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Workplace Violence: How it has affected
The Educational process.

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ABSTRACT

Workplace violence and school violence in the 1990s appeared to on the increase. In the years following the mass murder of students and educators at Columbine High School there appeared to be a decline nationwide. Studies have shown a decline in the past few years of juvenile violent crime arrests and juvenile violent behaviors in the schools, both in the nation and in Texas. Educators are more concerned over disruptive behavior in schools than they are violent acts. Although students in suburban schools feel they are in a safe environment, those in urban inner city schools do not share the same general feelings. With safe school programs and legislation passed not only in the nations capital, but on the state level as well, many schools are reporting a decline in school violence. Most of the information obtained in regards to juvenile violence in schools are based on arrests. However the data is self-reported and other missing values do not lend themselves to comparison or analysis.

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INTRODUCTION

The issue of workplace violence is relevant to law enforcement not only because most law enforcement employees are parents with children attending school, but also because this increases the workload for law enforcement departments when incidents occur. The purpose of the research paper will be to address the question: Can the threat of workplace violence be added to the list of reasons why there is a teacher shortage?

The intended method of inquiry will include not only a review of literature and other publications but also a survey of public school teachers in Central Texas. The results are anticipated to show that discipline and concerns over violence will be a key factor in the retention or recruitment of teachers. Violence against faculty and staff at a school falls into the category of workplace violence. The field of law enforcement will be affected in a long-term form as the cycle progresses. As students mature and leave the educational environment, they go back into the community. They are influenced by factors from the community that often lead to situations that place them on the opposite side of the criminal justice system.

Many students and teachers are more fearful today than ever before when they enter the doors of their school. However this fear may be somewhat exaggerated due to statistics indicating a decline in juvenile crimes across the nation. The causes of school violence are subject to speculation. Although, types of violence have not changed. Physical assaults, harassment, bullying, and threats are the most common. Conversely, the number of multiple homicides occurring in schools has declined over the past few years. The last major incident was Columbine High School in Colorado.

One may ask, who is to blame, parents, teachers, society, or chemical influence? It is hard to determine, parents blame the system, and teachers and counselors blame the parents. Studies show that it is a combination of several factors; there are more single parent households raising children and teachers, counselors, and school administrators are overwhelmed with a large volume of troubled children in the schools. Our solution is better training and cooperation with parents, teachers, and law enforcement.

In 1992 1.7 million violent crimes were reported to have been committed against students ages 12 through 18. In 1998 this number declined to 1.3 million. On average, each year from 1994 through 1998 there were 133,770 violent crimes against teachers at school. This translates into 31 violent crimes for every 1000 teachers. Research has shown that in the 1980s there was a drop in crimes at schools, with an increase in the early 1990s. In the later portion of the 1990s the trend seems to be on an upswing. From 1999 to 2001 the number increased to 1.5 million. One thing observed in the research is the fact that there seems to be an increase in violence and criminal activity for a various amount of years, then a decline, and then again an increase. Since 1992 there was an increase and decrease, and in the past five years another slight increase. Due to the fact the reporting is only a few years old, and is several years behind in being reported a pattern has not been established (National Center For Educational Statistics, 2002).

The threat of workplace violence intimidates everyone. In a public school setting, this can be very detrimental to a safe and secure learning environment. Violence can affect students to and from the environmental setting. This can lead to circumstances that spur violence off campus and the incident continue on the campus. This can lead to

a disruptive, poor functioning learning environment. Students and teachers alike have a difficult time in a learning environment if they know violence will follow them to what use to be considered a safe environment.

This research paper will address the issues of why educators and students still feel unsafe in their environment. This issue will be examined in suburban as well as urban school settings. The research will explore the causes of workplace violence in public schools, and the impact it has on the education process. This research is intended to take an extensive and comprehensive review of the causes of workplace violence in the educational environment. It is likely this review will determine if intimidation and fear are underlying factors in the decline in qualified teachers.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

What is work place violence? It may mean refer to any violent or threatening action that takes place within the confines of 4 walls of an assigned work area, during specific work hours. One must also consider the break room, classroom, parking lot, and to and from work. The work environment is not limited to work station, or area.

