

## **Violence in Jamaica's High Schools**

**Lorna Grant**

North Carolina Central University

### **Abstract**

This research determines the presence of crime, the disciplinary policies and procedures, and security measures on high school campuses in Jamaica. Data was collected from 27 randomly selected public high schools in the parishes of Kingston, St Andrew and St. Catherine through the administration of interviews, self-reported questionnaires and focus group discussions. School administrators (principals), teachers, guidance counselors and resource officers were engaged in face to face interviews. Male students (n=405), ages 12 to 17 years old who were classified as disruptive students, were randomly selected from lists provided by principals and school guidance counselors to participate in the research. Data was analyzed using qualitative research data management software programs, including Atlas-Ti version 4.2. and the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS Version 15) software. Violence occurred because of: (a) administrators' denial of school violence on their school campus, (b) non-caring school environment, and (c) poor implementation of school policies coupled with inadequate school security.. Violence on high school campuses in Jamaica mirrors the violence in the wider society; and school administrators often ignore or downplay the seriousness of violence in their schools. High schools in Jamaica fall into two categories: public and private. The public high schools are further categorized as Traditional and Non-Traditional High Schools. The better performing students in the GSAT examination usually go to the Traditional High School and the excellent performers among these are awarded various scholarships in the highly recognized high schools. Lower performing students are placed in the Non-Traditional High Schools. This research is focuses on Traditional High Schools that are public funded.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Crime and violence in schools have been matters of public concern in the years preceding this research, particularly after a spate of increase in incidents of fights, stabbings, and tragic school killings on several Jamaican school campuses (Gardener, Powell and Thomas, 2003). This concern had been further heightened by highly publicized incidents in the media, which featured young men as the chief perpetrators (Meeks-Gardner, 2004). The prevalence of these incidences caused much concern for the government, law enforcement, and the wider society.

# Violence in Jamaican High Schools by Grant

## Theories of School Violence

Many factors **have** contributed to violence among students. Included in these factors are **environmental level factors**, (issues such as social values and the impact of media, policy or legal decisions), **community level factors** (physical environment, available economic and recreational opportunities, existing social supports and other issues that impact the successful functioning of the residents), **family level factors** (family structure, support, culture, and functioning that ultimately affect the behavior of the individual members), **and individual level factors** (behaviors or characteristics that affect one person's risk of, or resistance to, potentially engaging in violent behavior (Hawkins, Herrenkohl, Farrington, Brewer, Catalano, Harachi, & Cothorn, 2000).

Several theories can be used to explain school violence [social bond posited by Hirschi (1969), social disorganization, by Shaw and McKay (1942), subcultural theories, such as Merton's (1938), Cloward and Ohlin's (1960), Agnew's (1992) strain theory, and school climate theory)], however, this paper will use school climate theory. It best explains some of the factors that have contributed to the increase in violence on a number of school campuses in Jamaica.

## School Climate Theory

When school climate theory is applied, a separate and distinctive "climate" in each school is measured. It encompasses four different areas: (a) ecology – which represents the physical and material features of school buildings; (b) milieu - which comprises the personnel in the school; (c) social system, defined as the ways in which the school interacts with the members; and (d) culture - which includes values, beliefs, and norms of the school system members (Kowalski and Reitzug, 1993; Miskel and Ogawa, 1988; and Owens, 1998). These arguments resonate well with contemporary theorizing about delinquency on school campuses. In explaining school climate, and school culture, the following definitions are offered.

*School Climate:* Howard, Howell, and Brainard (1987) defined school climate as “the schools’ ‘atmosphere for learning...the feeling people have about school and whether it is a place where learning can occur’”. In other words, it is what it "feels" like in a school. Hoy and Miskel (1992) defined school climate as the personality of the school.

*School Culture:* Kowalski and Reitzug (1993) defined school culture as the transmitting of integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior from one generation to another, through learning. Culture shapes both the character and the climate of an organization. As with culture, school culture assists in the transmission of values, beliefs, and morals.

