

Capstone Project



Violence in Schools

Spread of violence is inevitably attributed to processes of globalization, which have gained momentum nowadays. Needless to say, an act of violence is by all means a calamitous occurrence. In this respect, any act of violence that takes place at school is particularly frightening and alarming. On the other hand, school shootings as isolated examples of violent associated behaviors can be used to explain the notions of mass violence, social solidarity, and cultural trauma. Typically, one of the most notable aftermaths of a large-scale act of violence is that many people are victimized. With regard to this, a need to contemplate the gist of immediate and adequate response to calamitous events of that kind asserts itself. Developing this statement further, it should be noted that the issue of global insecurity is an integral part of modern reality. Therefore, the foregoing problem should be contemplated for the good and safety of all people.

Part I: Background

Scholars argue that there is an inherent interdependence between academic performance, psychosocial environment of an educational establishment, and an increased violent prevalence rate. Violence in schools is typically attributed to the amount of students attending that school, students' demographic diversity, and the state of academic environment. In the

meantime, researchers report that school crime and disruption are negatively correlated with such factors as, for instance, students' acceptance rates and student-to-teacher proportions. Implementation of the programs preventing violence in schools has proved to be a must. The researchers point out that taking the foregoing statements into consideration may presumably facilitate the implementation of violence prevention programs. Disambiguation of the notions of aggression, bullying, and violence is essential for the successful implementation of violence prevention programs. Hence, the researchers emphasize that it is necessary to investigate violence-associated behaviors in schools through the lens of interpersonal relationships between individual students, certain groups of students, and students versus educators.

Violence-associated behaviors among the youngsters can be viewed as a burning international problem. Certain behavioral patterns, namely leaking and threats, may potentially explain the mechanisms of violence, which can help in precluding violence in schools. A comparative analysis of the international school violence prevalence and crime rates, in its turn, may presumably give a broader vision of the problem within the framework of global context.

The scholars admit that the exaggerated perception of danger puts the maintenance of school safety and implementation of the effective means of dealing with violence in schools on hold. It is believed that school shootings reached their peak level when the cases of school violence have been concurrently declined. The experts from the Federal Bureau of Investigations claim that profiling as one of the possible means to preclude school shootings has proved to be insufficient.

As far as the issue of neighborhood's characterization is concerned, it is important to admit that neighborhood is heterogeneous by nature. In most of the recent researches, however, neighborhood is treated as a homogenous entity. As far as the issue of school violence prevalence rate is concerned, it is important to admit several aspects. First, having contemplated the essence of such concepts as, for instance, academic achievement, perceived school and neighborhood safety, violence exposure, and neighborhood environment, scholars arrive at conclusion that the concepts are intermingled. With regard to this, the two main findings made by the scholars are as follows: violence exposure and academic progress are claimed to be inter-connected, and academic progress and neighborhood environment, in their turn, are influenced by conception of safety and violence exposure rates, the latter two being customized.

Academic environment is shaped mainly by the local community. At the same time, academic environment is affected by access to weapons, neighborhood violence, and gang activity. Possessing and carrying weapons at schools is commonly referred to as a factor increasing the risks of school atrocities. Developing this statement further, according to the researchers, in the USA, an assumed prevalence rates of possessing and carrying weapons is as follows: "white males - 30,3%, black males - 24,6%, Hispanic males - 28,2%; "white females - 6,1%, black females - 10%, Hispanic females - 9%". Evidently, youth violence proves itself to be a matter of public health to a great extent. Therefore, adequate and sufficient response mechanisms and preventive measures need to be worked out and implemented in this respect. Notwithstanding that the number of school homicides has decreased, obviation of violence in schools still remains a topical issue because carrying weapons, fighting, and bullying are still commonplace

practices. Moreover, violent associated behaviors apparently cause more serious concerns. Youth violence is commonly referred to as an unmistakable sign of future aggression. Hence, it is necessary to disambiguate the means of appropriate response to youth violence. As of 2007, Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) reported that: a) 12% out of 14 000 students being inquired indicated that they were involved in physical fights at school at least once in the past 12 months; b) 6% have reported carrying weapons “at least once in the past 30 days”; c) 8% of students asserted that they were injured or threatened with weapons at school at least once in the past year. Clearly, the data provided by the YRBS position themselves as an issue for concern.

