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Kids And Police In Schools

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ABSTRACT

Since the introduction of law enforcement in public school in the 1960s, school security has taken several different forms. Through the establishment of school district police departments, one problem has remained. School police officers, due to their primary involvement with schools, deal with negative juvenile/officer confrontations on a daily basis. Through research, this project will display that negative contact is a result of miscommunication and misunderstanding on the part of juveniles and police officers. The proposed recommendations are to implement specific officer training about juveniles and educational programs, as well as social activities for juveniles to better understand police officers and their initiative.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research paper is to express the importance of developing positive adolescent attitudes toward police officers and their authority in the schools and the community environment as well as to improve the lack of police understanding of the very special nature of adolescent problems and the importance of these years in developing positive and lasting social attitudes.

The issue to be examined is the adverse attitudes harbored by law enforcement officials and adolescents involving mutual contact. The result of these attitudes are miscommunication, misunderstanding, labeling and other unfavorable notions that can have a negative impact on juveniles when the officers come in contact with them for the first time.

The intended audience for this project include administrators, board members, teachers and police officers of independent school districts as well as other state and local agencies that focus involvement with adolescents.

The sources used in this research project to obtain pertinent and useful information include books, journals, surveys and documented text book statistical analyses.

The intended outcome of this project is to develop a better understanding of adolescent behavior through training and the implementation of programs involving schools and law enforcement personnel. In addition, it is a goal to improve the adolescent attitudes concerning police officers and their initiative.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In the early 1960s, local police departments were ever-plagued with increased crime rates in their jurisdictions and were less able to respond adequately to the local schools newly recognized needs. It was then that many urban school system administrators were forced to begin thinking of ways to provide some means of protection for their schools. The introduction of "school security" as a separate branch of law enforcement was that protection.

In the next few years to follow, many large city school districts implemented security operations in their school system and by the late 1960s, the success of these early security experiments lead to many other imitating systems. Subsequently, by the early 1970s, virtually all large school systems had implemented some form of school security in response to criminal and violent student behavior.

In these early years of implementing school security, these programs took several different forms. Some school districts hired "security aids" with no police authority or training and were little more than hall monitors. Other school systems employed off-duty police officers to work in their districts. These officers, unlike security aids, carried all their police powers and authority into this part-time employment. In later years, school districts in populated urban areas introduced their own police departments. These officers had complete police powers with state recognized commissions but their jurisdiction focused primarily on district schools and students and faculty within.

The introduction of this new presence into school systems had an immediate impact on many groups within the system. Whereas school faculties were generally very

receptive, school house administrators were not usually as pleased. Principles of schools experiencing frequent and severe incidents of violence were glad to have additional help, of course. But there was an almost universal resentment on the part of these administrators regarding what they felt was a demotion of their authority to make decisions about actions taken in their schools. Officers in some cases were making arrests on school grounds when administrators felt situations should be handled administratively. Conversely, some school management were demanding arrests when the school officers had no legal grounds to, and therefore refused to take action.

Administrators were not the only group who did not fully welcome the introduction of security personnel into the school systems. As a rule, students viewed security officers with suspicion and distrust. Students reflected attitudes, then not uncommon among the general public, of resentment and disrespect for law enforcement officers. There were some students, of course, who welcomed these officers, but rather than risk disapproval of their peer groups, most students offered only a negative response to the officers.

Here, then, were the beginnings of public school security- why it began, how it began, and some of the problems it faced in those first days of its introduction into the school systems. Through the years, with the commencement of school police programs all over the United States, school administrators have ironed out most of their early issues with the programs and have proven to be important in police department policy implications. In addition, there is little doubt that school security operations on a national level have reduced student and teacher fear-levels. The school police presence

has probably increased the overall stability of educational programs and have certainly reduced school property losses. The police have provided school systems with orderly and uniform methods of handling criminal incidents. But the problems of yesterday have not all been solved.