Workplace violence began making headlines in the 1980s. In the 1990s studies began surfacing as to the causes of workplace violence. The U.S. Postal Service suffered 42 deaths among postal employees in a 7-year period due to workplace violence. In the 1990's public schools across the United States suffered multiple homicides at the hands of disgruntled students. Another chapter was added to the research into the causes of Workplace violence after the incidents at our schools (U.S. Postal Service, 1994).

Law enforcement agencies began studies into the personality of the type of person capable of such violent action. The U.S. Justice Department and the F.B.I. have categorized workplace violence into four categories:

1. Crime: Specifically Armed Robbery of retail outlets.

2. Terrorism: These attacks are for political or religious reasons.

3. Employee Assaulted by Known Associate: This category is normally employee vengeance, mentally disturbed worker/student, domestic violence, and revenge

4. Obsessional. This is generally the result of a broken relationship or a monomania (one-side) love affair. (U.S. Justice Dept., 2000)

What are the causes of workplace violence? Studies by the U.S. Justice Department, and law enforcement professionals across the United States determined that social issues, substance abuse, and poverty are key causes of workplace violence. The US Postal System stated that a hostile work environment was a key factor in causing employees to go over the edge. The term "going postal" became a common household term as a result of the 42 homicides in 7 years at U.S. Postal offices across the country. In several cases a broken relationship was the cause of the individual to go to the victim's place of employment and kill the victim as well as bystanders (U. S. Justice Dept., 2000).

This research will primarily examine Category III. This is due to the fact that most workplace violence in a school environment involves a perpetrator known to the victim. Students carry out their retribution against classmates and authority figures at schools. In the Columbine shootings in Colorado, the students who carried out the

attack did so as a means of getting even with preppy students. A teacher who tried to protect the students was wounded and later died.

Students who are disturbed or with a mental illness will direct their violent tendencies towards their fellow students and the faculty.   Members of the faculty, or personal domestic disputes are also carried out on school property. Former boyfriends or spouses may target female teachers. Gang related activities, or drug related activity that turns violent could also fall into the category of workplace violence.   Teachers in their daily contact with students are subject to threats, threatening behavior, and assaults. A teacher punishes a student, due to his emotional state or learning disability the student decides to get even with this teacher. A student is disrupting the class, as the teacher approaches to control the situation; the student takes his aggression out on the authority figure that just approached him/her.

A teacher breaks up a fight and due to the emotional level of the combatants one of them turns on the teacher and assaults the teacher. The number of emotionally disturbed students in public schools has increased. The number of students with learning disabilities has increased. This increase is more prevalent in the urban schools. This is due in part to the fact urban schools in low socio-economic neighborhoods do not have the financial resources to obtain services for the emotionally disturbed students.

The level of violence in our schools has been increasing for the past decade (Kopka, 1997). Violence in and around schools has become more common and more serious (Kachur et al., 1996; National League of Cities, 1995). Three million crimes are committed each year on the campuses of America's public schools. A Gallup Poll conducted in 1997 of attitudes toward public schools revealed that public school

teachers showed that 41% believed that violence in the schools is a very serious problem. The Gallup Poll revealed that fights, violence, gangs ranked with lack of discipline as the most significant problems facing our schools (Rose & Gallup, 1998).

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention has begun collecting data for states to monitor risky behavior of students such as carrying weapons or other violent actions. This data however is not available from Texas however as Texas did not participate in the survey. The Safe and Drug Free Schools Program, a federally funded effort to make our schools safer has begun to collect statistics on school violence in Texas. Although there was a 27 percent increase in the rate of assaults against students and teachers between 1996 and 1998, the rates for other types of violence in Texas schools is not increasing as rapidly as many fear.

Between 1994 and 1997, there was a significant drop in the number of assaults against students (50,904 to 45,556), but the number increased dramatically again in 1997-98 (to 58,634). Assaults against teachers and staff and the number of firearms confiscated showed similar decreases until 1997, but then increased again in 1998 (Violence And Weapons in Texas Schools, 2004).

Texas teacher's report they fear for their safety, and perceive more problems with crime than do principals. Over 60 percent of the teachers surveyed by the Texas Education Agency indicated that threats of violence were of concern, and 56 percent were aware of assaults on students (Texas Education Agency, 2003).

Most of the available literature pertaining to school violence is somewhat outdated. The most recent publications cite publications dating back to the late 1990's. The available literature indicates that each researcher relied on the results of other researchers to complete their research and data collection. One report basically follows

the trend of the other reports. There has not been a recent report that would show the results attempted in this research. The results appear to indicate that although there is somewhat of a decline in the number of violent incidents in schools, the number of teachers who have left did not use physical assault as the main reason for their departure from the educational process.

