



CARIBBEAN
PARTNERS FOR EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS



QUESTIONING SCHOOL VIOLENCE IN JAMAICAN SCHOOLS: A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

EDUExchange E-DISCUSSION SUMMARY

Date of Discussion: April 10-12, 2013

Dr. Deon Edwards-Kerr, Lecturer at the School of Education, was the moderator for the recently concluded Caribbean Partners for Educational Progress E-Discussion, EduExchange, held between April 10 and 12, 2013. Members shared their views concerning violence in schools as part of the School of Education, UWI Mona. The full discussion is available on the [Caribbean Partners for Educational Progress Website](#).

May 24, 2013

This publication was produced for your review by the U.S. Agency for International Development. It was prepared by Alesia Riddell of the QED Group, LLC, Dian Bailey and Nadine Valentine of the School of Education, UWI Mona.

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PARTICIPANTS

We received twelve comments for the discussion, for which we thank the following persons:

- Pauline Bain
- Karen Thwaites
- Craig Bloomfield
- Rohan Perry
- Anthea Henderson
- Carol Gentles
- Her Story
- Joyce Campbell

Contributors belonged to the following organizations:

- School of Education- UWI, Mona
- CARIMAC- UWI, Mona
- Community Advocate
- Family Life Ministries
- Peace Management Initiative
- St. Hugh's High School
- Old Harbour Primary School

Authors' Acknowledgments...

Thank you to our moderator, Dr Deon Edwards-Kerr. Thank you also to everyone who contributed to the discussion by posting comments and sharing experiences, and resources.

BACKGROUND

School violence occurs when “any member of the school community is subjected to abuse, threatening, intimidating or humiliating behaviour or physical assault from a student, teacher, or staff member”.¹ In Jamaica, previous research found that almost 90 percent of students in 11 Kingston based schools were worried about school violence. Their concern was justified as the survey found that 21 percent of the students had attacked teachers or staff, and 22 percent had suffered violence from other students (Gardner, Powell, Thomas & Millard, 2003).² Approximately 75 percent of the surveyed students believed they would be “picked on” more if they were reluctant to fight, despite the findings that 89% thought it generally wrong to hit other people (Gardner et al., 2003). The magnitude of the problem is evinced by recent statistics released by the Ministry of Education that showed that in the 2011 – 2012 academic year, there were 1288 reported incidents of violence in Jamaican schools including “915 fights, 160 robberies and three murders”.³

When it comes to violence in schools both educators and policy makers cringe. They do so, because the idea that children and young people could be involved in violent crime still seems farfetched to many, but also because school ought to be a ‘safe haven’. However, schools are no longer seen as a safe place where parents can feel comfortable knowing that their children are far from violence.



Fig. 1: Jamaican High School Students

In Jamaica, the antecedents of school violence are multiple and complex, one key factor is the dysfunctional social relations existing in many communities - ‘community violence’ influences what goes into schools – children and young people take with them ways of being what they see modeled in their communities, ways of dealing with conflict, ways to defend and protect themselves.

The idea that the ‘community’ will protect the school is no longer universal, furthermore the idea that the community will protect and care for students can longer be taken for granted. Lifestyles and ‘ways of being’ in some communities socialize some young people into violent norms, and, the ways in which some schools respond to the situations reinforce these behaviours rather than mitigate.

Dr. Deon Edwards-Kerr
School of Education, UWI, Mona

As Dr. Deon Edwards-Kerr pointed out, “violence in schools did not start in schools, it is an import, and over the years we have accepted it as a natural part of schooling - climate and culture” (Dr. Deon Edwards-Kerr, 2013). The issue of school violence has normalized over time and in schools; result in institutions paying more attention to right behaviours than understanding the underlying factors that cause violence in schools.

