The Effect of Community Involvement Programs on School Violence

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Concerns about school violence and violent youth are increasing and knowing which programs are effective would be beneficial to schools as well as the community. The author examined the effect of community involvement programs. The total number of violent incidents recorded at schools that participated in the School Survey of Campus Safety (n = 2,724 schools). Of the total number of schools: 726 were primary schools, 956 were middle schools, 954 were high schools, and 88 were combined schools. Data were analyzed for the schools interventions, and three of the eight involvement groups were found to be statistically significant.

Keywords: community involvement programs, school counseling interventions, and School Survey of Campus Safety

Childhood and youth violence in schools is a major problem and concern in the United States, and it has become a large social policy issue as well as public health concern (Boulter, 2004). In response to school violence educators have been creative in finding ways to promote safer school environments, prevent school violence, and deter school violence. It is important that the children are safe in their schools so they can reach their full learning potential (Jeklelek, Brown, Marin, & Lippman, 2007).

There are many approaches designed to prevent and reduce violence in schools and depending on school traits and needs some practices are used more commonly than others. The implementation of approaches is impacted by school level as well as other school characteristics. High schools typically implement more safety and security programs, whereas primary schools implement programs to foster parental support to help deal with behavioral issues (Jeklelek et al., 2007). Government funding has increased to identify the causes of youth violence and grants to support the development of programs, implementation of programs, and evaluation of Involvement programs related to youth and school violence (Boulter, 2004). Understanding which programs are effective is key in reducing school violence.

The most recent version (2005-2006) of School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS) was utilized for this study. The SSOCS is managed by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) on behalf of the U.S. Department of Education. SSOCS collects crime and safety data from principals and school administrators of U.S. public schools via surveys and questionnaires. Information obtained from SSOCS can be used to examine the relationship

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between school characteristics and violent and serious violent crimes in primary schools, middle schools, high schools, and combined schools. Data from SSOCS can also be used to assess what crime prevention programs, practices, and policies are used by schools (Nolle, Guerino, & Dinkes, 2007). Analyzing this information can help identify programs that are effective in school violence reduction. There are many approaches designed to prevent and reduce violence in schools and depending on school traits. This study will help identify community involvement and the effectiveness on school violence with the schools that participated in the 2005-2006 School Survey on Crime and Safety.

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Review of the Related Literature

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School Violence

School violence is an actual, attempted, or threatened fight or assault that takes place at school buildings, on school grounds, on school buses, or at places that hold school-sponsored events or activities (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). There have been many acts of school violence, and according to Lamberg (2003), over one-third of high school students had been in physical fights and altercations. According to another survey about one million students admitted to carrying firearms in their book bags at school, in this survey there were some children reported carrying firearms as young as 10 years old (Koch, 2000). In a recent study data were collected at 23 schools consisting of 1,033 participants. This study was focused around the contemporary fears of children and adolescents. The outcome of this study is that the number one fear was being raped, and students deal with teasing, bullying, and school violence on a regular basis (Burnham, 2009).

In order to help prevent school violence it is important that children develop positive relationships and values. In order to help children resist the social pressures and negative influences of peers it is important that children have anchors to help them stay grounded, and community involvement programs can be the anchors that our children need in order to help prevent school violence (Boulter, 2004). Policy decisions have been focused around school violence and promoting safer schools, but it is important to identify approaches to school violence that can be measured (Nickerson & Martens, 2008).

Community Involvement Programs

Community programs are important factors in reducing violence in schools and they help to foster a sense of being for children. Violence prevention programs are needed that involve parents, schools, students, media law enforcement, local businesses, and community based organizations working together to help shape students relationships and values (Boulter, 2004). There is an urgent need to help students face adverse situations without resorting to violent actions. Fostering resiliency in children and adolescents will help teach them coping skills as well as how to be successful (Burnham, 2009).

Parent groups. Though schools and family should work together to nourish the growth of a child, the family has had the greatest impact on the development of a child (Windham, Hooper, & Hudson, 2005). Family and parental support is key when it comes to impacting

students. It is essential that parents have a good relationship with their child. Parent groups help to voice concerns and also help with the implementation of program concepts. Support from families and parents help to sustain violence involvement programs (Boulter, 2004).