This researcher relied on the most prolific researchers, and collectors of data for more up to date information, however the information from their more current research has not been published as of this time. The information contained in this research comes from data that is several years out of date.

METHODOLOGY

Physical violence in schools has become a common occurrence. It is more prevalent in urban schools than in the suburban area schools. Although there is a decline in the reported violence involving juveniles youth violence is still substantial. When a teacher is assaulted or threatened at a school, this is termed as workplace violence. Workplace violence is a commonplace occurrence in public schools. (Private schools report a very low if not a non-existent rate of threats and violence.) Is there an impact on the educational system? Research shows that although there is a slight decline in the number of juvenile arrests, violence in our schools is still a continuing problem. The research although showing this decline supports the fact that violent behavior in schools has a slight increase.

Does violence on school campuses affect teachers and staff at a school? Does workplace violence affect a teacher's decision to change professions or change

educational environments? Research shows that 41% of the teachers nationwide reported that assaults and threats were a major concern in their decisions to leave urban schools for more rural or suburban school systems.

A survey has been sent to teachers in the Central Texas area. This survey will encompass at least one major school district in the Central Texas area. The purpose to the research questions will be to see if there is a correlation between teachers leaving the educational system and the aspect of becoming a victim of violence or threats at a public school campus. It is anticipated, that due to the lack of research in the area of why teachers quit, that the research will possibly indicate that economics will carry a larger role in this scenario than being a victim of crime. Most of the limited research only gives data on students as victims of crime, with very limited information on teachers.

Although this survey has been disseminated electronically the response rate is anticipated to be slow. During the summer months most teachers are out of contact until school begins in the fall. The response rate will depend on their arrival back to their perspective campuses. Once the information is obtained the results will be analyzed to determine if teachers feel that Work Place Violence is a key factor in their decision to change professions or move from Urban districts. The results of this survey have not been obtained as of this writing.

However based on a sample survey by Education Austin, a teacher's union in the Austin, Texas area, most teachers are leaving this district for higher pay, jobs in technology, or changing to a more stable environment.

FINDINGS

During the 1980's, 1990s, and the early part of the 2000 and 2001 school year there was an increase in school violence. School violence and workplace violence coincided with each other. In many instances of school related shootings and deaths around the country teachers as well as students were the victims of the rampages. From 1992 until 2001 there was a decrease in the number of homicides occurring on school campuses (National Center For Educational Statistics, 2002).
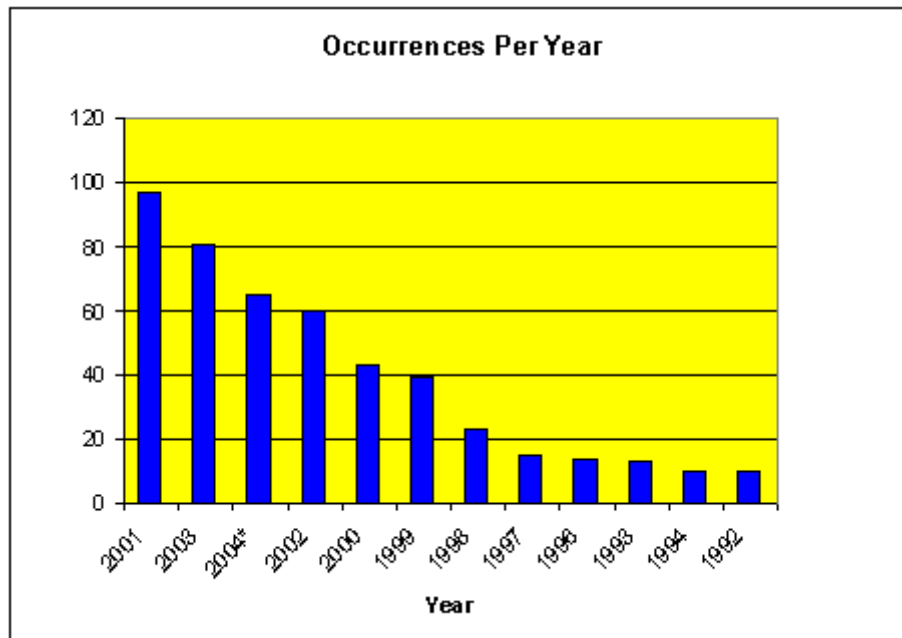