¹ http://www.unicef.org/lac/spbarbados/Implementation/CP/Regional/shoobasedviolence_2007_iadb.pdf

² <http://www.scielosp.org/pdf/rpsp/v14n2/a04v14n2>

³ <http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/School-violence-focus---Education-ministry-to-implement-measures-starting-summer>

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SCHOOL VIOLENCE

Discussants agreed that violence in schools mirror violence within communities. Dr. Edwards – Kerr advanced the critical perspective that takes seriously the interaction between students and their contexts. In this case, the school and the community are key social contexts which shape the identities of students through a variety of intersecting relationships. They noted that school violence results from familial, societal and educational factors, which are outlined below:

“In a modern, western, collective society where youth and adults have grown numb to violence, be it verbal, emotional, or physical, many educators today enter their schools with a deep-seated, justifiable trepidation as they are not only ill-equipped in terms of their professional expertise relative to violence (which is understandable as few of us began our careers with challenges in mind), but we also live in a general environment of fear”.
(Craig Broomfield, 2013)

HOME/FAMILIAL

- “Dysfunctional social interaction between community members.
- Violence is seen as the approach to dealing with conflict”.

SOCIETAL

Societal factors such as crime and violence in the wider society help to perpetuate the incidence of and numbness to violence. These factors include:

- The perceived return from criminal activity outweighs the legitimate returns of education coupled with perceived improbability of arrests and sanctions.
- Criminal activity is linked to survival as it is “sometimes the only avenue for one to provide a meal for themselves or family”. (Karen Thwaites, 2013)
- Youngsters and people in general, are readily hostile because of general incivility
- Youths’ perception that they need to “stand-up” for themselves
- “The media plays a crucial role in providing entertainment that is marred with violence”. (Anthea Edalere-Henderson, 2013)

SCHOOL/ EDUCATIONAL

- The response to violent behaviour by school administrators and teachers tend to reinforce this behaviour than mitigate it.
- Lack of proper administration and policies in schools
- Lack of “the necessary emotional support necessary for students from communities plagued by violence or who see violence as a means of conflict resolution” (Dr. Deon Edwards-Kerr, 2013).

Issues Observed

National Level

- Existing law and policies are not uniformly enforced
- New policies and laws are needed
- Improvement of teacher skills in identifying and addressing school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV)
- Guidance counsellors need to strengthen their counselling skills
- Develop and/or strengthen SRGBV response systems

Community Level

- Parents lack effective parenting skills
- Churches are not responsive to the needs of children, especially boys
- Social services at the community level are fragmented

Individual Level

- Violence is seen as normal
- There is evidence of harmful gender scripting.
- Lack of male role models
- School is seen as irrelevant
- Children are unaware of their rights
- Children have limited opportunity to build healthy relationships.

Source: Assessment Report of the Safe School

- Teachers are not adequately trained to understand the underlying factors and deal with violence.
- Many times violent exchange between students is not treated with urgency or the necessary diplomacy by teachers.

STRATEGIES

Dr. Edwards Kerr pointed out and the discussion highlighted that there is a “need to understand that it is the responsibility of the adults to ensure that our students are rightly trained and also to identify those at risk from an early age” (Dr. Deon Edwards-Kerr, 2013). The discussion also revealed that the numbness to violence may be a significant contributor and key to school violence reduction. As discussants indicated, school violence is not instantaneous and ought to be addressed early. A key part of doing this is dispelling the numbness to violence, hence unhealthy exchanges among students and other warning signs would receive the requisite intervention before issues escalate. Another key element referenced in discussion is socialization from the home and external agents including the school. The popular phrase, ‘children live what they learn’ is an accurate one that must be headed as the adults in their lives take care in modelling the behaviours that they expect to see.

Discussants identified strategies that would target the home, community and school factors to achieve a satisfying change in the incidence of violence in schools.

Home/ Familial

The family is considered as the best avenue for change (Anthea Edalere-Henderson, 2013).

- It must be understood that each child is different and therefore training and nurturing must be done with this in mind.

Instilling Discipline

- Parents and guardians should try to inculcate right behaviour by giving rewards for good behaviour and outcomes
- Violence as a means of discipline or to curve right behaviour should be eliminated as this only intensifies the situation. (Carol Gentles, 2013)
- Authority figures should set the right example for children to follow and build good relationships with them.

