot	8.4 (8)	6.7 (3)	10.0 (5)	25.0 (5)	3.3 (2)	6.7 (1)
Moderate	49.5 (47)	48.9 (22)	50.0 (25)	60.0 (12)	48.3 (29)	40.0 (6)
Very little	41.1 (39)	44.4 (20)	38.0 (19)	15.0 (3)	48.3 (29)	46.7 (7)
None	1.1 (1)	.0 (0)	2.0 (1)	.0 (0)	.0 (0)	6.7 (1)
<b>How Often Students Feel Safe</b>						
All of the time	24.2 (23)	24.4 (11)	24.0 (12)	15.0 (3)	26.7 (16)	26.7 (4)
Most of the time	63.2 (60)	66.7 (30)	60.0 (30)	65.0 (13)	65.0 (39)	53.3 (8)
Sometimes	10.5 (10)	8.9 (4)	12.0 (6)	15.0 (3)	6.7 (4)	20.0 (3)
Never	2.1 (2)	.0 (0)	4.0 (2)	5.0 (1)	1.7 (1)	.0 (0)

**Students' Perceptions of Administrative Awareness and Satisfaction with****Administrative Response to Violent Incidents**

Sometimes teachers know, other times they aren't aware of how cruel their students really are to each other. (Female/15years/grade9).

Teachers don't live the lives we live and they certainly don't remember how it really used to be when they were younger. (Female/13years/grade8).

I haven't seen teachers be at a place when they are needed.  
(Male/13years/grade8).

Students were asked if the principals and teachers were aware of the amount of violence occurring at school. In total, 17.9% (n=17) of students responded "yes", 60.0% (n=57) responded "somewhat", and 22.1% (n=21) responded "no". These results, including a breakdown by sex and by grade, are presented in Table 12. Analyses by sex and by grade were nonsignificant.

Sixty students elected to provide comments regarding administrative awareness of the extent of violence at school. Eleven of the students indicated that teachers and principals were aware, nine responded that they were somewhat aware, and 35 felt that they were unaware of the extent of violence occurring at school. Five students provided general comments regarding school violence and staff response to violence.

Teachers and the principal think that they know what's going on in our school but they really don't (same as our parents). (Female/14years/grade8).

There are about a dozen fights they don't know about. The ones they do know about are not serious. They don't know about the ones involving drugs, weapons, etc. (the more serious ones). (Male/14years/grade9).

I think that teachers do know most of the incidents because sometimes violence might occur in class and if an incident of any kind takes place most students would go and talk to the office. (Female/14years/grade8).

I think many kids are too scared to admit problems to teachers or principals.  
(Female/14years/grade8).

When asked if they were satisfied with how incidents of violence are handled at school, 25.3% (n=24) responded "yes", 49.5% (n=47) responded "somewhat", and 25.3% (n=24) responded "no". These results can be found in Table 12, along with a breakdown by sex and by grade. Analyses by sex and by grade were non-significant.

Fifty-four students provided comments regarding their satisfaction with how incidents were handled. Twelve students provided comments that reflected an overall positive feeling of how incidents were handled while thirty-one students provided comments that reflected dissatisfaction with the handling of violent incidents. Eleven students provided general comments regarding violence at school and administrative involvement.

As much as I hate to say this, the school isn't monitoring the level and amount of violence and unless someone tells the office, nothing is done.  
(Male/13years/grade8).

There are some incidents about which the school staff might not know and there is nothing they could do about it but the ones they do know of are being taken care of. (Female/14years/grade8).

Yes the punishments are pretty tough and our principal came up with those rules. (Female/13years/grade8).

Mr. (name of principal) can handle anything, especially trouble-makers.  
(Male/13years/grade7).

**Table 12**

**Frequencies and Percentages for Students' Perceptions of Administrative Awareness and Satisfaction with Administrative Response to  
Violent Incidents as a Function of Sex and Grade**

		Total n=95	Male n=45	Female n=50	Grade 7 n=20	Grade 8 n=60	Grade 9 n=15
		% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)
<b>Are Principals and Teachers Aware?</b>							
Yes	17.9 (17)	17.8 (8)	18.0 (9)	15.0 (3)	21.7 (13)	6.7 (1)	
Somewhat	60.0 (57)	53.3 (24)	66.0 (33)	65.0 (13)	56.7 (34)	66.7 (10)	
No	22.1 (21)	28.9 (13)	16.0 (8)	20.0 (4)	21.7 (13)	26.7 (4)	
<b>Satisfied with Response by Principals and Teachers?</b>							
Yes	25.3 (24)	24.4 (11)	26.0 (13)	35.0 (7)	20.0 (12)	33.3 (5)	
Somewhat	49.5 (47)	44.4 (20)	54.0 (27)	25.0 (5)	60.0 (36)	40.0 (6)	
No	25.3 (24)	31.1 (14)	20.0 (10)	40.0 (8)	20.0 (12)	26.7 (4)	

### **How Should Violence at School be Handled?**

If there is a fight then I guess the principal does the right thing; he either calls the cops or suspends the people that get into fights. (Female/14years/grade8).

I would like the kids expelled, this way our school would always be safe. (Female/13years/grade8).

Students were asked to reflect upon how violent incidents occurring at school should be handled. A variety of suggestions were made including stiffer penalties, police involvement, informing parents, and the provision of counselling.

I would like to see lockers searched and students expelled and or charged. (Male/14years/grade8).

I think you should first talk to the parents, see what their comments on the child's behaviour are. If the parents don't do anything, then you should suspend them, but also give them counselling and detentions after school and at lunchtime. (Female/12years/grade7).

More penalties. I mean come on, a 3 day suspension after someone beats the #@%\$ out of you? (Male/14years/grade8).

I would like the incidents to be handled sort of differently. Like if two people fight, they penalize them both. But they really don't see the victim in the case. If I got beaten up and then suspended I'd be really upset. That's how it goes here. (Female/14years/grade9).

### **Why Do Students Participate in Violence?**

Participants were asked to indicate why they thought students participate in violence by responding "yes" or "no" to six possible explanations. The three most frequently endorsed reasons were "to get back at someone" (88.4%, n=84), "for fun" (75.8%, n=72), and because "they are part of a gang" (73.7%, n=70). In addition, 60.0% (n=57) of students agreed that "no supervision by parents" was a factor, 58.9% (n=56) of students thought that

"bored/nothing to do/nowhere to go" was a plausible reason, and 43.2% (n=41) of students believed that "ethnic/cultural conflict" was a possible explanation. These results are presented in Table 13. A breakdown of responses by sex can be found in Table 13 and a breakdown of responses by grade can be found in Table 14.

Independent t-tests (for sex) and ANOVAs (for grade) were performed for students' perceptions of why students in their school participate in violent acts. Significant differences by grade were found for the response that "they are part of a gang",  $F(2,92) = 4.842$ ,  $p \leq .01$ . The post-hoc analysis by the Tukey HSD method revealed that grade 8 students were more likely than grade 7 students to cite gang membership as an explanation for participation in violence.