Table 1

In Table 1, from the National Institute of Occupational and Safety Institute, shows that there was an increase of school campus homicides until 2001 and then there was a steady decline in 2002 thru 2004. This decline was due in part to the world wide

attention that schools such as Columbine generated in the media. With the media

coverage other school systems began investigating their own campus safety procedures
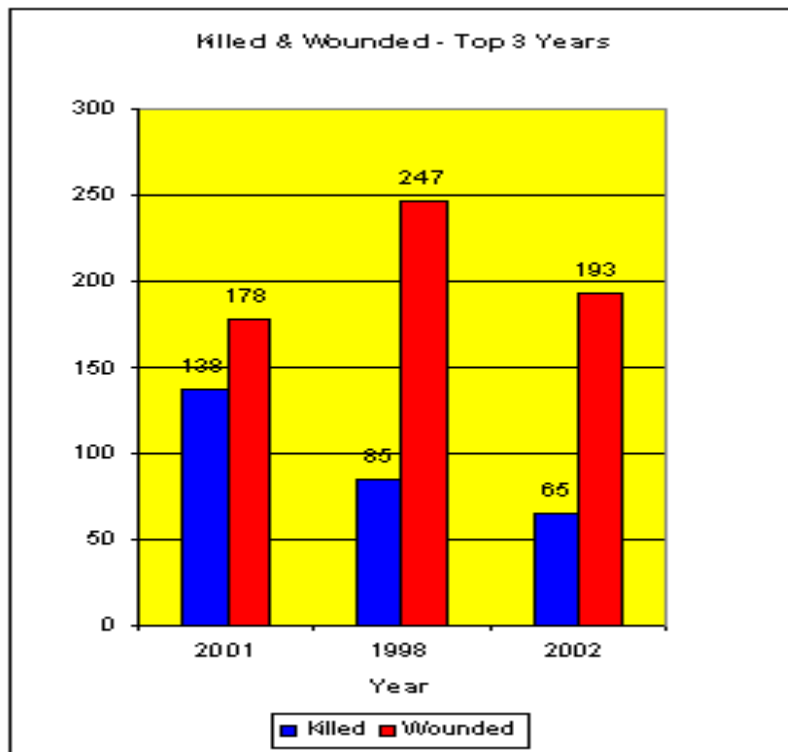
(NIOSH, 2004).

Table 2

Table 2 shows the top three years for homicides in public schools were 1998,2001, and

2002. The year before Columbine, and the two years following Columbine were the

worst for school shootings. Although the majority of the deaths were students, faculty

and staff also suffered tremendously (School Violence Resource Center, 1996 -2005).
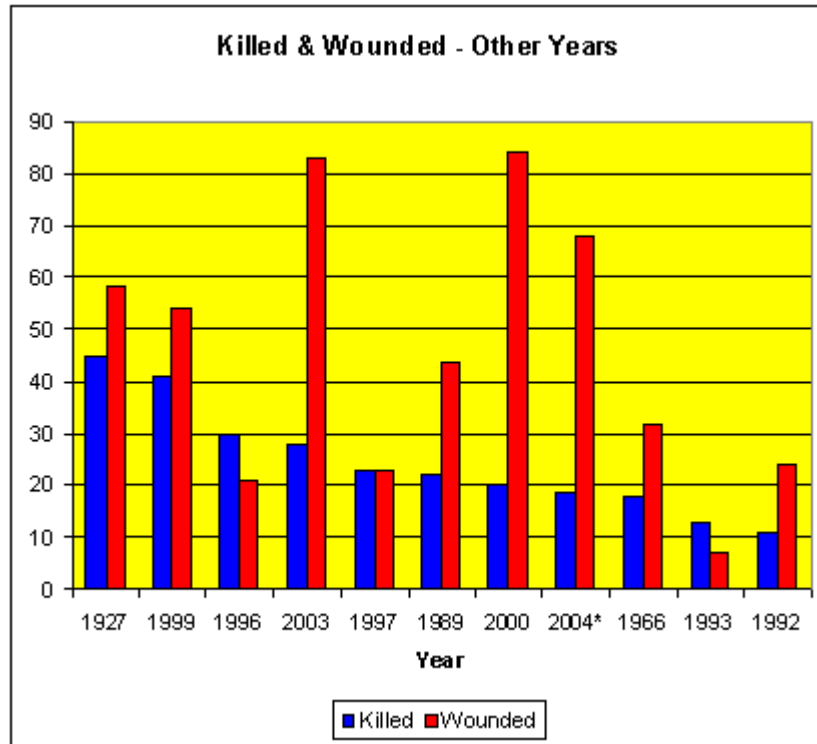
Table 3