Community

The community play a vital role in combating violence in schools and the society in general. According to Joyce Campbell (2013), community support and the implementation of different programmes and facilities can help to alleviate this problem. The following strategies can help to mitigate against community factors that contribute to the incidence of school violence:

- Health Care Facilities
- Home Work Centres
- Skills Training
- Counselling facilities for persons who need proper direction and assistance
- Recreational facilities that enable community members, can engage in physical activities such as sports and exercise.
- Mentorship programmes focused on emotional literacy and promoting positive values, attitudes and behaviours.
- Skills training
- Rehabilitation within the community
- The use of Restorative Justice /Mediation to solve conflicts

School

It is believed that a variety of expediciencies should be used at all levels of the education system and involves teachers, administrators and students. Discussants suggested the following strategies:

- *Professional development*
 - Sessions in the form of workshops, seminars and accredited training programmes, which would:
 - Assist teachers in identifying students who are likely to be violent
 - Promote awareness of available assistance within and external to the school community.
 - Provide an opportunity to share the successes and difficulties faced when dealing with school violence.
- *Improve Teacher – student relations.*
 - Teachers should express more care and concern toward their students and build healthy relationships with them.
 - School personnel should be role models for right behaviour
 - School personnel should refrain from the use of violence to curve same.
- *Prevention and Early Intervention*
 - “The inclusion of a psychologist to do triage and referrals before a problem student crosses the border”. (Craig Broomfield, 2013)
 - Reducing unhealthy exchanges between students before it escalates.
 - A system that enable quick identification and intervention on acts of violence within schools.
 - Identifying students who exhibit violent behaviours from an early age (pre-school years)
 - Installing professional security forces in schools as students will most likely have respect for the highest authority
 - Ensuring that proper infrastructure, policies and a robust security system are in place
 - Identifying students who exhibit violent behaviours from an early age (pre-school years)
- *Crisis Management*
 - Identifying roles and promoting collaborative effort between the security forces and the school administrators (school resource officers, guidance counsellor and principal) in combating violence.
 - Promoting peer support amongst both teachers and students to mitigate against effect of violence.

Other strategies include:

- Placing students who have a violent history in a special institution. (Rohan Perry, 2013).
- Increasing the time allotted to Guidance Counselors so that they play an active role in the students’ life. (Pauline Bain, 2013)
- Ensuring that the Guidance and Counselling and Health and Family Life Education material available and issued to students.
- Teaching and learning should facilitate team-effort rather than competitive approaches.

The critical incident management plan proposed some strategies that can be used to mitigate violence in school.

Violent activities were grouped accordingly:

- Student fights
- Staff-student fights
- Gang activities within school communities

The following strategies were deemed necessary to assist in mitigating violence in schools:

- There should be regular review of school rules to ensure that students understand what is expected of them.
- Implement a violence protection programme
- Conduct frequent searches for weapons and other instruments that can be used to inflict arm.
- Encourage moral, values and attitudes

- There should be strong disciplinary procedures to curtail gang activity within schools
- The police force should be utilized to assist with having dialogue with gang members
(Source: Ministry of Education, Jamaica)

As Joyce Campbell noted the availability of resources is very crucial to the implementation and effectiveness of these strategies shared.

Creating Safe Places for Learning in Schools Project

Time period: 2007- 2010

Primary Objective(s): to equip school-based professionals, primary caregivers and students to better manage anger and mitigate conflict and violence, create a safer school environment and promote child rights and responsibilities

Target Group: 30 schools in Kingston, St Catherine and St James.

Activities:

- Dispute Resolution Foundation worked with students, school-based professionals and parents on fostering anger management, conflict resolution and mediation strategies in schools to reduce violence
- Teachers were trained in conflict resolution and anger management techniques
- Live dramatic production in schools entitled Curfew that tackles the issues of violence and conflict resolution that was executed and accompanied by small group discussions.
- Sensitized school-based professional, students and parents on child rights and responsibilities.

Implementing organization: Ministry of Education, Dispute Resolution Foundation & the Violence Prevention Clinic at the UWI

Peace and Love in Schools (PALS)

Started in 1992

Primary Objective(s): reduce the levels of violence in the society and foster greater respect for life and breaking cycles of violence.

Target group: Primary and selected high schools throughout Jamaica

Activities:

- Conflict Resolution curriculum is incorporated into primary education
- Ongoing training sessions through the use of workbooks which focuses on Community Building, Anger Management, Rules for Making Peace, Effective Communication and Perception Skills
- Trained individuals are equipped to go out and train others to use the right techniques for conflict resolutions
- Parent and community outreach sessions are also done in an attempt to sensitize the wider community to the problems facing our youngsters.