Since the introduction of police in the school systems, the issue of negative confrontations between juveniles and school law enforcement has not been resolved. History on this subject has revealed that there is a need for attitudinal changes among youth as well as school district police officers when dealing with each other. It has been found that by middle school and junior high, most students have already developed negative attitudes and behavior patterns concerning law enforcement due to many different reasons. This general anti-social conduct is carried on into high schools and many times leads to negative confrontations with police officers. Thus, a possible solution among others to this prolonged problem could be to positively influence the attitudes of adolescents at a younger age. The following research information displays possibilities that could help correct what has plagued the history of juvenile/law enforcement contact in our schools and could possibly give rise to new positive relations.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND PRACTICES

It is a commonly held view that many young people are often hostile towards police leading law enforcement to respond in a stern and aggressive manner to resolve confrontations with these juveniles. Again, this is a common angle seen by many, but there is much research data to support an almost opposite conclusion. According to

numerous studies on the attitudes of adolescents, children recognize the need for police forces and in many cases, are supportive of law enforcement in their schools.

In a national pole conducted by the Purdue Opinion Panel, some interesting information was uncovered regarding adolescent attitudes towards police authority. In this random national sampling of 12,000 high school students, the question was asked: "Should the police have the right to use whatever means are necessary to capture and punish criminals?" 51 % of the students polled agreed with that question. In response to the statement, "Police officers have no right to be on school property," 83% of the students polled disagreed, supporting the need for law enforcement on school campuses.

Why then, with these types of responses, is it generally assumed that youth are hostile toward police. Perhaps another statement that the same youths responded to can give light to their possible hostility toward police. Students were asked to respond to the statement, "High school students should be permitted to dress in any manner they please, to wear their hair the way they want, etc.," 71% agreed. Answers to questions like this display a general adolescent desire to be free of established law and authority as well as standards of behavior. It could be said for this, that attitudes harbored by adolescents about police are negated by the possible tendency of officers to respond negatively toward young people for their refusal to accept social norms supported by police.

Professor Donald Bouma from Western Michigan University conducted similar surveys but added the aspect of police responses to questions involving youth opinions, as well as juvenile response. In almost every category covered in these surveys, the police who were questioned believed that students had much more negative attitudes toward law enforcement than that which was found. One particular question of interest that was

asked to students, "Do you think criminals usually get caught?" 68% of the students polled answered "yes". Yet the police, when asked, "Do you feel students think criminals usually get caught?", 21 % answered "yes" while 62% answered "no".

TABLE 1
STUDENT RESPONSE

Question	Answer		
	Yes	No	Not sure
Do you feel that criminals usually get caught?	68%	15%	17%

TABLE 2
POLICE RESPONSE

Question	Answer		
	Yes	No	Not sure
Do you feel that students think criminals usually get caught?	21%	62%	17%

With regard to other questions asked of both students and police officers, this study found, "While there was no doubt about the pronounced negative feelings toward police held by the majority of students, the feelings were not nearly so negative nor as widespread as officers thought." ()

To search for possible contrasts in these finding a small but similar survey was conducted on the opinions of a Houston area independent school districts police

departments personnel. When the police officers from the Aldine Independent School District Police Department were asked similar questions as to those in the Bouma study, the results were not surprisingly very parallel. 85% of the officers questioned felt that most juveniles think criminals never get caught. Just as in the Bouma study, the Aldine officers had an over-exaggerated negative opinion of students attitudes and beliefs. When the officers were asked the question, "Do you think students would report a break in if they witnessed it?," 62% disagreed, when in fact, the previous study reported that 69% of students said they would report the incident. In addition, Aldine officers were asked if they thought students feel the world would be better off without police. Half of the officers polled agreed, While the Bouma study results displayed only 6% of students possessed this opinion.

The results of the Bouma study revealed that negative attitudes harbored by juveniles, though not as extreme as most officers conceived, increase during the years of early adolescents. This could be attributed to negative initial contact with law enforcement due to officers lack of understanding and aggressive behavior. Aggregately, the findings of the Bouma study and the smaller independent survey of the Aldine police officers lead to an obvious conclusion that officers have a misconceived notion about the opinions of youth and there is a need for additional training and programs to increase the awareness of actual adolescent behavior and attitudes.

DISCUSSION OF RELEVANT ISSUES

Spawning from research data obtained, it is obvious that there is a need for improving communication between school district police personnel and the student they

work with. School systems introduced security operations in to their school to help combat crime but now these officers are needed to help develop positive juvenile attitudes and social skills. This can be accomplished by officers being educated and aware of adolescent problems and conceptions of authority. This goal can be achieved through implementing required training programs in school district police departments.