Table 3 obtained from NIOSH indicates the worst years of homicide in public

schools. The worst years according to NIOSH indicates 2000, 2003, and 2004. In table

1 NIOSH indicated that 2001 was the worst year for homicides. In this table NIOSH

indicates that 1999 would have been the worst year. More students were wounded in

2000 than in previous years. Also included in this chart is the University of Texas

shootings in 1966 (NIOSH, 2004).

Year	Killed	Wounded
2001	138	178
1998	85	247**
2002	65	193
1927	45	58
1999	41	54
1996	30	21

2003	28	83
1997	23	23
1989	22	44
2000	20	84
2004*	19	68
1966	18	32
1993	13	7
1992	11	24
1988	10	27
1995	10	17
1994	10	7
1964	8	20
1991	8	4
1970	7	21
1959	6	17
1986	4	82
1974	3	9
1978	3	2
1968	3	0
1984	2	11
1979	2	10
1985	2	3
1982	2	2
1983	2	1
1980	2	1
1987	2	0

Table 4

Table 4 indicates the number killed/wounded each year. The worst years were from

1998 thru 2001. The years 2002 thru 2004 show a decline in the number killed and

wounded. There are several factors that could have affected this decline. Better

Violence prevent programs at schools, and more adequate safety procedures at

educational institutions appear to lead the list of items that lead to the decline. The

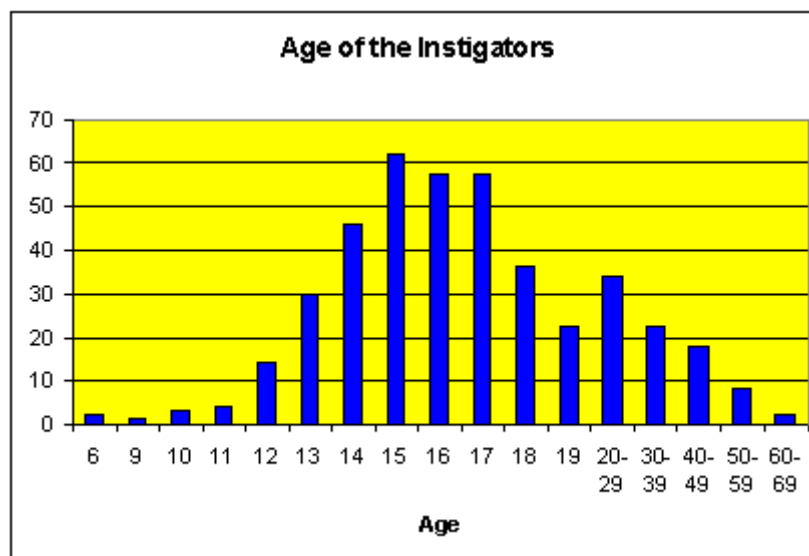tragedy of 9/11/2001 also is considered a major contributing factor.

Table 5

Table 5 indicates the approximate age of the individuals involved in the homicides that

occurred on campuses. The average age for school age perpetrators is 13.3 years

(Violence in our schools, 2003).

Table 6

Table 6 indicates the number of homicides according to the type of campus.

School Type	Number
Elementary School	51
Middle / Junior High School	94
Senior / High School	298
University / College	35
Unknown	61

High schools have a higher incident of homicide than all the other schools combined

(NIOSH, 2004)

Reported Incidence of Violence and Weapons in Texas Schools Rate per 1,000 Students	1994-95		1995-96		1996-97		1997-98	
	Number	Rate	Number	Rate	Number	Rate	Number	Rate
Incidents of school-related gang violence	5,736	1.6	5,945	1.6	8,959	2.3	6,879	1.8
Assaults against students	50,904	13.9	47,987	12.8	45,558	11.9	58,634	15.1
Assaults against teacher/staff	6,238	1.7	4,125	1.1	3,927	1.0	4,369	1.1
Number of firearms confiscated	851	0.2	542	0.1	523	0.1	576	0.1
Number of other weapons confiscated	8,554	2.3	5,081	1.4	7,993	2.1	7,436	1.9

Source: Safe and Drug Free Schools Program, Texas Education Agency. Between 9 and 11 school districts did not report each year.