One of the most calamitous and heinous acts of violence has occurred recently in Jokela, Finland. The whole country was challenged by a shooting in one of the local schools of Jokela. The event itself greatly impacted all the citizens of Finland. School shootings in general and Jokela case in particular can be characterized as woeful events leading to a collective cultural trauma due to a great deal of their unexpectedness and unpreparedness. Unexpectedness of such events and unpreparedness to social calamities of that kind can be explained by the fact that in both cases the tragedy comes from within the society itself. With regard to this, scholars list an increased social solidarity level among the consequences of cultural trauma. At this particular point, the issue of living patterns asserts itself. It is believed that a collective cultural trauma affects society's living patterns significantly.

Evidently, Jokela school shooting has victimized a great number of people. Hence, the event can be also characterized as a shared crisis. Moreover, the event has proved itself to be a sorrowful and unforgettable experience for

the whole country and community of Jokela in particular. Reluctance to deal with a crisis itself and to consider its consequences, guilt, and a state of constant distress impeded social groups' resistance. Specifically, the foregoing factors hinder society's socio-psychological recovery. It is asserted that mass violence is capable of hampering people's interaction patterns and social engagement for quite a long period of time. Dealing with distress and tragic events in general is an individual endeavor. For this reason, the concept of social solidarity turns out to be ambiguous.

Community of Kauhajoki (Finland) was also persecuted by a school shooting in 2008. Jokela and Kauhajoki school shootings are reported to "have not been totally unexpected". Hence, the issue of the global context of violent-associated behaviors in school evolves. Scholars assert that integration and welfare are the two main factors shaping violent behavior and the act of violence as such. It is believed that Scandinavian countries hold safety of their residents among their primary goals. Therefore, Nordic welfare countries have already worked out the mechanisms for an adequate and immediate response to atrocity by localizing emergencies and minimizing the future risks. However, the efficacy of the latter is questioned. Evidently, the society of Finland found itself in a state of deep shock having encountered the two indelible school killings. It is reported that Jokela and Kauhajoki cases have almost brought school killings on the verge of becoming "a middle-class reality" in Finland.

Scholars report that there is a great deal of similarity between the school shootings in Finland and atrocities of the same kind that took place earlier in the United States of America. Similarity here is the fact that the school killings in Finland and the USA occurred mainly in suburban or rural areas. In this

respect, Columbine High School massacre has proved itself to be one of the most outrageous events of the kind.

Having contemplated the effects of distress, scholars arrive at conclusions that youngsters are aware about the causes of violence. These particular social groups are believed to be most susceptible, especially when atrocity is about to repeat itself. It is asserted that men and elderly people are supplier on the matters being discussed. Clearly, tackling a heinous event is difficult. The point scholars are trying to make is that Nordic countries in general and Finland in particular have to find and implement new ways of dealing with distress and violence in order to guarantee their residents' safety.

Atrocity basically causes broader problems if compared to its threats being explicit by nature. Calamitous events of that kind affect large social groups. Unexpectedness of and unpreparedness to school shooting is counted among the major risk factors. The authorities should take the foregoing risk factors into account to ensure consolidation of community and its socio-psychological recovery in case of social, economic, and/or political distress.

Analyzing the mechanisms of school violence prevention, the scholars state that the issue of peer support needs to be explored further. Methodology of peer support implies that children and adolescents are urged to give their fellow students who are experiencing adversity social and emotional support. The proponents and users of a peer support method are the two categories of people who may potentially take the advantage of it. Peer support is a matter of school ethos to a greater extent. Peer support and peer mentoring programs are both reported to have positive impact on the

academic environment. Therefore, a peer support method and peer mentoring programs are important in terms of pro-social behavior promotion and maintenance of safety at schools.

Health education curriculum can be viewed as another means of preventing violence in schools. The initiatives of that kind should focus on promoting lenience and pro-social behaviors. Due to the increased amounts of the cases of under-age firearms' possession, scholars are seriously considering the use of metal detectors at schools. The foregoing premise is controversial in a sense that metal detectors' use has its positive and negative outcomes. The negative outcomes here rest upon the fact that the issue of students' health is concerned.

A close attention should be also paid to threat assessment as one of the most effective means for youth violence prevention. Threat assessment can be viewed, above all else, as an alternative to a profiling technique. But most importantly, threat assessment is a procedure that "focuses on determining whether the individual (or group) actually poses a threat or is engaged in threatening behavior for some other reason". This presupposes that minor acts of aggression do not come unnoticed.