**Table 13**

**Frequencies, Percentages, and t-test Results for Perceptions of Why Students Participate in Violence as a Function of Sex**

Why Students Participate in Violence	Total n=95	Males n=45	Females n=50	t-test	
	%yes (n)	%yes(n)	%yes (n)	t	p
i. Bored/Nothing to do/ Nowhere to go	58.9 (56)	57.8 (26)	60.0 (30)	-.218	n.s.
ii. No supervision by parents	60.0 (57)	53.3 (24)	66.0 (33)	-1.252	n.s.
iii. Part of a gang	73.7 (70)	71.1 (32)	76.0 (38)	-.535	n.s.
iv. Ethnic/Cultural conflict	43.2 (41)	33.3 (15)	52.0 (26)	-1.853	n.s.
v. To get back at someone	88.4 (84)	91.1 (41)	86.0 (43)	.772	n.s.
vi. For fun	75.8 (72)	80.0 (36)	72.0 (36)	.903	n.s.

**Table 14**

**Frequencies, Percentages, and ANOVA Results for Perceptions of Why Students Participate in Violence as a Function of Grade**

Why Students Participate in Violence	Total n=95	Grade 7 n=20	Grade 8 n=60	Grade 9 n=15	ANOVA	
	%yes (n)	%yes (n)	%yes (n)	%yes(n)	F	p
i. Bored/Nothing to do/ Nowhere to go	58.9 (56)	65.0 (13)	56.7 (34)	60.0 (9)	.213	n.s.
ii. No supervision by parents	60.0 (57)	75.0 (15)	56.7 (34)	53.3 (8)	1.208	n.s.
iii. Part of a gang	73.7 (70)	50.0 (10)	83.3 (50)	66.7 (10)	4.842	.010** <sup>a</sup>
iv. Ethnic/Cultural conflict	43.2 (41)	35.0 (7)	40.0 (24)	66.7 (10)	2.110	n.s.
v. To get back at someone	88.4 (84)	80.0 (16)	90.0 (54)	93.3 (14)	.931	n.s.
vi. For fun	75.8 (72)	85.0 (17)	71.7 (43)	80.0 (12)	.801	n.s.

**Note.** Total values are repeated from Table 13 to facilitate ease of comparison with Grade values.

\* Tukey HSD revealed significant differences between grade 7 and grade 8.

\*\*p≤.01.

### **Suggestions for Preventing School Violence: Students' Voices**

Students were asked to provide their thoughts and suggestions regarding how students, staff, parents, the police, and the community could help to prevent violence at school. The following sections provide a sample of student responses to each question.

#### **What Can Students Do?**

Students could be less aggressive towards each other. We should be more polite and less egocentric. We shouldn't do what we know will disturb others. There's nothing wrong with apologizing. (Female/15years/grade9).

Students' comments reflected a variety of opinions and suggestions. These included keeping teachers informed about violent incidents, students monitoring and changing their own behaviour, and taking action against violence.

They could tell/warn teachers/principals about what is happening around the school. (Female/13years/grade8).

Try not to express their anger through violence. Try to prevent getting into bad situations. (Female/13years/grade8).

Students could have dances, assemblies, posters against violence. (Female/15years/grade9).

Stay away from gangs. (Male/14years/grade9).

Don't react to threats, but rather inform the proper authorities. Don't think that revenge will occur. (Male/13years/grade8).

#### **What Can Staff Do?**

Take action more often. Nothing is too small. (Male/13years/grade7).

Students made numerous suggestions for the involvement of staff in preventing violence at school. Their comments reflected a need for staff to impose and consistently enforce more rules regarding violence, to take violent incidents more seriously, to improve/increase monitoring of students both inside and outside of the building, to provide alternatives such as after-school activities, peer mediation, and counselling, and to make the effort to talk with students more often.

Teachers and staff could care more about the violence in this school and be more involved. (Female/13years/grade8).

They could have more curriculum about violence. (Female/14years/grade8).

Offer guidance to those who are in trouble. Guidance counsellors do not encourage people to discuss problems. (Male/13years/grade8).

Be more cautious of what's going on cause sometimes it's right under their nose. (Female/14years/grade8).

Patrol more places of the school. (Male/14years/grade8).

### **What Can Parents Do?**

Some parents let their children do whatever they want. The parents don't care about smoking or school. The students have more freedom to do bad things. (Female/14years/grade8).

Parents should ask their kids how school is and how their friends are. There should be a conversation between parent and child. (Female/14years/grade8).

Suggestions for parents included the need for parents to pay attention to their children, supervise them, and spend time with them regularly. Students also recommended that parents be stricter, keep in contact with the school, and ground their children. Some

students felt that their parents could not do anything to help prevent school violence. The most common response related to the need for parents to teach their children about appropriate behaviour, tolerance, and responsibility from early on in their lives.

The parents should teach kids from a young age to accept everyone the way they are. (Female/14years/grade8).

Realize that we no longer face the same problems that they did. (Male/13years/grade8).

Talk to their teens about making the right decisions. (Male/14years/grade8).

Pay more attention to children, spend more time with them (go to parks, theatres, etc.). (Male/13years/grade7).

Go to the meetings at schools more often and give comments. (Male/12years/grade7).

Look out for their children, stay more in tuned with their school work, and curfew, and know where they are at all times (Female/14years/grade9).

### **What Can Police Do?**

Build a more friendly reputation for themselves. All teens think that cops are jerks. (Male/14years/grade8).

The police could do everything, for example we could have a policeman looking over our school. (Female/14years/grade8).

Students were asked for suggestions regarding police involvement in preventing school violence. Comments included appeals for tougher punishments such as arrests, fines, and jail time, suggestions that police officers be more visible at school, and the idea that students be educated about the effects of violence and the punishments involved.

Police should give assemblies so that ones who commit violence know what to expect and students/victims know what to do. (Females/14years/grade8).

Come to the school and educate the kids. (Male/13years/grade7).  
Charge students. (Male/14years/grade8).

Maybe patrol the 7-11 and places where gangs hang out.  
(Female/14years/grade8).

The police too could talk to students and tell everyone what happens to  
(Female/14years/grade8).

Should be on patrol during lunch and after school. Drive around the schools  
with lots of violence. (Male/14years/grade9).

### **What Can the Community Do?**

The community could involve students in activities so they would not be  
bored and would not use violence as a resource of 'busy work'.  
(Female/13years/grade8).

Create opportunities for youth, get them to spend time being productive,  
instead of being a threat to society. (Male/15years/grade9).

Students were asked to comment on how the community (eg. businesses, recreation services) could help to prevent school violence. Students suggested that the community create more places for youth to hang out, provide jobs for students, reduce media violence, and provide education regarding violence. Students also called for the community to become more involved in keeping watch and supervising youth.

The community could encourage kids to take part in sports or jobs.  
(Female/14years/grade8).

Watch out for violence and call the police fast. (Male/14years/grade9).

The community should make some places for teens so they won't be just outside or in the park just hanging around. (Female/14years/grade8).

They should stop with the violence and alcohol on t.v.  
(Female/13years/grade8).

Have centres for students with such problems. A place where they could turn.  
(Female/15years/grade9).