Table 7

Table 7 although more outdated than the other tables shows a decline in school

violence between 1995 thru 1997. In school year 1997 thru 1998 there is a significant

increase in the number of assaults against students and faculty (Texas Education

Agency, 1998).

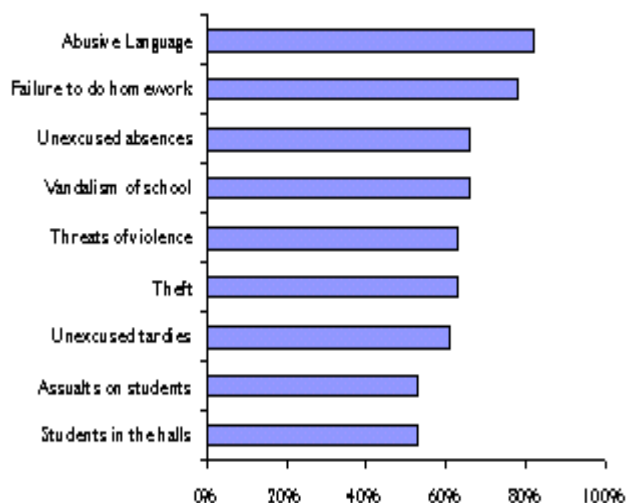## Top Behavior Problems reported by Texas Teachers

Table 8

Table 8 shows the number of behavior problems reported to the Texas Education Agency. Threats and assaults are lower on the list than other problems that educators are reporting. These charts are an indication that violence in schools is on a decline. The students and educators feel somewhat safer now than they did five years ago.   The correlation between workplace violence on public school campuses, and student violence seems to waiver. The definition of workplace violence does not meet the same criteria of student violence, unless an educator is assaulted or threatened by a student (Texas Education Agency, 1998).

Rate of Violence and Weapons per 1,000 Texas Students

Assaults against students
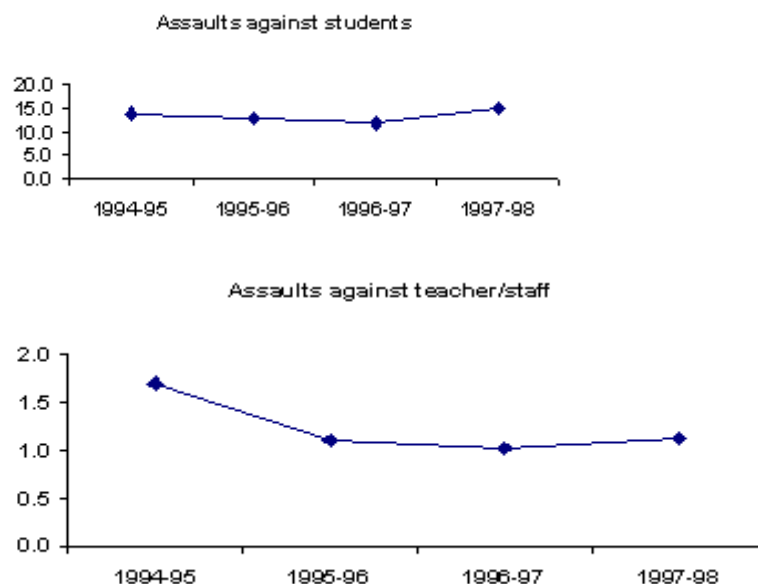

Assaults against teacher/staff

Table 9

Table 9 from Violence and Weapons in Texas schools shows that assaults against teacher/staff have declined with a slight increase in 1997-1998. The assaults against students for this same time frame have shown an increase.

The research of workplace violence, although more extensive for the private sector, has very limited resources for public school systems. Public school violence is parallel to workplace violence. In most if not all-multiple shootings/homicides at public schools teachers and staff were also victims of this violence. This changes the complexity of school violence to also be classified as workplace violence (Weapons and violence in Schools, 2002).