There is a dichotomy between climate and culture but they are related. Essentially, climate is the commonly held interpretations of culture. Culture

establishes normative behavior for the members of organizations, and climate is the perceptions of those norms. However, schools have their own characteristics and personalities, just as individuals do. Education is delivered within a specific organizational structure and social climate. The term *school climate* is however, a rather broad concept that encompasses at least four distinct school-level dimensions: organizational structure, disciplinary policies, disciplinary procedures, and ecological environment (Anderson, 1982).

All four dimensions of school climate help to define the parameters of acceptable behavior among teachers, students, administrators, and assign some degree of institutional responsibility for school safety (Welsh, et al., 2000). Several elements of school climate and culture are major predictors of school violence. Indicators of these predictors are: class size- student /teacher ratio, quality of planning and action, students' influence, respect for students, fairness of rules, clarity of rules, parental education, delinquent association, social bonding, school attachment/commitment, involvement, and belief in conventional rules, values, norms, attitude, and enforcement practices.

### **Risk factors for perpetrating violence**

There are empirically tested risk factors that are associated with violence. They include individual risk factors; relationships risk factors; community/ societal risk factors; and school risk factors. Individual risk factors include delinquent friends, aggressiveness of the individual, substance and alcohol abuse, lower intelligence, and birth complications. Family risk factors include history of family crime and violence, lower or lack of expectations by parents, the lack of monitoring by parents, and child abuse and neglect, harsh, lax, or inconsistent disciplinary practices, low parental involvement, low emotional attachment to parents or caregivers, low parental education and income, parental substance abuse or criminality, and poor family functioning (e.g., poor communication). Community factors include the availability of weapons, drugs, violence, large numbers of broken homes/families, high level of transiency, and economic deprivation within the immediate area, high level of family disruption, and low levels of community participation. School risk factors include such things as early delinquent behavior(s), academic failure, lack of commitment to school, and gang involvement (Bennett-Johnson, 2004; Lipsey & Derzon, 1998; Resnick, Ireland, & Borowsky, 2004)

### **History of Violence in Jamaica's Schools**

Violence in Jamaican schools is not a new phenomenon. Incidents of school violence have attracted the attention of policy makers, educators and even students in the last ten years. One suggestion was that students who were engaged in such behavior should be placed in boot camps where they would be subject to 'rigid' discipline (Jamaica Gleaner, 2002). School violence was described as getting substantially worse, mirroring the surge in violence in the

## **Violence in Jamaican High Schools by Grant**

wider society. In former years, violence in schools involved "ragging", a sort of rite of passage (or mild hazing) for new or junior students, or rivalry between classes, houses (i.e., school teams) or groups of students.

In 2003, Smith, President of Jamaica Teacher's Association (JTA) characterized the violence in Jamaican schools as student efforts to capture or retain classroom furniture, extort materials, engage in community feuds brought onto the school premises and sheer intimidation (JTA, 2003). According to Smith, older children prey upon younger ones demanding protection money and valuables. Intimidation exists for students not only in schools, but in the community as well. Sometimes host communities controlled by gangs "exact a toll" from commuting students, especially in cases where the victims are from a community with which the hosts have tensions. One consequence of this is students resorting to carrying a weapon for protection. This resulted in police searches on students which often reveal a variety of weapons. Students were employed by members of warring gang communities as conduits for weapons as well as drugs because students were often able to evade police cordons and searches (JTA, 2003).

JTA concerns regarding worsening patterns of violence in Jamaican schools, including attacks on teachers, murder, and the rape of students, to name a few, became the topic of intense discussion at the Ministry of Education level. This was reflected in the killing of three students during the 2001 to 2002 academic year. There were several other incidents of attacks on both students and teachers, which resulted in at least 25 injuries. Students have been attacked by other students or members of the school's host community and in 17 cases teachers were the victims. However, these incidents do not necessarily reflect the extent of the problem, as they were based only on those reports filed with the JTA (2003).

Violence took on a new dimension on a number of school campuses. JTA reported incidents of fatal stabbings, homicides, rapes and extortion. For example, on February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2008, the *Jamaica Gleaner* newspaper reported two cases where students were victimized on their school campus. In the first case a 10<sup>th</sup> grade student at a prominent Kingston high school was beaten unconscious with a steel pipe by schoolmates who attempted to steal his mobile telephone. In the second case at another of the capital's (Kingston) traditional high schools, one boy stabbed another to death (Jamaica Gleaner, February 27, 2008).