Social services. Creating social bonds and opportunities help to promote academic success and decrease violence among children who display risky behaviors. Social casework strategies and involvement help when it comes to individual involvement that help children and adolescents with interpersonal problems (Van Acker, 2007). Social services interventions also include the family, and the family is one of the most important aspects of a child's life. Family and social services help to break cycles of violence and parents and loved ones address family issues (Van Acker).

Juvenile justice. Research indicates that juvenile justice programs change the context of school environments and school experiences. School interventions with a juvenile justice component yield positive results. Most programs with juvenile justice integration contain social competence, conflict resolution, bullying prevention, and programs to help educate parents and teachers (Burns et al., 2003). These programs are aimed at violence and childhood delinquency prevention; schools that incorporate a juvenile justice component reduce the amount of violence and antisocial behavior of attendees. To prevent school violence and youthful offending more resources should be made available to schools that will help educate children and adolescents effectively (Burns et al.).

Law enforcement. Law enforcement organizations and programs help to decrease school violence. The Drug Abuse Resistance Education program utilized in over 80% of school districts in the country, the program is a drug and violence prevention program. The program consists of 17 sessions taught by trained police officers (Komro et al., 2004). Violence interventions should spread their programs beyond the classroom and into more aspects of the community. Messages should be consistent and provide encouragement of violence free norms. Programs with a social/community components as well as law enforcement involvement allow students to meet positive members of the community as well as law enforcement officials. Students participating in programs like D.A.R.E. have the chance to see law enforcement officials helping the community by completing service projects such as: neighborhood cleanups, seminars, and multicultural events (Komro et al.).

Mental health. Those responsible for school violence come from all ethnicities and socio economic status. Mental health resources and programs can help to provide a sense of psychological wellbeing. Programs with mental health components can help students with resiliency to negative influences and life situations. Programs that include a mental health component help students face their issues rather than resort to a life of drugs, denial, and aggression. These programs also help build healthy self-esteem, and allow students to have a source of support outside of the family (Boulter, 2004).

Civic organizations. Community organizations and community members need to be involved with school's violence prevention programs (Boulter, 2004). Community organizations can assist with after school programs, health concerns, and can also address issues from a culturally sensitive standpoint when the entire community becomes involved. Organizations like

Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBSA) solicit volunteers from communities to be mentors for youth. The volunteers are screened with written applications, background checks, interviews, and home assessments (Underwood, Sandor Von Dresner, & Phillips, 2006). BBBSA mentors are matched with youth based on needs and interests. An evaluation of the BBBSA program showed that 46% of the youth enrolled in the BBBSA program were less likely to initiate drug and alcohol use. According to the same study about one-third was less likely to participate in violent acts, and those who participated in the program reported more positive relationships with friends and loved ones (McGill, Mihalic, & Gropeter, 1998).

Businesses. There is little information about businesses and school involvement. Research suggests that businesses are important because they are involved in the community. It appears as though one of the most important aspects of school violence interventions is parental support as well as the support of the surrounding community (Boulter, 2004 and Van Acker, 2007), though no specific mention of local businesses and support was made.

Religious organizations. According to (Boulter, 2004), spiritual anchors help students to build a positive self image, set healthy limits, and promote meaningfulness and purpose in a student's life. These spiritual anchors also help to provide a foundation of understanding of life events which may be out of the students control and help them gain hope for their future endeavors. Any firm belief in a greater power seems to be a source of positive values and guidance for the child's spirit. Boutler also states, "The most common spiritual anchor is an organized religion based on a philosophy of love and nurturance of the soul" p. 33. Research seems to indicate that religious and spiritual factors play a healthy role in the functioning of children and adolescents (Windham et al., 2005).

Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed in this study:
1. What is the effect of community-involvement-parent group programs on the total number of violent incidents recorded in a school?
2. What is the effect of community-involvement-social services programs on the total number of violent incidents recorded in a school?
3. What is the effect of community-involvement-juvenile justice programs on the total number of violent incidents recorded in a school?
4. What is the effect of community-involvement-law enforcement programs on the total number of violent incidents recorded in a school?
5. What is the effect of community-involvement-mental health programs on the total number of violent incidents recorded in a school?
6. What is the effect of community-involvement-civic organizations on the total number of violent incidents recorded in a school?
7. What is the effect of community-involvement-businesses on the total number of violent incidents recorded in a school?
8. What is the effect of community-involvement-religious organizations on the total number of violent incidents recorded in a school?
9.