Open more hangouts that are supervised and safe. (Male/14years/grade9).

### **Students' Voices: General Comments Regarding Violence**

We can't stop violence but we can reduce it. It has been with us for thousands of years. People are different. The ones that are too proud will get in trouble. If someone doesn't have enough self-control to walk away he/she is usually the one to get into trouble. The non-violent people stay out of trouble. With age, violent people become wiser and non-violent. (Female/15years/grade9).

Students were given the opportunity to provide any additional comments (e.g., regarding youth violence in general, violence in their school, safety, how to prevent or deal with violence in their school, etc.). Fifty students elected to provide additional comments. Various types of responses were provided including more information about experiences of violence at school, requests for parents, teachers, and the police to become more involved, and general comments regarding the status of violence in our society. A sample of these comments is provided in Appendix A.

## CHAPTER 4

### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate students' experiences and perceptions of school violence within a particular junior high school. In particular, this research endeavored to introduce findings regarding students' experience of, participation in, and willingness to participate in school violence, their perceptions about the extent of violence and the level of safety in their school, their opinions about the administration's awareness of and response to the problem, their explanations for student involvement in school violence, and their suggestions for improvement and prevention. Attempts were made to identify trends and differences in experiences and perceptions based on both sex and grade. In addition, this investigation endeavored to provide students with an opportunity to express their feelings about youth violence and school violence; Thus collecting and presenting student "voices" was another objective of this study.

#### Frequency of Violent Incidents

As was expected, students in the present study reported experiencing and participating in a variety of violent incidents at school in the past year. Although the total amount of violence experienced was quite low for most students, the majority of students reported having experienced at least one type of violent incident this year. In addition, almost half of the students surveyed admitted to having participated in or being willing to participate in at least one type of violent behaviour.

### **Effects of Grade**

The expectation that grade 7, 8, and 9 students would report differences in their experiences of, participation in, and willingness to participate in violent incidents at school was not substantiated by this investigation. Instead, findings revealed that grade 7 students were just as likely to experience major forms of violence as were grade 9 students, and their reported levels of participation in school violence were similar to those of students in the higher grades.

Surprisingly, differences between the grades *were* revealed regarding perceptions of violence. Students in grade 7 reported fearing students from their own school more than they feared youth from other schools. Students in grades 8 and 9 reported the opposite; indicating that they were more afraid of youth from other schools than they were of students in their own school. Most strikingly, students in grade 7 perceived there to be a greater problem with the extent of violence in their school than did the older students.

It is very interesting that the grade 7 students report similar rates of victimization, similar rates of involvement, and similar perceptions of safety while at school, but overall, they perceive the situation to be more problematic. Perhaps the students in grade 7 find it more difficult to accept the occurrence of violence at school. The findings of this study indicate that although older students may report the same rates of victimization and involvement as younger students, they seem to be less concerned, or more accepting of the violence that is occurring. These findings support Ryan et al.'s (1993) suggestions that as students grow older and spend more time within a school, they become more accepting of the violence at school and begin to perceive the violence as a somewhat "normal" part of their

school experience.

Of particular interest in this study is the large number of grade 8 students who were interested in participating as compared to students in grades 7 and 9. While it is possible that the teachers in grade 8 were simply more diligent in collecting consent forms, it is also possible that grade 8 students were more motivated to speak out because of their position in the school. Unlike the grade 7 students, the grade 8 students have been in the school long enough to have a good understanding of the extent of the violence that is occurring. However, unlike the grade 9 students who are leaving the school, the grade 8 students still have a vested interest in seeing the problem of school violence confronted.

It is also possible that somewhat akin to being the "middle child" in a family, the grade 8 students may feel that less attention is paid to their feelings and concerns about school issues. It is possible that the grade 8 students perceive the grade 7 students as being somewhat coddled and the grade 9 students as being given extra privileges in the school. Speaking out in a survey may be a way for the grade 8 students to capture some attention and make their experiences known. It would be interesting for future research to include some questions which gauge the students' interests in completing the questionnaire (e.g., Asking "why did you choose to complete this questionnaire?").

### **Effects of Sex**

Similar to the limited differences in the experiences and perceptions of grade 7, 8, and 9 students, this study found little difference between male and female students in their experiences of, participation in, and willingness to participate in school violence. Hence, the

expectation that male and female students would report different experiences of school violence was not supported. Contrary to findings by Artz and Riecken (1997) - that one's experiences with violence at school are highly influenced by one's sex - the analyses performed in this study revealed that experiences and perceptions of violence in junior high school are not highly dependent upon a student's sex. In fact, this study substantiated previous findings by Ryan et al. (1993) that female students are experiencing school violence to the same extent as their male counterparts. It also lends support to the need for further consideration and investigation of female students' experiences of and participation in violence.

Although it may appear striking that female students' experiences of and participation in violent incidents at school mirror those of their male counterparts, we must acknowledge the plausibility that our society has long been uninformed about the extent of violence female students encounter while they are at school. Although we have accepted the likelihood that females are the victims of a higher incidence of sexual forms of violence and have acknowledged findings that female students regularly demonstrate involvement in indirect forms of violence (eg. verbal assaults), we have been largely unaware of the possibility that female students may experience and participate in many forms of school violence to the same degree as their male counterparts. Perhaps female students have been rendered invisible by the attention being paid to the violence that is committed by male students. Perhaps female students are more discrete in their assaults, thereby escaping notice by teachers and principals. Regardless of the explanation, however, the findings of this study call for increased attention to be paid to female students as both victims *and perpetrators* of incidents of school violence.

**Victimization and the Likelihood of Participation or Willingness to Participate in  
Violence**

A unique contribution of this study is the investigation of the correlations between violence experienced and both violence participated in and willingness to participate in violence. These investigations revealed several significant correlations that suggest that students who experience violence in school are also more likely to participate in or be willing to participate in violent incidents.

It is possible that the increased likelihood of participating in the same type of violent incident one has experienced can be explained by mere circumstance. That is, students engaging in a physical fight are likely to be *both experiencing and delivering* physical blows. Possibly, students who are experiencing a physical assault also perceive themselves to be participating in the assault if they hit back during the encounter. This interpretation would suggest that even for innocent victims (i.e., those who have not provoked/initiated an assault), violence is experienced as interactional and reciprocal. According to this explanation, a victim's failure to "walk away" - which may be virtually impossible to do when one is attacked - and subsequent attempt to defend himself/herself, renders him/her a "participant" in the violent incident. (Indeed, school authorities may also view the victim who defends himself/herself as a participant.) Future research should endeavor to understand students' interpretation of "participation in violence" and the circumstances under which they perceive themselves to be participants in violence.

