

Youth violence on the possession of firearms in school

[Sociology](#), [Violence](#)



Despite nationwide gun-free school laws that prohibit possession of a firearm on or near the property of a public or private school, students are bringing guns to school and using them against their fellow students and teachers with increasing frequency. What possesses these students to gun down their classmates? How are these students getting access to firearms? Who is ultimately responsible for these tragedies? What stresses contribute to these shootings? And how are parents and educators missing the warning signs that these children have reached the breaking point?

Over the past few years, there have been an astronomical number of school shootings across the country, sending policy makers, parents, teachers, and other concerned citizens into a tailspin. These events are becoming more frequent and have shattered the sense of safety that children should have when they are in school. Shootings by students, some as young as 10, have occurred at sickeningly regular intervals in urban towns like Pearl, Mississippi, Jonesboro, Arkansas, Fayetteville, Tennessee and most recently Littleton, Colorado, where 12 students and 1 teacher lost their lives at the hand of two teen shooters who took their own lives.

Firearm violence falls second only to automobile-related deaths, as the leading cause of injury-related death, in the United States. By the year 2003, firearm fatalities are projected to become the United States leading cause of injury-related death, unless the violence is curbed. In 1991, Texas and Louisiana saw firearm fatalities surpass automobile fatalities, and Virginia and Nevada also have continued this trend. In fact, the firearm death rate is

increasing faster than any other cause of death except AIDS related fatalities.

Recent public attention has focused on the problem of gun violence in the nation's schools. A 1994 Gallup poll of Americans, for the first time, fighting, violence, and gangs have moved to the top of the list to tie with lack of discipline as the biggest problem facing schools. It is difficult to determine what effect the threat of violence has upon the learning of each student, but clearly education takes a back seat to one's own sense of security and well being. According to a survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control, one in 20 high school students carry a gun and one in five students would tell a teacher if he or she knew of another student carrying weapons to school.

Theories differ about where young people get their guns. School security experts and law enforcement officials estimate that 80% of the firearms students bring to school come from home, while students estimate that 40% of their peers who bring guns to school buy them on the street. The United States has weaker firearm regulations and higher numbers of deaths involving firearms than all other industrialized nations.

The greatest tragedy of gun violence is the tremendous numbers of children and youth killed or injured each year by firearms. These numbers continue to increase at alarming rates. According to Gunfree. Org, in 1985, the number of firearm homicides for youth 19 years and younger was 1,339, in 1995, it was 2,574. In 1995, guns accounted for 84% of homicides of persons 13 to 19 years of age. Averages of 14 youth each day are killed by gunshots.

A group studying juvenile violence in Multnomah County, Oregon identified the inadequate response of the juvenile justice system to students expelled for possessing weapons in schools, the need for additional efforts to detect weapons, and anti-violence education in schools as primary concerns. We must, as a society, recognize that there is a cycle of violence and that violence breeds more violence. There is no single answer to the problem of violence. A multi-faceted approach is needed. Prevention must be a priority. According to a "PublicHealth" Approach, recognition of three levels of prevention activities is essential:

Primary prevention: These are interventions directed at people who have no obvious risk factors for development of violence. An example would be teaching grade school children to deal constructively with anger and conflict.

Secondary prevention: These activities are directed to those who show clear-cut risk factors for violence. An example would be training in anger management for people who have a history of arguments or fighting.

Tertiary prevention: These activities are directed toward minimizing the danger caused by those who have displayed violent behavior. Examples include interventions to allow gang-established patterns of serious or repeated violence.

Any approach to violence must include education carried out in various ways and settings including collaboration among community groups, businesses, the schools, and government. Most of all, the parents must get involved.

Schools offer the opportunity to reach a substantial percentage of the youth population and teach them skills aimed at the reduction of violence.

Teachers are able to identify early on problem youth and families. Schools represent an important site to convey the message of society against weapons and violence. An important part of the anti-violence prevention strategy aimed at all youth is increasing the efforts to detect weapons in schools.

While schools are already vigilant about responding to individuals when specific knowledge is available about weapons possession, this approach has not addressed concerns and perceptions that a number of weapons are present in schools undetected. Expanding the commitment to zero tolerance for weapons in schools would also better communicate to youth community standards, assuming that adequate consequences are in place. Most weapons are found through reporting by a concerned student. Such reporting should be praised.