



CSPV SCHOOL VIOLENCE FACT SHEET

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Youth Violence: A Public Health Concern

- Intentional violence accounts for one-third of all injury deaths in the United States.
- Intentional interpersonal violence disproportionately involves young people as both perpetrators and victims.
- Among minority youth, particularly African Americans, violence has struck with unique force in recent years. Homicide has been the leading cause of death among African American males and females between the ages of 15-24 for more than ten years.
- Firearm-related deaths among African American youth have particularly increased. Between 1984 and 1993, gun-related deaths of young African American males tripled, with the most dramatic rise among those 13 to 18 years old.
- As levels of violence in the general society have risen sharply, it is a disturbing, but not surprising corollary that the levels of violence in and around schools have also increased.
- Research suggests that violence in schools derives mainly from factors external to schools, but may be precipitated or aggravated by the school environment.
- Student assaults on other students are the most frequent type of violence reported in schools.
- In recent years, weapon carrying by students in schools has become a growing source of violence and threat of violence. A study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (1995) found that nearly one-fourth of students nationwide had carried a weapon to school during the month preceding the survey.
- Violent incidents and threats of violence at school negatively affect students, school staff, and the educational process. Fear and feelings of being unsafe cause students to miss school and participate less in class.
- The personal health costs and economic costs to society from the devastation of violence are immense. Nationwide, the average cost of fatal and nonfatal violent injuries was \$44,000 in 1992. The total medical cost of all violence that occurred in the United States was estimated at \$13.5 billion in 1992.
- Traditionally, youth violence has been addressed by justice or sociological domains and not as a concern for the public health system. In recent years, a proven, effective public health approach has become an increasingly important resource in the effort to prevent youth violence.
- The public health approach emphasizes primary prevention -- that is, prevention taking place before the onset of disease or injury. Primary prevention identifies behavioral or environmental risk factors associated with disease and takes steps to educate the community about, or protect it from, these risks.

- Just as application of public health principles and comprehensive strategies reduced the number of deadly traffic accidents and the number of deaths attributed to tobacco use, the public health model can help reduce the extent of injuries and deaths attributed to violence.
- The public health model includes five essential features:
 1. Community-based methods for problem identification and the development of solutions across entire population groups;
 2. Health-event surveillance for gathering data to establish the nature of the health problem and to track relevant risk factors and the trends of its incidence and prevalence;
 3. Epidemiological analysis to identify risk factors and associated co-factors associated with the health problem;
 4. Intervention design and evaluation; and
 5. Outreach/education/information dissemination.
- The public health approach allows one to think about violence not as an inevitable fact of life, but as a problem that can be prevented. It empowers individuals and communities to reduce the risk factors leading to violent behavior.

The information for this fact sheet was excerpted from the following book chapter. *Violence in American Schools* was developed by CSPV through a grant from the W.T. Grant Foundation:

Hamburg, M.A. (1998). Youth Violence is a Public Health Concern. In D.S. Elliott, B. Hamburg, & K.R. Williams (Editors), *Violence in American Schools: A New Perspective*, (pp.31-54). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

For more information on how to obtain a copy of this book, please contact Cambridge University Press, 110 Midland Avenue, Port Chester, NY 10573. Telephone: (800) 872-7423, E-mail: orders@cup.org, or URL: www.cup.org.