Another plausible and more concerning explanation for the correlation between violence experienced and violence participated in or willingness to participate in violence is

that the more a student is victimized at school, the more he/she develops a willingness or interest in retaliating (either against the perpetrator or against an innocent student). Although the findings in this study are not conclusive, and they certainly cannot be interpreted as causal, they raise an interesting area for further exploration. If it is true that students who are repeatedly victimized become increasingly interested in seeking some form of revenge, then it is imperative that we begin to pay more attention to all victims, even those who have experienced the incidents of violence we would consider to be minor. As was demonstrated by the devastating school shootings in Littleton, Colorado, we cannot underestimate the impact of a student's feeling of victimization, alienation, and isolation at school. Media reports have suggested that although Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, the two perpetrators in the Colorado shootings, did not necessarily experience victimization that was physical in nature, they continuously felt victimized by particular groups of students in their school. While this in no way excuses the gravity of their actions, it does underscore the need for attention to be paid to victims of all forms of school violence.

### **Additional Issues of School Violence**

#### **Students' Perceptions of Their Safety While at School**

A disconcerting finding of this study is the extent to which students feel unsafe at school. It is disturbing that 57.9% (n=55) of students feel that there is either "a moderate amount" or "a lot" of violence at school and that only 24.2% of students feel safe "all of the time". Given that more than 75% (n=72) of students feel unsafe at school at least once in a while, efforts must be made to address the issues and conditions which are influencing

students' perceptions of their (limited) safety from violence at school.

However, it is somewhat perplexing that only 24.2% of students reported feeling safe at school all of the time considering larger percentages of students both reported that there is very little or no violence in their school (42.2%) and indicated that they had not personally experienced any violence at school during the preceding school year (33.7%). Clearly, students' perceptions of their safety at school are not entirely attributable to their experiences of violence at school. But why is this the case? Why are students feeling so unsafe when they report relatively low experiences of violence (e.g., recall that the mean TV-E score was less than one type of experience)?

### **Re-conceptualizing Issues of School Violence**

#### **The Significance of Perception: Students' Appraisals, Interpretations, and Meaning-Making of Violence**

Like many other investigators of youth violence, I originally set out to discover how much violence was occurring and to explore the nature of this violence according to the common variables of sex and grade. Although I was very interested in students' perceptions and comments about the violence that was occurring, I did not have the foresight to focus my research on the potential psychological and emotional effects of the violence. However, while analyzing students' responses and comments regarding both their experiences and perceptions of violence, my attention and interest were pulled towards several issues which seemed less related to the frequency, extent, and nature of the violence, and related more to the effects that this violence has had on the students' perceptions. These issues merit discussion as they may

provide a foundation for future investigations and conceptualizations of school violence.

In this study, students of both sexes and all three grades reported similar experiences with both the nature and frequency of violence. These similarities, along with the findings of the discrepancy between the rates of violence experienced and the reported fear of violence, suggest that the psychological impact the violence has had on the students may be just as important as the type and frequency of the violence. Specifically, since junior high students' fear of potential violence at school cannot be explained entirely by their direct (personal) or indirect (witnessed or heard about) experiences of violence at school, and since the students' perceptions of both the extent of violence in their school and their risk for victimization are worse than their reported levels of actual victimization at school, one can suggest that the students' appraisals, interpretations, and internalizations are somehow assuming a "larger life" than their actual experiences of violence. Therefore, perhaps it is time for researchers to resist engaging in the debate about the rates and frequency of violence, and to spend more time focusing on its effects. Perhaps it is not only important whether there are 15 incidents or 25 incidents of violence in a school within a given year, or whether students' exposure to school violence is direct, indirect, or virtually nonexistent. Perhaps it is equally important that considerable numbers of students both perceive that violence is a problem in their school and are concerned about their safety. In trying to understand the students' perceptions of violence, consideration must be given not only to the rates and impact of violence at school (whether it is direct or indirect, actual or threatened), but also to the influences on students' perceptions and the ways in which the students cognitively and emotionally appraise, interpret, and attach meaning to the issue of violence in their school.

**Stressors, Skills, and Supports: Developing A Framework for Understanding, Investigating, and Intervening in Students' Appraisals and Interpretations of School Violence**

In exploring the issue of adolescents' participation in violence, various researchers have made either explicit or implicit references to the principles of various theories that consider the interaction between individuals and the environment. For example, principles from theories such as ecological theory, adolescent identity theory, and appraisal theory have surfaced either implicitly or explicitly in the discourse of researchers such as Garbarino (1999), who situates his accounts of male youth violence within an ecological framework, Elkind (1998), who refers to the challenges of adolescence in his discussion of youth violence, and Guest (1997), who alludes to principles of appraisal theory in his descriptions of adolescents who are unable to cope with increasingly violent incidents of bullying. Similar to adolescents' *participation* in violence, it is plausible that adolescents' *perceptions* of violence are influenced by numerous individual and environmental factors. However, previous research has neither explicitly integrated such theories, nor comprehensively applied their principles to adolescents' perceptions of violence.

The explicit integration of ecological theory, identity theory, and appraisal theory may present a new way of conceptualizing, understanding, investigating, and intervening in the development of adolescents' perceptions about youth violence in general and school violence specifically. Such an approach would emphasize considerations of the violence-related stressors imposed by adolescents' environments, the skills they possess for dealing with these stressors, and the supports they regularly have available when confronted with

such stressors. Thus, a framework of stressors, skills, and supports is proposed for future approaches to understanding and investigating the factors that may influence how adolescents form their perceptions about violence in general, and school violence specifically.

### **Stressors**

The concept of "stressors" refers to the challenges that are imposed by the adolescents' social context. These challenges are external in origin and may be imposed by the family, peers, school, community, or society.

In general, adolescents face numerous challenges in today's society. Firstly, our society delivers mixed messages regarding what is expected of adolescents. At times adolescents are expected to think, behave, and make decisions like adults whereas at other times, they are reminded that they are not grown up and that their thoughts and opinions are less valuable than those of adults. Gibson-Cline, Dikaiou, Haritos-Fatouras, Shafrir, and Ondis (1996) point out that it is unfortunate that adolescents are often denied the opportunities to "participate actively in their own development" (p.5) because although adolescence may be a time of particular vulnerability to stress, adolescents are still capable of making decisions and being productive.

However, at the same time that they are perceived as young, adolescents are inundated with messages that they need to be more mature and act more responsibly. For example, Elkind (1998) explains that a variety of social changes have "transformed the context in which young people are growing up" (p.14) and led to a phenomenon of "adolescent sophistication". He explains how changes in our economic landscape, the

media's and merchandisers' perception of adolescents as a "niche market", and the emergence of a youth culture are just a few examples of contextual factors that have influenced today's adolescents - when compared with previous generations - being prematurely thrust into the expectations of adulthood. Garbarino (1999) concurs, expressing that children in our society are being "exposed too soon to too much" (p. 177). He has highlighted the importance of considering the social context in attempts to understand youth violence. For example, Garbarino proposes the concept of "social toxicity", referring to the social and cultural poisons that are contaminating the social world of adolescents and their families. The violence that youth witness on television can be identified as one such social toxin (Elkind, 1998; Garbarino, 1999).