Extortion was another prevalent form of victimization. Extortion, an identifiable activity in established gangs, is endemic in some school communities, but it is concealed by an apparent *code of silence* (JTA 2003). Schoolboys attending a number of high schools in St. Catherine have formed gangs named after the two prominent criminal networks that control the extortion racket in Spanish Town. The youngsters, most of whom reside in, or come from crime-ridden communities in Spanish Town, have proclaimed themselves Junior One Order and Junior Clansman and have embarked on their own campaign of robbery and extortion of lunch money and brand name items from students on their school campuses. Other areas with such activities include the parishes of Kingston, St.

Andrew, Hanover, and Trelawny. Deputy Superintendent of Police, Mervin McNab, the coordinator of the policing arm of the Safe Schools Program, confirmed that young gangsters have been active in schools and a number of them have been sentenced in the courts for activities including robbery (Douglas, 2006). In supporting DSP Mc Nab, Henry (2005) stated that the upsurge of gang activity in St Catherine schools adds to the worrisome trend of the escalating island-wide violence in schools. The St Catherine parish is located on the south coast between the parishes of St Andrew to the east, Clarendon to the west, and St Ann and St Mary to the North. Spanish Town is the capital of St Catherine and this is the headquarters of the two major gangs (the One Order and the Clans Man Gangs. However pockets of these gangs can be found throughout the parish.

According to the 2007-2008 President of the Jamaica Teachers Association (JTA) teachers are frustrated with the high incidences of violence in schools and were willing to migrate in response to overseas recruitment agencies that attempt to woo special education teachers to United States (US) and United Kingdom (UK) schools (Francis, 2008). The president noted that at least three high school students have been killed on Jamaica's campuses between January and March 2008. In response to the continued spate of violence, the Education Minister, Holness, noted that violence and disciplinary problems were preventing teachers and principals from doing their jobs (Francis, 2008). The issue of violence has become especially sensitive, after several incidents have caused the closure of a number of schools in recent months, including one in which two girls attacked a female vice principal (Jamaica Star, February 21, 2008).

## **METHODS**

### **Population and Sample**

The accessible population was male students 12 to 17 years who were identified as displaying disruptive behavior by school administrators (principals), Dean of Disciplines, guidance counselors and school resources officers (SRO) in 27 public high schools in the Jamaican parishes of Kingston, St. Andrew, and St. Catherine. Males were chosen because that is the gender which was identified by School Administrators( principals), Dean of disciplines, Guidance Counselors and School Resources Officers, the media, the police, and the public at large to be involved in the majority of disruptive behaviors on a number of school campuses.

*Sampling:* Participating schools were selected through a stratified selection process from a list which was provided by the Ministry of Education and Youth. This was done by putting the parishes in subgroups based on the parishes in which the research would be conducted. These parishes were Kingston, St Andrew, and St Catherine. The schools in each parish were randomly selected, to ascertain the schools that would be included in the study. Random sampling procedure was utilized to ascertain the names of students who were involved in

## **Violence in Jamaican High Schools by Grant**

delinquent behavior for the academic years (September, 2007 to July, 2012) from the list provided by each principal. From the list, a number was placed beside each student's name. Every third student was selected from the list. Student's names were matched with their disciplinary record to verify the nature of their behavior records. A total of 405 students were selected from the three parishes.

*Procedure* - Four hundred and five (405) questionnaires, comprising 40 pre-selected, open-ended and closed-ended questions were administered to students in grade 7 to 10 who were identified as displaying disruptive behavior. Twenty-nine of these surveys were eliminated for incomplete or missing responses. A total of 376 were analyzed. Face to face interviews were conducted with school administrators (Principals), deans of disciplines and guidance counselors and school resource officers. They responded to a set of pre-selected, open-ended questions. In addition, six focus group discussions were conducted from the same sample of students as a form of triangulation. Ethnography was utilized using participant observation. Student's interaction and incidents of violence were observed and documented. For the focus group discussion, a set of pre-selected questions were used to stimulate discussion with the focus groups.