Method

Participants

Data from schools in the United States was collected for the 2005-2006 school year were utilized in this study. Questionnaire packets were mailed to 3,565 public schools and a total of 2,724 public schools submitted questionnaires. Of the total number of schools: 726 were primary schools, 956 were middle schools, 954 were high schools, and 88 were combined schools. The schools in this study were from rural areas, cities, urban areas, and towns. The data utilized for this study has been collected for 1999–2000, 2003–04, and 2005–06. A fourth collection was collected for the 2007-2008 school years, but is not available to the public at this time. These data are available and downloadable at the U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences (IES) via the National Center for Education Statistics.

Procedures

Data were downloaded from the Institute of Education Statistics website (IES). The IES database provides a broad range of information on the performance of students and schools throughout the United States. The School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS) is managed by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), and SSOCS provides information on crime and safety data from principals and school administrators of U.S. public schools. The researcher began by selecting the 2005-2006 school year, of the SSOCS files (approximately 2,700 public schools) for the United States, and variables to be examined (i.e., promote sense of community integration and community involvement variables). The data are organized on the NCES website into an SPSS database, the data were downloaded as an SPSS file and then analyzed. There was no focus on particular grade levels so all schools in the SSOCS dataset were utilized in this study.

Results

An examination of the standardized skewness coefficient (i.e., the skewness value divided by its standard error) and the standardized kurtosis coefficient (i.e., the kurtosis value divided by its standard error) revealed extremely large deviations from normality. Specifically 16 of 16 of the standardized skewness and kurtosis coefficients fell outside of the normal limits of were outside the -3.00 and 3.00 bounds of normality (Onwuegbuzie & Daniel, 2002), a non-parametric Wilcoxon's dependent samples t-test (Huck, 2007) was utilized to address each of the research questions. The Bonferroni adjusted level of significance was calculated at .006 (.05/8), and was utilized as the level of significance for each of the non-parametric Wilcoxon's dependent samples t-test.

Parent Groups

Wilcoxon's dependent samples t-test indicated that the parent groups were not statistically significant ($z = -0.50$, $p > .006$). There was no significant difference in the total number of violent incidents recorded at schools that had community involvement-parent groups implemented in their schools than there was in schools that did not. Table 1 presents the means

and standard deviations for the total number of violent incidents recorded as a function of community involvement-parent groups.

Table 1
Means and Standard Deviations for Community Involvement – Parent Groups as a Function of Total Number of Violent Incidents Recorded

Variable	*n*	*M*	*SD*
With Parent Groups	2001	26.90	40.59
Without Parent Groups	723	28.77	40.56

Social Services

Wilcoxon's dependent samples *t*-test indicated that the social services groups were statistically significantly ($z = -5.41$, $p = .0001$) when implemented into schools in order to reduce the total number of violent incidents. The effect size associated with this difference was .15. Using Cohen's (1988) criteria, this value represented a small effect size. Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations for the total number of violent incidents recorded as a function of community involvement-social services groups.

Table 2
Means and Standard Deviations for Community Involvement – Social Services as a Function of Total Number of Violent Incidents Recorded

Variable	*n*	*M*	*SD*
With Social Services	1906	29.93	42.93
Without Social Services	818	23.45	34.22

Juvenile Justice

Wilcoxon's dependent samples *t*-test indicated that the juvenile justice groups were statistically significantly ($z = -10.36$, $p = .0001$) when implemented into schools in order to reduce the total number of violent incidents. The effect size associated with this difference was .24. Using Cohen's (1988) criteria, this value represented a small-to-moderate effect size. Table 3 presents the means and standard deviations for the total number of violent incidents recorded as a function of community involvement-juvenile justice groups.

Table 3
Means and Standard Deviations for Community Involvement – Juvenile Justice as a Function of Total Number of Violent Incidents Recorded

Variable	*n*	*M*	*SD*
With Juvenile Justice	1538	31.51	43.82
Without Juvenile Justice	1186	22.06	35.28

Law Enforcement

Wilcoxon's dependent samples *t*-test indicated that the law enforcement groups were statistically significantly ($z = -7.26$, $p = .0001$) when implemented into schools in order to reduce the total number of violent incidents. The effect size associated with this difference was .22. Using Cohen's (1988) criteria, this value represented a small-to-moderate effect size. Table 4

presents the means and standard deviations for the total number of violent incidents recorded as a function of community involvement-law enforcement groups.