In truth, adolescents face numerous types of stressors with respect to youth and school violence which can be likened to Garbarino's (1999) concept of social toxins: They experience, witness, and hear about violent incidents at school, they may be pressured by peers to become involved in violent behaviour, they are inundated with television, film, and music images of violence which may desensitize them to violence and convey the notion that violence is rampant and imminent, and media news sources present numerous sensational cases of violence which both give the perception that violence rates are high and can mislead Canadians into believing that Canadian rates of violence are comparable to American rates. Given such realities, how can we expect adolescents not to conclude that violence is imminent and that they are at risk? In our society, it can be challenging for anyone to avoid believing everything they hear in general (e.g., consider recent Y2K hysteria) and specifically, to be confident that they are not continually at risk of experiencing violence.

Applying the "stressor" concept to intervention in school violence definitely involves monitoring the violence that actually does occur and making attempts to reduce the extent of that violence. However, it also involves becoming more conscious about the messages we are sending young people regarding violence and ensuring that we regularly provide them with accurate information about youth violence, school violence, and their safety. As one example, school responses to media accounts of school shootings should not only involve debriefing with students about their feelings, but also analyzing and critiquing the accuracy and relevance of the coverage and discussing the prevention of such incidents in the students' own school. It must be kept in mind that crime, including youth violence and school violence, "is not only enormously pervasive on television, but it is pervasive in the absence of virtually any other source of information about crime" (Haney & Manzolati, 1988; p.121).

## **Skills**

The "skills" component of the proposed framework refers to the internal resources adolescents have available for coping with the stressors they face. In his discussion of male violence, Garbarino (1999) asserts that a boy's violence is "an adaptation not only to the conditions of life around him but also to what's inside his head" (pp. 118-119). Similarly, students' perceptions of violence may be associated not only with the extent of violence around them but also with the cognitive and emotional skills they possess for coping. The concept of "skills" is specifically linked to considerations of identity theory and appraisal theory.

Erikson (1968) described adolescence as "almost a way of life between childhood and adulthood" (p. 128). He explained that during adolescence, individuals are faced with numerous challenges implicit to the task of identity formation. Adolescents are particularly concerned with gaining approval from others and may struggle with their competing interests of appeasing their peers and of upholding the views they have formed over the course of their upbringing. In addition, adolescents struggle with the challenge of developing skills for work and for future meaningful contribution to society. Understandably, adolescents may become overwhelmed in their simultaneous attempts to gain peer approval, defend their own opinions or beliefs, withstand peer pressure to conform, please and impress adults, and make mature and well-informed choices.

Lazarus (1990) explains that appraisal of stressful situations involves two steps, primary appraisal, which involves judging if the situation is a threat to our well-being, and secondary appraisal, which is comprised of our determining if we have the resources to cope with the threat. Lazarus' theory of primary and secondary appraisal can be integrated with identity theory to explain how junior high students form their discouraged perceptions about school violence. That is, the adolescents may first determine that they face numerous violence-related stressors (primary appraisal) and may then conclude that they possess few skills for coping with or eliminating these stressors (secondary appraisal). Identity theory is involved in that the younger the adolescents are, the fewer skills they may indeed possess not only for coping with violence-related stressors, but also for making informed inferences about the actual extent of these stressors. For example, it is undisputable that adolescents' (as well as many adults') references about many issues in society are media-created, peer-

created, and often based on misinformation. The skills that are related to the development of identity may impact significantly on the adolescents' abilities to avoid becoming overwhelmed and unable to cope.

Indeed, a troubling finding of this study was that so many students indicated an overwhelming feeling of powerlessness in their responses and comments about school violence. Many of the students felt that there was nothing either they, their parents, or their school could do about the extent of violence occurring and resigned themselves to a belief that violence is simply a part of everyday life in our society.

Clearly, adults need to become more involved in helping adolescents to develop their skills in many areas, including those related to coping with issues of violence. On the one hand, adolescents need to be explicitly taught how to cope with the pressures of actual violence. This particularly involves empowering them and encouraging them to enlist help when needed and to report their concerns about violence to parents, teachers, and police. On the other hand, adolescents also need to be specifically taught to look at reports of violence critically and to avoid developing exaggerated fears of violence. Clearly, developing adolescents' skills in coping with violence requires taking the time to both find out how the adolescents are doing and to assess their individual needs. However, as Elkind (1998) has pointed out, a significant step in "helping young people develop a healthy sense of self and identity is to be adults to our children" (p.242). It is our responsibility to teach, guide, and socialize the adolescents in our lives.

## Supports

The "supports" construct of the proposed framework refers to the external resources adolescents believe they have available to them in dealing with the stressors that challenge them. Specifically, the concept of "supports" refers to the adolescents' abilities to communicate and share information regarding their experiences with the adults in their lives and to have confidence in the adults' abilities to protect them. Of primary relevance to a discussion of supports is the acknowledgment of the impact of the communication barrier/gap that exists between adolescents and adults (Adams & Gullotta, 1983; Bibby & Posterski, 1985; Garbarino, 1999; Guest, 1997; Phelan, Davidson, & Yu; 1998).

Adams and Gullotta (1983) explain that conflicting communication arises between adolescents and adults because of a natural dichotomy in the outlook of the two generations. They suggest that adolescents "dream of utopian ideals" (p.31) whereas "their parents have become pragmatists through experience and the usual conservatism that comes with age" (p. 31). As a result of their discrepant perspectives on life, the two generations are unable to communicate. While "youths cry for change, their parents call for patience and contend that time will change the youths' perspective (Adams & Gullotta, 1983; p. 31).

Bibby and Posterski (1985) speak of the suppression of "emergence" in their accounts of the relationship between adolescents and adults. Emergence, a process of "continuous becoming" (Bibby & Posterski, 1985; p.10) and of making the transition from one developmental stage to another, is suppressed by adults' failure to allow adolescents to grow up (Bibby & Posterski, 1985). Rather than inviting discussions about adolescents' interests, concerns, and challenges, and both encouraging and facilitating the process of emergence,

adults choose to impose restrictions and rules which were characteristic of the adolescent's childhood (Bibby & Posterski, 1985). However, Bibby and Posterski also caution that we should avoid falling into a trap of believing that teenagers want complete freedom from their parents. Rather, we should recognize that most teenagers want the support and involvement of adults while they learn to make choices, exert their independence, and assume responsibility for themselves.

Garbarino (1999) alludes to concerns about the communication barrier between adolescents and adults in his discussion about teenage males who have killed others. He expresses that

sometimes it seems that few people really care about hurt little boys who have grown up to be violent teenagers, except as potential threats to the community. It is as if we want to forget how they got to be kids who kill in the first place. We are willing to incarcerate them but not to understand them. Perhaps we feel that understanding them is unnecessary because punishment is the only issue, or perhaps we feel that an attempt to understand them is dangerous because it might excuse their actions...In our anger and fear, many of us seem ready to impose the ultimate penalty against children. (pp.20-21).

Although he is referring specifically to males who kill, Garbarino's (1999) thoughts can be extended to suggest that adults should be taking the time to understand and learn about the life experiences of all youth. This is particularly important because what adults perceive to be adolescents' most serious challenges may not be what the adolescents are actually experiencing.