### **Data analysis**

Quantitative data was analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS Version 15) software. Descriptive statistics were gathered through the performance of frequency distribution. Measures of central tendency, which included the mean, mode, and median were performed to determine the average age of students. Chi-square (cross- tabulations), was used to assess the perceived increased of violence in the three Jamaican parishes identified in this study.. From Table 4, there was a statistically significant difference between those who believed that violence on school campuses was influenced by violence in the community/wider society and those who did not believe that violence on school campuses was influenced by violence in the community/wider society. Qualitative Data was analyzed using ATLAS Ti software program, which is particularly designed for organising, sorting, and indexing qualitative data so showing patterns.

### **Questions asked**

Questions focused on the perception of school administrators (principals), deans of discipline, guidance counselors and school resources officers and students about violence on their schools' campuses, disciplinary policies and procedures utilized by the schools, security measures deployed, strategies used by school administrators to address violence, and the impact of community violence on schools

## **FINDINGS**

### **School Staff and Students**

Administrators (principals), teachers and school resources officers and students were asked: *Has there been an increase in violence on the school campus and if 'yes', What in your opinion has contributed to the increase of violence?*

#### *Responses from Administrators (Principals)*

Of the 18 principals interviewed, (12) reported an increase in violence in their school for the last three academic year. Violence in schools was a reflection of the type of violence in society (homes, communities and the media). According to the Jamaica crime statistics for the year 2010, there was a total of 39,188 crimes committed (larcenies, shootings, break-ins, murders, rapes and robberies) (2010 OSAC Jamaica Crime and Safety Report)

One principal reported:

The incidents of violence in our schools are frightening and totally unacceptable. Some students are from homes and communities where violence is the norm. Therefore, they do see the ills of violence. The issue of violence in the wider society must first be dealt with because what is happening in the school is only a spillover of what is happening in the wider society.

Another principal reported: "Violence in our schools is the reflection of the violence and indiscipline that is so pervasive in the society." He noted that the violence in the wider society only undermines the efforts to provide "our children" with those opportunities that will offer them better chances to become productive citizens. He emphasized that all sectors in the society must become part of the crusade to rid this country of the scourge of indiscipline and violence so that there can be a stable society that provides the basics. In his opinion, when there is violence in the wider society, evidence of the violence can be seen in the schools.

### **Response from School Resource Officers**

There was a general consensus among school resource officers (SROs) that violence had definitely been on the increased on a number of school campuses. According to some of the resource officers, they had seen a reduction in violence on the school campus to which they were assigned. However, some expressed concern about the amount of time they were able to spend at their assigned schools, since they had to do regular police duties in their division. In addition, when there was pressing security issues in their division, school duties were less of a priority. Conflict with school administrators, deans of discipline and guidance counselors, students and SROs was often experienced. Some SROs suggested that there was opposition to how they administered their duties. Some

## Violence in Jamaican High Schools by Grant

administrators reported that SROs were in denial regarding the types and prevalence of violence on their campuses. However, the majority of the SROs expressed interest in additional training to effectively relate to adolescents.

### Responses from Deans of Disciplines and Guidance Counselors

All 10 deans of discipline and the 15 guidance counselors reported that there was an increase in violence in their school. They attributed this to poor parenting and the absence of positive role models for boys in the home, a result of absentee fathers. They also attributed some blame to the media - particularly, the television. Conflict with school administrators, deans of discipline and guidance counselors, students and SROs was often experienced. Some SROs suggested there was opposition to how they administered their duties. They reported that some administrators were in denial regarding the types and prevalence of violence on their campus. However, the majority of the SROs expressed interest in additional training to effectively relate to adolescents.

### Response from Students

A majority of the students (56%) did not support the views of Administrators, deans of disciplines, and guidance counselors. The students felt that the violence in school was, somehow, less than had been publicized by the media. A chi-square analysis of the data was calculated to determine if there was a perceived significant increase in violence over the five year period. With 159 (42%) of the students responding “yes” and 214 (56%) responding “no”, the findings of the analysis ( $p < 0.05$  (.000)) suggest that there was a significant difference in their perception of violence in the schools. There was little support for a perceived increase in violence in schools.