Chris E. McGoey in his report of Dangerous Occupations, compiled the following statistics based on the rate of violence per 1000 workers over a five year period as follows: (Chris McGoey Workplace Violence Dangerous Occupations, 2004)

Junior High/Middle School Teachers	57	47,300
School Bus Drivers	45	17,200
Special Education Teachers	41	9,000
High School Teachers `	29	33,300
Elementary School Teachers	16	35,400

It is interesting to note that Junior High/Middle School teachers show a higher incidence of being assaulted or threatened than high school teachers.

During the 1980s and 1990s multiple homicides at industrial sites, post offices, and retail sites were in the news almost weekly. From the late 1990's until 2001 school violence showed a dramatic increase. The victims were not only students, educators, and staff as well.

This research has found thus far that nationwide there is reported decline in juvenile violence, from the year 2001. This decline became evident after the fatal shootings at Columbine High School and Sept. 11, 2001. Surveys conducted by the Texas Education Agency (Table 8) show that teachers are more concerned over the educational process and the disruptive activities of the students than they are of violence on the campus. However this decline in juvenile violence depends on several factors. The reporting method, the reporting agency, and how the information is disseminated.

CONCLUSION

The general idea of this research was to ascertain if faculty, staff, and students felt that Workplace Violence, or campus violence was as prevalent now as it was just a few years ago. Has violence or the threat of violence affected the educational process?

Although there seems to be some shift in the attitude towards school violence, with students reporting they feel somewhat safer at school, this attitude has relied on information obtained from suburban and urban school districts. Students from suburban districts are reporting feeling safer. Students from urban districts are indicating they do not feel any safer now than before. Hispanic and African American students report they do not feel any safer now than before. Studies suggest relationships between the frequency of violence and characteristics of the school (number of students enrolled) student demographics are not conclusive enough to target populations for intervention.

The Texas Federation of Teachers School Safety Survey conducted a survey in 1993, and then again in 2002 after the passage of the Safe Schools Act. Their findings indicate that since the passage of the Safe Schools Act, a significant drop in physical violence and threats of violence was reported. Threats of physical violence to students dropped from 62.93 % in 1993 to 29.44% in 2002. Assaults against students dropped from 68.87% in 1993 to 42.88% in 2002. The educators who responded to the survey stated assaults on faculty dropped 2% from 1993 to 2002.

The survey conducted by this researcher of teachers (approximately 487 responded), in the Austin Independent School District had results that were in line with the survey by the Texas Federation of Teachers. Only 28% of the responding teachers said they had been assaulted or threatened by a student or non-student. Over 40% of the teachers responding felt more threatened of being assaulted by an irate parent than a student. At least 45% of the teachers responding to the survey blamed the administration's not taking action, or responding with minimum punishment as more of a concern than threats of violence. Teachers felt lack of support, and failure of the

administrators to enforce discipline as more of a concern over fear of assaults and threats.

The research although indicating that a smaller percentage of teachers and students still feel unsafe at school, the majority of the students nationwide felt safer now than before. However as previously stated, students in a suburban setting felt safer, than those in urban schools. The same also applied to the faculties at these campuses. Most faculty members felt that disruptive behavior in classrooms, and lack of action by administrators was more of a problem than campus violence. Faculty report leaving the educational system more so for financial reasons, and lack of support from the school districts, rather than from fear of being a victim of violence.

This researcher had difficulty in finding current material to support the hypothesis. Most of the material available for a nationwide examination was several years old, and recent material was not available. Some of the material found dates back to the mid 1990s. The most recent material was from this researcher's home state, however was not current.

A vast majority of school districts in the United States have their own police department. Officers are assigned to the campuses as School Resource Officers. Their tasks are to provide safety, security, and enforce criminal laws on the campuses. With an apparent increase in discipline issues on campuses, the SRO'S are called to examine the situation and ascertain if a criminal or educational law has been violated. With the increase in discipline issues the SRO is becoming overwhelmed with calls for service from the faculty. The discipline issues on campus are demonstrated off campus as well, and vice versa. With teachers reporting classroom discipline issues as a major problem, and also reporting lack of administrative support this in turn creates a two-fold

problem for law enforcement. With lack of discipline in our school systems, the problem is also carried into the neighborhoods. This in turn creates more issues of problem solving for officers on the street.

Workplace violence and school violence obviously was a major factor in the late 1990s and early 2000. However with the reported decline in juvenile violence, and an increase in lack of discipline, workplace violence on school campuses has taken a back seat to other issues currently plaguing the school campuses.

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