Indeed, the students who participated in this study demonstrated an overwhelming need to be heard. The multitude of comments provided by the participants indicates not only that students have a great deal to tell us about their experiences with violence, but that they

are longing for opportunities to share this information. However, many of the students also provided comments that indicated that they feel alienated from and misunderstood by adults, that the adults in their lives do not know what is going on with respect to school violence, and that even when the adults do know what is happening, they are not handling the problems appropriately.

Garbarino (1999) cautions that children in our society are learning that adults cannot protect them. Elkind (1998) concurs, suggesting that

a number of recent changes in our society have undermined the authority of both parents and teachers, the two categories of adults with whom teenagers interact the most. When these adults lose their authority - their claim to superior knowledge, values, and skills - teenagers lose an all-important marker of their place in the social order. (p.129).

It is concerning that issues related to their experiences of violence at school (e.g., their dissatisfaction with how violent incidents are handled, their belief that teachers are unaware of the extent of the violence) may be perceived and internalized by students as a reinforcement of the communication gap between themselves and the adults who are involved in their lives. As students increasingly feel unsafe, they may become further convinced that adults really do not have an understanding of the challenges they face. It is also unsettling to consider that adolescents might lose faith in the ability of adults to protect them from violence. This may inevitably result in the adults losing credibility in the eyes of these adolescents.

Certainly, when students feel that the administration is unaware of the extent of school violence, their respect for and confidence in that administration's abilities diminish. Furthermore, adolescents who feel hopeless about the extent of violence in our society may

become more and more dispirited about their future. They may also be learning discouraging lessons about their own abilities - or perhaps lack thereof - to effect change within their environment. However, adolescents need to feel that they do have some control over their environment and that steps can be taken to confront the problem of violence.

### **Students Call for Action and Attention**

An important finding of this study related to the students' eagerness to make use of external supports in their suggestions for reducing the amount of violence in their environment. Many students appealed for more severe consequences to be put into place in response to violent incidents at school and suggested that parents, teachers, principals, and police need to become more aware of and involved in students' whereabouts, actions, and experiences. Evidently, these students both welcome and espouse the need for adult involvement in their lives and they want to see their classmates punished when they engage in violent behaviour.

However, despite their need for more involvement on the part of adults, numerous factors may prevent students from approaching adults with information about school violence. As Guest (1997) has pointed out, adolescents

may be angry, ashamed, and afraid. And, specifically they may be afraid of retaliation from the offenders, they may be afraid of getting friends into trouble, or of being thought of as a rat by their classmates. They may also be afraid that they won't be believed or that parents, school authorities or police won't take them seriously and won't act on the problem. (p. 22).

With respect to schools specifically, adolescents may feel unable to approach teachers and principals about violence. Bronfenbrenner (1972) expressed that "schools have become

one of the most potent breeding grounds of alienation in American society" (p.672).

Therefore, the more adolescents perceive schools and school staff to be unfriendly, the less likely they are to approach the staff with information about school violence and to have confidence in the likelihood that the staff will protect them.

### **Bridging the Communication Gap Between Adolescents and Adults**

If adolescents are experiencing difficulty approaching adults about violence, it is incumbent upon the adults to make all possible efforts to enlist this information from the adolescents. Firstly, parents need to initiate conversations about violence and schools need to incorporate discussions about violence directly into their curricula. Tolerance, violence prevention, decision-making, coping, and reporting of incidents should be among the various topics covered in both home and school discussions about violence.

Secondly, schools should engage in a regular process of surveying students for information about school violence. If students are having difficulty reporting these incidents, schools need to provide them with safe ways of conveying this information. Although we should also be aiming to improve students' confidence and skills in enlisting help, perhaps we should not be placing all of the burden of reporting on the students.

In addition, by showing regular interest in the topic of school violence, we may succeed at improving adolescents' confidence in our awareness of the occurrence of school violence. Ultimately, this may result in their becoming increasingly willing to discuss the issue of violence with us.

Finally, since it is clear that violence does occur in schools, schools cannot assume

that just because their hallways are quiet, violence is not occurring. Rather, schools should assume that violence, in some form, is taking place and should make every effort to uncover the extent and impact of this violence. Guest (1997) reminds us that " if we don't see visible signs of damage, like property destroyed or someone injured, that doesn't mean there's not a problem" (p.50).

### **Clarifying the Message of the Stressors, Skills, and Supports Framework**

Having explained the stressors, skills, and supports framework, it is important for me to emphasize that my intention has been neither to present adolescents as incapable and unintelligent nor to undermine the many skills they do possess. In fact, adolescents should be regarded as intelligent individuals who are increasingly capable of decision-making, problem-solving, and of discriminating many aspects of fact from fiction. Rather, the purpose of developing the stressors, skills, and supports framework has been to encourage adults to be aware of the many factors which, in combination, may be rather overwhelming for adolescents and may ultimately be impacting negatively on how they form their perceptions about school violence. These are issues that we adults need to consider as we shape adolescents' skills, families, classrooms, environments, and society. We need to recognize that families, schools, community, and society are largely responsible for both the stressors adolescents face and the development of the adolescents' skills in coping with these stressors. A comment provided by one student conveys this point:

Sometimes I think that adults overreact over unimportant things and sometimes don't do anything when it actually is serious. I don't think there's been any problems with youth violence but it's mostly adults who actually commit acts of violence (at least that's what I've been hearing on the news). It's important that parents are good role models for us. (female/14years/grade 8).

Clearly, it is incumbent upon us to lessen the violence-related stressors adolescents face, to develop and increase the adolescents' skills in coping with violence and enlisting supports, and to narrow the communication gap between ourselves and the adolescents who depend on us.

### Limitations

Having highlighted the contributions of this study, it is also important to give consideration to the limitations involved. Firstly, the fact that this study was conducted with a limited sample ( $n=95$ ) in only one school obviously limits its generalizability to all junior high school populations.

A second limitation of this study is the low number of participants in both grade 7 and grade 9, particularly as compared to the substantial number of grade 8 participants. This inconsistency in the composition of the sample significantly limits the generalizability of the findings and prevents the investigation of any grade by sex interactions. In addition, the small sample size and limited number of participants of each sex and of all three grades may have affected the power of some of the analyses, and might have decreased the likelihood of these analyses reaching statistical significance. A larger sample (and hence larger numbers of students of both sexes and all three grades) might have increased the likelihood that some

of the sex or grade comparisons would have reached significance. Therefore, the findings of this study, particularly with respect to the similarities between the sexes and the grades, should be interpreted with caution. In addition, this paper's discussion about the implications of the similarity in findings between the two sexes and the three grades might be limited to the findings of this study. Clearly, further research with larger numbers of participants of both sexes and of all three grades is warranted.

A final note of caution relates to the proposed Total Violence Scores. Although these scores are interesting to explore, they currently are not highly interpretive. For example, a Total Violence Experienced score of "3" could be obtained for experience with either three very minor incidents or three very major incidents. Clearly, the interpretation of the score should differ depending on the severity of incidents involved. Future research should focus on developing a total violence scoring system which reflects the severity of the incidents along with their frequency.

### Conclusions

Despite the limitations of this study, it is clear that violence does occur in junior high school and that considerable numbers of students have experienced, participated in, or would be willing to participate in various incidents of school violence. Furthermore, students are concerned about the extent of this violence and about their safety at school.