Part II: Research Proposal

Evidently, the authorities have taken the issue of safety at schools seriously. Hence, it is reported that safety levels of the American elementary and secondary educational establishments have been improving lately. However, such violent associated behaviors as, for instance, coercion, theft, and

assault tend to trigger broader social concerns. There is no unambiguous approach towards the definition of safety. In other words, the very essence of the term 'safety' is vague. Therefore, the ambiguity of the notion of safety can be viewed as one of the key factors preventing an adequate and immediate response to youth violence. An adequate and immediate response to violence in schools presupposes a strong collaborative relationship between "policy makers developing a national strategic agenda, lawmakers approving funding, and local human services agencies providing support programs".

As far as the problem of social stratification is concerned, it is important to admit that scholars classify children in the rural areas as the most vulnerable segments of society. A great number of armed conflicts, for instance, took place in the vicinity of the Colombia school district. It is argued that school violence is inseparably connected with the violence in society. It is admitted that it is rather difficult to foresee the long-term effects of the initiatives being employed in order to prevent violence from spreading. In particular, this implies that our capability of contemplating the efficacy of these initiatives is insufficient. The scholars are convinced that involvement of civil society is needed in this respect to ensure new proposals are brought forward and the long-term effects of educational policies are taken into account. By and large, the following issues should be explored further: mechanisms for youth violence prevention on school property; means of immediate and adequate response to atrocities; firearms' possession legislation; academic environment; and student-educator relationship paradigm. With regard to this, the scholars make the following statement: "The goal for educators is to develop an integrated approach that spans the range from minor misbehavior to life-threatening situations and focuses on

maintaining safety and order”.

A population segment involved in the purposed research is mostly represented by students and educators of the elementary, secondary, and high schools. The purposed research implies the analysis of data associated with violence prevalence among children and adolescents by gender, race, and performance rates. Systematization of previous findings is important as well. A realistic timeline for completing a purposed research is approximately 3-5 years. This particular timeline is optimal to ensure predictive analysis and that the problem is explored over time. From a staffing perspective, around 3-4 dozens of people would be needed to conduct the purposed research. Inquiries of students and staff of educational establishments, sociometric tests, and systematization of data and researches associated with youth violence in a period of past decade form the applicable research methods. Around 300 subjects are required for our study. The resulting data should be systematized and reported in a scholarly periodical focusing on the matters of education and psychology. Evidently, the purposed research may potentially be of use for elementary, secondary, and high schools.

Conclusion

The increased violence prevalence among youngsters, which is supported statistically, testifies a decay of modern culture and is by all means alarming. School shootings in the United States of America and Finland triggered broader concerns in a sense that a) each case of school shooting was unexpected and, therefore, society was unprepared for it, b) school shootings impeded communities' sense of security. What is more important,

they had very much in common. Developing this statement further it is necessary to admit that youth violence has two dimensions: social and political one. All things considered, a social dimension of youth violence transcends the limits of states' borders. Shared experience, individual versus collective cultural trauma, social solidarity, resistance, and socio-psychological recovery are listed among the concepts associated with such a woeful and calamitous event as a school shooting.

Obedience by law, order, yet unconventional thinking, and treatment of conformity with caution can be viewed as the possible solutions to violence at schools. The idea here is that unconventional thinking and cautious treatment of conformity are needed so that the acts of minor aggression could not go unnoticed. Order, lenience, and pro-social behavior prove themselves to be self-explanatory in this respect. All things taken into account, our conception of safety/security has to be reconsidered. Threat assessment, implementation of peer support mechanisms, and health education curriculum proved themselves to be effective in terms of enhancement of academic environments. Academic environment improvement, in its turn, implies the enhancement of neighborhood and society at large. In other words, the inseparable connection that exists between academic environment and life of a neighborhood should be taken into consideration by all means. Moreover, it needs reconsideration and further investigation.

Violent-associated behavior on school properties proves itself to be especially calamitous. Hence, a close attention should be paid to the issue of violence in schools as a whole and to each of its aspects in particular. Mankind is destined on the path of confrontation. Whether something can be

done about it or not depends on each and every person individually. What people have to do is to consider their responsibility and honor themselves and all living beings that surround them.