**Table 1**  
Violence on School Campuses

Question	Observed		$\chi^2$	df.	<i>p</i>	
	Yes	No%				
Has the violence on your school campus increased over the last five academic years?	159	42.3	214	56.9	196.144	2
	.000					

Although students did not report a significant increase in school violence, students described the types of violence most commonly committed. These



include fighting, extortion, rape, drugs sales/distribution, disorderly conduct, vandalism/destruction of school property, weapon law violation, and robbery. The students noted that perpetrators of violent acts frequently used weapons such as knives, guns, batons and blunt instruments (sticks and boards) to assist them in these violent activities. Other types of weapons mentioned were stones, a broken chair and desk, a piece of iron pipe, and a machete.

Table 2

**Types of violence and other criminal activities on school campuses**

Questions	Yes	%	No	%	Non Responses	%	
What types of violent acts are being committed?							
Assault (physical or verbal attack)	246	65.4	129	34.3	1	.3	(n = 376)
Drugs Sales/Distribution	106	28.2	270	71.8			(n = 376)
Disorderly conduct	180	47.9	196	52.1			(n = 376)
Drug possession	118	31.4	258	68.6			(n = 376)
Larceny/Thief	201	53.3	175	46.5			(n = 376)
Weapons law violation (carrying a weapon to school)	257	68.4	119	31.4			(n = 376)
Homicide (killing somebody)	60	16.0	315	83.8	1	.3	(n = 376)
Robbery	196	52.1	180	47.9			(n = 376)
Gambling	269	71.5	107	28.5			(n = 376)

## Violence in Jamaican High Schools by Grant

Table 3

### *Types of weapons used in acts of violence on school campuses*

		Questions		Response		
Yes	%	No	%	Non	%	
Knife		335	89.1	40	10.6	1 .6 (n = 376)
Firearm (gun)		49	13.0	327	87.0	(n = 376)
Batons		64	17.0	312	83.0	(n = 376)
Blunt instruments		222	59.0	154	41.0	(n = 376)

### **Students' Views on Disciplinary Policies and Procedures.**

Students were asked the following questions regarding disciplinary policies and procedures at their school. (a) *Are there disciplinary policies in your school?* 'yes' 'no' (b). *Do the policies address most disciplinary problems?* (b) (c) *Are students aware of these policies?* 'yes' 'no'. (d) *Do you think the policies are fair?* 'yes' 'no'. If no, why do you think so?\_\_\_\_\_ (e) *Do you think the guidelines for handling discipline are followed by both teachers and administrators?* 'yes' 'no'. and, (f) *Is your parent(s)/guardian in support of the disciplinary methods used in your school?* (b) *If so why not?*\_\_\_\_\_.

From the responses received from students, a majority of students (92 %) are aware of disciplinary policies, and 74% thought they were fair. Some 79% of the students suggested that the guidelines for handling discipline are followed by both teachers and administrators. In addition, 94% of the students stated that their parent(s) or guardians support the disciplinary methods used in their school.

#### *Students' Views on Security Measures*

The questions solicited answered pertaining security on school campus.

(a) *Do you feel safe at your school?* 'Yes' 'No' *If no, why not? (Circle all that apply)*

1. Students are regularly involved in fights.
2. Students carry weapons to school.
3. There is no security guard or school police on my school campus.

4. There is no security fence around the school campus.
5. School is located in a violent community.
6. Community members have free access to my school.
7. Other \_\_\_\_\_ (Please indicate)

**(b) Are any of the following security devices at your school? Select all that you are aware of.**

- |   |                   |    |
|---|-------------------|----|
| 1. Electronic detection system(s)               | Yes               | No |
| 2. Closed Circuit T.V.                          | Yes               | No |
| 3. Automatic Communication link with the police | Yes               | No |
| 4. Central Monitoring station                   | Yes               | No |
| 5. Portable emergency signal device             | Yes               | No |
| 6. Security Fencing                             | Yes               | No |
| 7. School Police                                | Yes               | No |
| 8. Security guards                              | Yes               | No |
| 9. Public address system                        | Yes               | No |
| 10. Other _____                                 | (Please indicate) |    |

**(c) Are visitors at your school required to report to the school office?**

Yes No

In responding to security measures provided for the school environment, 70% of students stated that security was inadequate. Forty two percent concluded that the most popular form of security is unarmed security guards/ school police or unarmed gateman, followed by public address system. In addition, 89% of students observed that there was no security fence around their school campus. Resulting from the lack of adequate security, 62% of the students said they did not feel safe on their school’s campuses. Despite the students’ perception of the lack of security measures, a majority of the students (89%) suggested that visitors to their school campuses were required to report to the school office.