The findings of this study also suggest that students' psychological and emotional interpretations of school violence may be as important than their actual experiences of it. This suggests that we should be expending less energy and resources on determining the

frequency and rates of violent incidents and more on evaluating how students interpret, attribute meaning to, and internalize these experiences and how their psychological and emotional interpretations can subsequently influence the impact of these incidents. Overall, this study points to the need for increased attention to the multifaceted issue of school violence and to the need to investigate the extent of and effects of the violence occurring in all junior high schools.

Clearly, schools must pay greater attention to the extent and effects of school violence and must endeavor to develop both preventative strategies and intervention techniques for confronting the problem of school violence. As Artz (1998a) has pointed out, "schools are sites for everyday violence" (p. 189). Much violence

takes place in school corridors, school yards, on the way to and from school, in front of the corner stores, and in the shopping malls closest to the schools. While schools and school districts don't cause violence, they do provide the ground for the social networks that support it: They draw together all the young people of a certain age in a given area and demand that they operate within a certain set of rules, in a certain building, under the guidance and supervision of a relatively small number of adults. (Artz, 1998a; p.189).

However, it would be unfair to burden schools with all of the blame and responsibility for the violence that is occurring within them and it is clear that schools should not be expected to confront the problem alone. As indicated by the students who responded in this study, it is incumbent upon all members of our society to become involved in this process.

As Bronfenbrenner (1972) has pointed out, the power of any adults

to function as constructive forces in the lives of children depends in substantial measure on the degree to which the surrounding community provides the place, time, example, and encouragement for persons to engage in activities with the young. (p.673).

Clearly, parents, police officers, community members, and the students themselves must become more involved in combating the problem of school violence specifically, and youth violence in general. Students need to be encouraged to report incidents of violence more regularly, parents need to improve their supervision of their children, police need to enhance their involvement in schools and communities, communities need to provide students with meaningful activities and safe places to spend their time, and the government needs to provide more funding to focus on the issue of school violence.

In addition, all adults need to become involved in decreasing the stressors related to violence, increasing the adolescents' skills in preventing, reporting, and dealing with violence, and augmenting the supports adolescents have specifically with respect to coping with school violence. Without a collective effort to confront the problem, school violence specifically, and youth violence more generally, can indeed be regarded as a reflection of the larger society.

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## Appendix A

### Students' General Comments

The following is a sample of the students' comments. Included are thoughts regarding youth violence in general, violence in their school, perceptions of safety, and how to prevent or deal with violence in schools.

Too many guys harass the girls. Most people will almost do anything to be popular here, and they do stuff they may regret. We all need to deal with our own problems, and we have to ignore what other people say. Doing something to other people for kicks or for popularity is not right. Being friends with everyone not fighting with everyone is the one true way to being popular. (Female/13years/grade8).

I feel that the most important issue that must be dealt with is payback. Nowadays, battles do not end, but rather escalate to the point where a 1 on 1 fist fight can lead to a battle between gangs with weapons. Although I can not offer a solution, if teachers could enforce that payback will be dealt with, students would definitely feel safer at and out of school. (Male/13years/grade8).

I think the main cause for violence in this school is personal differences. Those who are considered to be physically smaller, weaker, or unattractive are picked on often. In this school we don't experience the classical bully. (Male/13years/grade8).

I think that our community is doing a pretty good job of keeping violence under control. All they need to do is have some respect for teens and their beliefs. They should also give teens some freedom. (Male/14yeaers/grade8).

At first there has to be communication with parents. In school, someone (Mr. (name of principal)) should talk every week with a group of people who tell him what is going on around the school, outside, and also problems in their families. That's the most important thing: communication. Teachers should be more concerned about what's happening with a kid, ask him if he wants to talk with a counsellor. Once, something happened to me and I had to go to the office and tell exactly what happened and the teacher that I had didn't let me go to the office. He said that I should do it on my own time. (Female/14years/grade8).

Violence is everywhere. Everyone knows something but most people never say anything. They know more than you know, more than you think. We have access to the word on the street. You don't. If people knew they would get caught and get in trouble, then they wouldn't do the things that they do. They don't think that they'll get caught, and usually they don't. (Male/13years/grade7).

I'm pretty sure that my school is really violent free, and I don't really fear other students because they are just playing. They are not actually going to harm you (I hope). They can be prevented by not losing their temper, trusting people, understanding them. I know it's not easy but works. (Female/14years/grade9).

Violence is growing everyday. We need police officers to talk to students about these things. We need teachers, principals and parents to watch for these acts. (Male/14years/grade9).

**Appendix B: Questionnaire**

**Student Perceptions and Experiences of Violence Questionnaire**

The following questions will ask you about what you believe or have experienced with regards to school violence and violence outside of school. Your experiences and opinions are very important and any suggestions you make will be shared with the staff in this school.

Please answer the following questions and feel free to say as much as you like. **All of your comments will remain confidential.** Please **do not** put your name on this questionnaire.

**1.** Age? \_\_\_\_\_

**2.** Grade? \_\_\_\_\_

**3.** Are you: (please check your answer)

Male \_\_\_\_\_

Female \_\_\_\_\_

4. **Between September and June of this school year (eg. September 1998 to June 1999), have any of these incidents happened to you or someone you know while at school (during school hours)? In the last column, please think of the most serious incident for each question and check-off whether the incidents were carried out by a gang or group of 2 or more.**

	<i>To You</i>	<i>To Someone You Know</i>	<i>By Gang/Group of 2 or More</i>
1. Lunch Money Taken from You:	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
2. Other Items Taken from You By Force (Eg. clothing, books)	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
3. Verbally Harassed/Picked on/ Bullied/Intimidated:	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
4. Threatened to be Beaten-up:	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
5. Beaten-up (Kicked/Punched):	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
6. Threatened with a Weapon:	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
7. Hurt with a Weapon:	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
8. Sexually Harassed:	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
9. Sexually Assaulted:	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
10. Other (Please specify what):	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

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Please Comment/Explain:

- 5.** Between September and June of this school year (eg. September 1998 to June 1999), have you or someone you know *participated* in any of the following activities while at school (during school hours)? In the last column, please think of the most serious time you or someone you know participated in each type of incident and check-off if you were part of a gang/group of 2 or more people when you participated in the incidents.

		<i>Yourself</i>	<i>Someone You Know</i>	<i>By Gang/Group of 2 or More</i>
1.	Taken Lunch Money from Someone:	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
2.	Taken Other Items from Someone By Force (Eg. clothing, books)	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
3.	Verbally Harassed/Picked on/ Bullied/Intimidated Someone:	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
4.	Threatened to be Beat Someone up:	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
5.	Beaten Someone up (Kicked/Punched):	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
6.	Threatened Someone with a Weapon:	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
7.	Hurt Someone with a Weapon:	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
8.	Sexually Harassed Someone:	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
9.	Sexually Assaulted Someone:	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
10.	Other (Please specify what):	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

---

Please Comment/Explain:

6. Would you or someone you know participate in any of the following activities if you knew you could get away with it and would not be caught?