Table 4

Means and Standard Deviations for Community Involvement – Law Enforcement as a Function of Total Number of Violent Incidents Recorded

Variable	n	M	SD
With Law Enforcement	2316	28.66	41.42
Without Law Enforcement	408	20.20	34.69

Mental Health

Wilcoxon's dependent samples *t*-test indicated that the mental health groups were not statistically significant ($z = -1.99$, $p > .006$). There was no significant difference in the total number of violent incidents recorded at schools that had community involvement-mental health groups implemented in their schools than there was in schools that did not. Table 5 presents the means and standard deviations for the total number of violent incidents recorded as a function of community involvement-mental health groups.

Table 5

Means and Standard Deviations for Community Involvement – Mental Health as a Function of Total Number of Violent Incidents Recorded

Variable	n	M	SD
With Mental Health	1608	30.09	43.32
Without Mental Health	1116	23.52	35.76

Civic Organizations

Wilcoxon's dependent samples *t*-test indicated that civic organizations groups were not statistically significant ($z = -1.54$, $p > .006$). There was no significant difference in the total number of violent incidents recorded at schools that had community involvement-civic organizations implemented in their schools than there was in schools that did not. Table 6 presents the means and standard deviations for the total number of violent incidents recorded as a function of community involvement-civic organizations.

Table 6

Means and Standard Deviations for Community Involvement – Civic Organizations as a Function of Total Number of Violent Incidents Recorded

Variable	n	M	SD
With Civic Organizations	1294	28.12	42.93
Without Civic Organizations	1430	26.74	38.35

Businesses

Wilcoxon's dependent samples *t*-test indicated that business groups were not statistically

significant ($z = -1.54$, $p > .006$). There was no significant difference in the total number of violent incidents recorded at schools that had community involvement-businesses implemented in their schools than there was in schools that did not. Table 7 presents the means and standard deviations for the total number of violent incidents recorded as a function of community involvement-businesses.

Table 7
Means and Standard Deviations for Community Involvement – Businesses as a Function of Total Number of Violent Incidents Recorded

Variable	n	M	SD
With Businesses	851	29.46	47.33
Without Businesses	1873	26.46	37.10

Religious Organizations

Wilcoxon's dependent samples *t*-test indicated that Religious organizations groups were not statistically significant ($z = -2.06$, $p > .006$). There was no significant difference in the total number of violent incidents recorded at schools that had community involvement-religious organizations implemented in their schools than there was in schools that did not. Table 8 presents the means and standard deviations for the total number of violent incidents recorded as a function of community involvement-religious organizations.

Table 8
Means and Standard Deviations for Community Involvement – Religious Organizations as a Function of Total Number of Violent Incidents Recorded

Variable	n	M	SD
With Religious Organizations	689	30.19	49.20
Without Religious Organizations	2035	26.45	37.19

Discussion

The community involvement programs that were statistically significant according to the data were involvement programs that incorporate social services, juvenile justice, and law enforcement. Specific details related to the schools that implemented these programs would be beneficial, for example: if the programs had been in effect for a number of years; if the programs were new; if the programs were put in effect due to violence in the schools; and information related to the amount of violent acts before the programs were implemented. The information presented in this research study compares the means of schools with the community involvement programs and those without the programs. Conducting research on the schools before and after implementation of the programs may also be beneficial in researching this area.

Further research on the effectiveness of programs related to civic, social organizations, and religious organizations is needed in order to explore their effectiveness. The literature supports all of the interventions, but specifically religious affiliation and religious organizations. The literature that supports spiritual and religious affiliations suggests that children who participate and are active with a religious organization are more likely to be fully functioning

(Windham et al., 2005).

The programs found to be statistically significant are involved with the state or government officials in some way. It appears as if the involvement programs were implemented in schools that were having violence problems and the involvement programs were utilized in being re-active to school violence rather than a proactive approach. More information would need to be obtained from the school that implemented these programs, information on the number of total violent acts recorded before.

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