Implementing organization: The Jamaica Gleaner

Change From Within Programme (PALS)

Started in 1994

Primary Objective(s): to build self-esteem among all stakeholders, thereby reducing anti-social behaviours and fostering school involvement.

Target group: Selected School across Jamaica

Activities:

- Professional development workshops to assist teachers and administrators to improve leadership skills.
- Mentorship programme that involves teachers mentoring students, teachers mentoring teachers and students mentoring students.
- Identifying students interests and use it to motivate them to participate in different activities.
- Circle of friends to share experiences, ideas and to identify strategies to improve leadership skills.

Implementing organization: The University of the West Indies, Faculty of Humanities and Education

Safe Schools Programme

Started in 2004

Primary Objective(s): Decrease school violence in at-risk schools

Target group: 89 troubled institutions in the parishes of St James, St Ann, St Elizabeth, Kingston and St Andrew

Activities:

- Members of the Jamaica Constabulary Force are trained as School Resource Officers (SRO).
- SROs mentor and assist in dealing with disputes that may arise on the school compound
- SROs work with the school administration to identify and monitor areas on school compounds that pose potential dangers to students.
- Each institution is required to plan and implement school specific safety measures to achieve violence prevention and reduction targets.

Implementing organization: Ministry of National Security, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health

RELATED RESOURCES

Benbenishty, R. & Astor, R.A. (2008). School violence in international context: A call for global collaboration in research and prevention. *International Journal of Violence and School, 7*.

This paper discusses the potential contributions of international and cross-cultural perspectives. We list a range of questions and issues that should be addressed by international studies. We then propose an international collaborative study of school violence across the world that can address these issues. Finally we make recommendations for a conceptual and methodological framework to design an international monitoring system for school violence.

Carroll, B. R. (n.d.). *The Effects of School Violence and Crime on Academic Achievement*. Available from <http://www.davidson.edu/academic/economics/Student%20Research%20Papers/Brandon%20Carroll%20paper.pdf>

This paper tests the effect of criminal and violent acts in North Carolina public middle schools on the academic performance levels of 8th graders, controlling for a variety of relevant factors. Results confirm that these incidents lower academic achievement, as measured by the percentage of students at or above grade level on N.C. 8th Grade Math and Reading End-of-Grade tests; the first incidents are more disruptive to achievement than later incidents; and the relationship is small in magnitude but statistically significant. Specifically, the average marginal influence of one more incident of crime or violence is a 0.138 decrease in Math scores and a 0.143 decrease in Verbal scores; these findings were also strongly inelastic. The paper directs future research to determine if these effects compound over time and to create education policy around them so as to produce a more efficient public sector.

Erik, A. (2007). *School-based violence prevention*. *Inter-American Development Bank: Sustainable Development Department*. Available from <http://idbdocs.iadb.org/wsdocs/getdocument.aspx?docnum=911739>

School is one of the most important socializing environments for children, since it is where they spend a great deal of time interacting with teachers and peers. However, the persistent spillover of community socioeconomic conditions and violence means that schools and their surroundings are no longer protected places, but share in the day-to-day violence of the urban space (Abramovay, 2002; Gottfredson, 2001). As a result, school violence has increased correspondingly.

Gardner, J. M.; Powell, C. A., Thomas, J.A. & Millard, D. (2003). Perceptions and experiences of violence among secondary school students in urban Jamaica. *Pan Am J Public Health 14(2)*. Available from <http://www.scielosp.org/pdf/rpsp/v14n2/a04v14n2>

Seventy-five percent of the students thought that someone who was reluctant to fight would be “picked on” more, 89% thought it generally wrong to hit other people, and 91% thought it wrong to insult other people. Eighty-four percent knew of students who carried knives or blades from such items as a scalpel or a utility knife to school, and 89% were worried about violence at school. Thirty-three percent had been victims of violence, and 60% had a family member who had been a victim of violence. Eighty-two percent thought that violent television shows could increase aggressive behavior. Factor analysis of selected responses was carried out, yielding **five factors: neighborhood violence, school violence, perceptions of acceptable behaviors, level of concern about violence, and general experiences and perceptions of violence**. The factors varied with gender, age, grade level, socioeconomic status, and school type. These results will help focus interventions aimed at reducing violence, provide a baseline for later comparisons of perceptions and experiences of violence, and offer a basis for comparing the experiences of young people in urban Jamaica with those of young persons elsewhere.

Ministry of Education and Youth. (2007). *Guidelines for Developing a Critical Incident Management Plan for a Safe School Environment*. Available from <http://jamaica.kdid.org/groups/eduexchange-questioning-school-violence-jamaican-schoolsa-critical-perspective/safe-school-pr>.

This manual was created by the Jamaica's Ministry of Education to guide schools to respond to a wide range of critical incidences and includes prevention as well as response strategies. Violence and aggression continue to be the major causes of trauma within some schools, as a small, yet significant number of students become involved in gang rivalry; drug trafficking, drug use, drug abuse and fights, sometimes with deadly weapons. These incidents usually result in violent acts that are sometimes fatal, affecting the entire school community and causing major disruptions.

Ministry of Education Jamaica. (2007 – 2010). *An evaluation of the Create Safe Places for Learning in Schools Project*. UNICEF. Available from http://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/files/2011_Jamaica_-_CSPL_EVALUATION_FINAL.pdf

Jamaica is one of the most violent societies in the world and as a consequence Jamaican schoolchildren, especially those living in what are often referred to as 'inner-city' communities are highly exposed to violent acts, including stabbing, shooting and sexual assault. Many studies in recent years have reported the high percentage of Jamaican children that have witnessed a murder or seen a dead body in mainly the Kingston Metropolitan, St James and St Catherine areas, where a multiplicity of criminal gangs control whole communities. This increasing phenomenon is numbing the senses of Jamaican children to violence and in turn bringing about both a fear and an acceptance of violence as a way to resolve conflicts. Jamaican children have therefore been seen playing next to and eating food in close proximity to newly murdered corpses, demonstrating inappropriate social responses to this kind of trauma. There is no doubt that exposure to violence among Jamaican youth is a public health crisis that is thwarting the efforts of parents and educators to positively mold and shape the attitudes and behaviours of young people and divert them away from violence. The CSPL Project was piloted in 30 schools between July 2007 and December 2010 and was a collaboration of the Ministry of Education, (MOE), the Dispute Resolution Foundation (DRF) and the Violence Prevention Clinic in the University of the West Indies (VPC). From the total target school population of 33,445, 41% (13,571) of students were exposed to the CSPL project. Some students were selected based on their teacher's perceived risk of them, while some schools applied a universal approach to project implementation in their classes. This report presents the findings of the project's evaluation.

Sacco, F. C. & Twemlow, S.W. (1997, June). *School Violence Reduction: A model Jamaican Secondary School Program*. *Community Mental Health Journal*, 33(3).

The Montego Bay Secondary School Project presents an example of how violence reduction can be achieved using almost no physical resources, and the special effect called 'Bruno Effect', created by one Jamaican police officer with the consultation of a psychodynamically led training and intervention team. The 'Bruno Effect' resulted in a dramatic reduction in the number of physical attacks from an observed 5 fights per day (3 out of 5 involved knives and cutting) to 1 per week. The violence rate returned to its former level as soon as 'Bruno' left the school. The dramatic violence reduction appears related to establishing an adult protective shield. The results stem from the unique personality of the adult protector as well as a combination of the special role of the police and the outside intervention team.

USAID. (2005). *Safe School Program: Jamaica Assessment Report*. Available from http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNADD898.pdf2005

This report presents the findings of an assessment aimed at:

- Assess existing programs for their capacity to address SRGBV;
- Understand the nature of SRGBV in Jamaica; and

- Identify individuals and organizations from the key informant interviews to serve as local partners.

The Safe School Programme's approach to creating a gender safe environment for all boys and girls as well as guiding principles are highlighted. A general summary of the issues and recommendations are noted.

Security and Safety Policy Guidelines: Promoting a culture of security and safety in schools. (2008). Ministry of Education Available from <http://www.moe.gov.jm/sites/default/files/Security%20and%20Safety%20Policy%20Guidelines.pdf>

This Security and Safety Policy was developed by the Ministry of Education for the Jamaican education system. Zero Tolerance in Jamaican education system, understanding the recording and promoting requirements of the MoE, general rules for student searches, the role of school leadership and guidance for creating a school environment free of weapons and contraband.