	<i>Yourself</i>	<i>Someone You Know</i>
1. Take Lunch Money from Someone:	Yes ____ No ____	Yes ____ No ____
2. Take Other Items from Someone By Force (Eg. clothing, books)	Yes ____ No ____	Yes ____ No ____
3. Verbally Harass/Pick on/ Bully/Intimidate Someone:	Yes ____ No ____	Yes ____ No ____
4. Threaten to be Beat Someone up:	Yes ____ No ____	Yes ____ No ____
5. Beat Someone up (Kick/Punch):	Yes ____ No ____	Yes ____ No ____
6. Threaten Someone with a Weapon:	Yes ____ No ____	Yes ____ No ____
7. Hurt Someone with a Weapon:	Yes ____ No ____	Yes ____ No ____
8. Sexually Harass Someone:	Yes ____ No ____	Yes ____ No ____
9. Sexually Assault Someone:	Yes ____ No ____	Yes ____ No ____
10. Other (Please specify what):	Yes ____ No ____	Yes ____ No ____

---

Please Comment/Explain:

**7. Where are assaults, intimidation, bullying, etc. by students from your school most likely to happen? (please circle)**

1. On school property
2. At people's houses or parties
3. Other (please specify where): \_\_\_\_\_

**8. When are fights, intimidation, etc. by students from your school most likely to happen?**

1. Before school (eg. while walking to school)
2. During school hours
3. After school (eg. while walking home)
4. On weekends
5. Other (please specify when): \_\_\_\_\_

**9. While at school, who of the following do you most fear: (Please check off only one answer for each type of incident  
- For example, if I was most afraid of having my money stolen by a group of males in Grade 9, I would check off my answer the way the example shows).**

		<i>A Male Student in Grade</i>	<i>A Female Student in Grade</i>	<i>A Group of Males in Grade</i>	<i>A Group of Females in Grade</i>	<i>A Group of Males &amp; Females in Grade</i>
eg.	<b>Having money stolen by</b>	7_8_9_	7_8_9_	7_8_9_✓	7_8_9_	7_8_9_
1.	<b>Being verbally harassed/intimidated/bullied by?</b>	7_8_9_	7_8_9_	7_8_9_	7_8_9_	7_8_9_
2.	<b>Being beaten up by?</b>	7_8_9_	7_8_9_	7_8_9_	7_8_9_	7_8_9_
3.	<b>Being hurt with a weapon by?</b>	7_8_9_	7_8_9_	7_8_9_	7_8_9_	7_8_9_
4.	<b>Being sexually harassed by?</b>	7_8_9_	7_8_9_	7_8_9_	7_8_9_	7_8_9_
5.	<b>Being sexually assaulted by?</b>	7_8_9_	7_8_9_	7_8_9_	7_8_9_	7_8_9_
6.	<b>Other</b> _____	7_8_9_	7_8_9_	7_8_9_	7_8_9_	7_8_9_

**Please Comment/Explain:**

10. Are you more afraid of students from your school while you're at school or when you see them out in the community (eg. parks, malls, skating rinks, community centres, etc.)?

More afraid at school \_\_\_\_\_

More afraid in the community \_\_\_\_\_

Please Comment/Explain Why:

11. Are you more afraid of violence from students in your school or from students/youth from other schools?

Students in this school \_\_\_\_\_

Youth from other schools \_\_\_\_\_

Please Comment/Explain:

12. Are there any groups of students you are afraid of?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_

No \_\_\_\_\_

Please Comment/Explain:

13. Do you believe there is a problem with violence in this school (please circle your answer)?

1. No (no problem at all)
2. Rarely (very little violence)
3. Some (a moderate amount of violence)
4. A lot of violence

Please Comment/Explain:

**14. Do you feel safe from violence while you're at school?**

1. Yes - I feel safe all of the time
2. Most of the time
3. Sometimes
4. Not at all - I never feel safe

Please Comment/Explain:

**15. Do you think the teachers and principals are aware of the amount of violence that takes place in this school?**

Yes \_\_\_\_\_

Somewhat \_\_\_\_\_

No \_\_\_\_\_

Please Comment/Explain:

**16. Are you satisfied with how incidents of violence (eg. bullying, threats, fights, etc.) are handled in this school?**

Yes \_\_\_\_\_

Somewhat \_\_\_\_\_

No \_\_\_\_\_

Please Comment/Explain:

17. How would you like to see incidents of violence handled at your school when they happen?

18. Why do you think students in your school take part in violent acts? (please respond to each item)

- |    |   |           |          |
|----|---|-----------|----------|
| 1. | Bored/Nothing to do/Nowhere to go   | Yes _____ | No _____ |
| 2. | No supervision by their parents   | Yes _____ | No _____ |
| 3. | They are part of a gang   | Yes _____ | No _____ |
| 4. | Ethnic/Cultural Conflict  | Yes _____ | No _____ |
| 5. | To get back at someone  | Yes _____ | No _____ |
| 6. | For fun   | Yes _____ | No _____ |
| 7. | Other reasons: (please list other reasons you think students participate in violent acts against other students at school). |           |          |
-

- 19.** Have any of these incidents happened to you while at a party or hanging out with your friends outside of school? In the last column, please think of the most serious incident for each question and check-off whether the incidents were carried out by a gang or group of 2 or more.

	<i>Have Happened to You</i>	<i>By Gang/Group of 2 or More</i>
1. Items Taken from You By Force (Eg. clothing, books)	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
2. Verbally Harassed/Picked on/ Bullied/Intimidated:	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
3. Threatened to be Beaten-up:	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
4. Beaten-up (Kicked/Punched):	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
5. Threatened with a Weapon:	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
6. Hurt with a Weapon:	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
7. Sexually Harassed:	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
8. Sexually Assaulted:	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
9. Other (Please specify what):	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

- 
- 20.** Would you go to a party or hang out again if you knew the people who carried out these incidents would be there?

Yes  No

Why or why not?

21. Where do you and your friends like to hang out when you're not at school (eg. evenings, weekends)?

22. Do you think there are enough places in the community for youth your age to hang out?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_

No \_\_\_\_\_

23. What other kinds of places would you like to be made available to you and your friends?

24. Do you ever attend the Youth Centre at this school on Friday nights?

Often \_\_\_\_\_

Sometimes \_\_\_\_\_

Never \_\_\_\_\_ (if never, skip to Question # 27)

25. If yes, is this a valuable place for youth your age to hang out?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_

No \_\_\_\_\_

Please explain:

**26. Where would you and your friends be if not at the Youth Centre on Friday nights?**

**27. What suggestions do you have for things that could be done to prevent violence at school?**

1. **What could students do?**

2. **What could school staff do (eg. teachers & principals)?**

3. **What could the police do?**

4. **What could parents do?**

5. **What could the community do (eg. recreation services, businesses, etc.)?**

- 28.** Please provide any additional comments you have regarding youth violence in general, violence in your school, safety, how to prevent or deal with violence at your school, etc. You may use the back of this page if you need to.

**THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION**