Are Adventist Schools Safe?

The answer may surprise you.

A recent study of 24 Adventist schools in the Pacific Union Conference conducted by Plummer and Gifford found that violence has invaded our schools.

By Paul Plummer

The Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll for 1995 showed that "a vast number of the [U.S.] public believes that violence in the public schools is increasing, not only in the nation's schools (89%) but in local schools (67%) as well." The poll also showed that people with children in private or church-related schools were much more likely to think that violence in public schools had increased a great deal. This finding may suggest that parents send their children to private or church-related schools to escape the violence in public schools. Also, one might conclude that these parents think that private or church-related schools are violence-free or at least have fewer problems in this area than public schools.

For the past several years, the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company has published a survey called *The American Teacher*, which reports on students' opinions about violence, social tension, and equality among teenagers.

About one in four students nationally report having serious problems in school with hostile or threatening remarks and physical fights. One in five students (22 percent) say that violence has decreased over the past year, yet an equal proportion say it has increased (21 percent). Violence is rampant in today's world. It "runs the gamut from bullying to murder, and finds fertile ground in television programs, movies, videos, and superhero games, where it's gussied up and glamorized."

Are violence and crime increasing in private and church-related schools? Are these schools as safe as parents perceive them to be? In 1991, Dale Johnson wrote an article for this *Journal* entitled "Coping With the Unthinkable: Violence in SDA Schools." Violence in our schools may have been "unthinkable" in the past, but Adventist schools are not unaffected by the effects of violence, which can and do occur every-
In general, public school administrators and teachers have been more willing to acknowledge their concern about school safety than have Adventist educators.
Are violence and crime increasing in private and church-related schools?

of the schools reported that there were never any threats or intimidations, while 22 percent had more than one incident a month. Fourteen percent reported that kicking, biting, or hitting never occurred at their school, while 23 percent said they had more than one incident a month.

To the question, “What are your three major safety concerns?” nine out of 24 schools indicated a concern about intrusion on campus by non-students. This appears to be a major problem.

Adventist educators have usually played down such statistics or denied that crime or violence is a concern on their campuses. In general, public school administrators and teachers have been more willing to acknowledge their concern about school safety than have Adventist educators.

The security director of one of our colleges tells of talking about crime on campus with his counterpart at another Adventist college. The other security director said there was no crime on his campus. When asked if there was fighting or theft in the dorms, he said “yes,” but those things didn’t count as crimes. His attitude reflects the thinking of many Adventist school administrators and teachers.

The study cited above makes it plain why school safety must be a major concern of Adventist educators. We can no longer deny that crime and violence occur in our schools; we must find ways to stop them.

The National Center for Education Statistics recently published a study showing what percentage of American students in grades six through 12 had heard reports about, witnessed, worried about, or were victimized by bullying, physical attack, and robbery.

Figure 1: SCHOOL SAFETY STUDY
How often have the following incidents occurred on your campus during the past year?
(Reported by 24 schools in Pacific Union Conference)
School officials can respond in one of two ways to the growing concern about violence and crime on school campuses—reactively or proactively.

includes a school-wide safety plan that is discussed with faculty, staff, parents, and students.

As Adventist educators, we need to take a proactive stance when it comes to school violence and safety concerns. The articles in this special issue should help each of us to acknowledge the problems of violence and crime on our campuses. They will suggest positive ways to make our schools safer places where the peace and love of Christ pervades the campuses, and everything possible has been done to banish fear, crime, and violence.

Dr. Paul E. Plummer is Professor of Education at Pacific Union College, Angwin, California and Coordinator for this issue.

REFERENCES


5. Ibid.


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Figure 2:

Reports by U.S. students in grades six to 12 of the occurrence, witnessing, worry about, or victimization, by selected incidents: 1993

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incident</th>
<th>Occurred</th>
<th>Witnessed</th>
<th>Worried about</th>
<th>Happened to student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Attack</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Robbery</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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