School police are unique in the fact that their jurisdiction is primarily focused on schools and school activities. Likewise, their training needs to emphasize improving relations with the juveniles they are hired to deal with. This training needs to reveal to officers, their misconceptions about youths and their need to develop a better understanding of adolescent psychology and behavior. With this education, officers would be better able to reinforce positive juvenile attitudes rather than encourage the development of negative attitudes toward police and authority. Also, officers need not represent themselves nor society as perfect, but rather show sincere efforts to deal with these students and delinquency. This will lead students to believe change is possible, for no individual or group is perfect. Sincerity and frequent positive contact with students can help resolve miscommunications.

Another group within the school system that can be a valuable resource to help resolve this problem is the school educators. To utilize their help, teachers must first be familiar with the functions of school police agencies. Often, teachers have idealistic beliefs about police and their functions which can lead to the reinforcement of negative student attitudes toward officers. Secondly, teachers can help strengthen programs established to teach students about crime and police functions by reviewing material that

officers present to the students. This leads to the concept of officers teaching educational programs in the classrooms.

The introduction of educational programs taught by police officers in school would break down communication barriers and permit mutual learning and understanding. School programs taught by law enforcement would present the officers in a positive and realistic light, as well as reduce student fears of police and laws. This could happen through the implementation of educational material such as lectures, presentations, structured conversation and the like taught by the school district police officers. The objectives of the material would be to increase student awareness of laws and diversion opportunities, as well as to illicit student resolutions to crime and delinquency. In addition, officers could target such subjects as drugs, alcohol abuse, gang involvement and the importance of education.

This proposed school program could be put into action by assigning a school, or schools, to each officer within a school district police department. At scheduled opportunities, each officer would go to their assigned school and give presentations in a personal classroom setting. At other times, according to convenience and availability, the officer would frequent the school to establish a positive and social police presence. This would be beyond the routine call for service, but rather an initiative to promote improvement in communication. Emphasis should be placed on programs in elementary schools for the attitudes and behavioral patterns of this age-group can be easily influenced. Once these programs have entered the school curriculum, officers will notice a change in attitudes of students with whom they are in contact with, i.e., in non-offense situations, and a reduction in delinquent behavior.

The last program suggested to help improve juvenile/law enforcement communications is police department sponsored school and community social activities. These activities include movies, dances, police K-9 demonstrations, contact sports, picnics, street dance competitions, talent shows, etc. This social activities program would establish a positive rapport with juveniles, all the while educating the participants on the dangers of crime and delinquency. However, for this program to work it is important to note that police department personnel's voluntary time and efforts are very necessary. Also, outside assistance would need to be obtained from community service organizations to help with larger activities that financially are not feasible for the school district police department alone.

Whether all of these solutions are actually available to school police departments might "depend upon school district, local community, and state resources. In times of economic hardship, social services are often targeted for budget cutting and monetary restrictions. Thus, departments must find other avenues to obtain financial support for programs. Possible solutions are sponsorships, grants and donations, but most importantly officer dedication, voluntary time and effort are what will implement these programs. These programs go beyond a cost/benefit analysis, but rather a time/benefit analysis would better apply. Is it worth it for school district officers to dedicate their time and effort to departmental training, student and faculty education, and social activities? The answer is most definitely "yes". With the introduction of these proposed programs, school police officers, as well as the entire school system would enjoy better communications between officers and students. Thus, improving over-all officer job

satisfaction, as well as school safety.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this research paper is to express the importance of developing positive adolescent attitudes toward police officers and their authority in school and community environments, as well as to improve the lack of police understanding of the nature of adolescent problems and the importance of these years in developing positive and lasting social behavior.

This topic is relevant to school district police departments and their officers because of their extensive involvement with juveniles due to their jurisdictional focus on schools and students within.

The issue examined is the adverse attitudes harbored by law enforcement officials and adolescents involving mutual contact. The result of these attitudes are miscommunication, misunderstanding, labeling and other unfavorable notions that can have a negative impact on juveniles when officers come in contact with them.

The recommendations to this problem are to firstly, introduce required police departmental training for officer to understand their own misconceptions involving youth, as well as those harbored by juveniles. Secondly, implement police educational programs for students to be taught by school police officers in the classroom. Lastly, develop school and community based social activities sponsored by the school police departments.

These solutions will target the problem by establishing understanding on the part of police and juveniles through positive communication. By bringing miscommunications

and negative preconceived notions into the open, adverse police/juvenile confrontations, as well as delinquent behavior will be reduced.

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