**Strategies used by School Administrators to Address Violence.**

*Question: Are you aware of any strateg/iesy being used to reduce the violence on your school campus? ‘yes’ ‘no’ . If yes, that strategy/ies is being used?*

The strategy that the students were aware of for preventing violence activities in school was the effort by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Security that involved assigning school resource officers to schools known to be experiencing gang problems. One student commented that “the ministry plant police in a de school fi watch people” (in other words, the police were largely in schools to inform/snitch. Prior to the arrival of school resource officers, many schools had security guards whom the students described as ineffective, especially when “bad man come pan the compon” - (meaning when criminals

## Violence in Jamaican High Schools by Grant

invade the school campus). Significantly, students were of the belief that school security officers should be armed, and should have authority to search all persons entering and leaving the school, including students. This would help to reduce the entry of illegal weapons and drugs.

### **The Impact of Violence in the Community and the Wider Society on School Violence**

*Question: Do you think the violence in the community and the wider society influence the violence on your school campus? 'yes' 'no' If yes how is your school affected by the violence, explain.* A chi-square analysis of the data was conducted to determine if violence in the community and wider society was significantly perceived as influencing violence on school campuses. The findings shown in Table 4 suggest that the students perceived violence in the community and the wider society community as influencing violence on school campuses, at a  $p < 0.05$  (.000) level of significance.

Table 4

*The impact of violence in the community and the wider society on school violence*

Questions	Yes %	No %	$\chi^2$	df.	$p$
Is violence on school campus being influenced by violence in the community and wider society?	306 81.4	70 18.6	148.128	1	.000

(n = 376)

Further analysis as to how violence in the community and the wider society impacts school violence revealed that community members gave weapons, advice, and assisted students with different illegal activities. There was a significant connection between school violence and community violence. According to a majority of the students (75%), the level of violence in the society has an impact on the students, because they are a part of the society. To them what is happening in the schools is a reflection of what the wider society portrays – fighting, extortion, drug use, and homicide.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **The Impact of Violence in Jamaican Schools**

While school violence is a popular media topic, it is a sensitive one for Jamaican principals who believe that if certain matters are discussed publicly their schools' reputation and ratings will be diminished (Henry, 2005). There are principals who will deny the problem of violence until it is too late. These cases of violence exist in all types of high schools (Virtue, 2007). Some school administrators admitted to the level of increased violence on their school campus; however, there are others who were in denial although guidance counselors and deans of disciplines admitted to the increase in violence on these same campuses. Denial of this problem is done in order for school rating not to fall below a certain level. This finding was supported by Henry (2005), who believed that if certain matters were discussed publicly schools' reputation and ratings would be diminished.

Despite the denial by some principals, students in this study indicated that they had taken weapons to school at times, and engaged in violence. The students who said there was an increase in violence also mentioned cases of weapon law violation, assault, robbery, and homicide. Within these circumstances some students expressed a preference for "dealing" with the problem of violence themselves, because as one put it, "if you don't fight for yourself, nobody will, for teacher only look out for them friends." Clearly, such strong feeling about the existence of favoritism with regard to discipline further fuels indiscipline, and set the atmosphere for the occurrence for violence. Violence will always be present, if schools have ceased to be communities where groups of persons share values and commitments. If school as a unified place, declines in conflict between students, between students and teachers or administrators, can be expected to increase. If, as this study indicates, this is the reality, there is a need for teachers to revisit both school policies and school operations.

Students further suggested a relationship between school violence and community violence by acknowledging that society had become more violent, positive role models are not readily available, and law and order had declined in the country as a whole. The media reports (Henry, 2005; Virtue, 2007) support this perception that school violence mirrors increasing violence in the wider society. Fear, therefore, has been crippling the citizens of some communities and now, those in schools. Some students claimed that their teachers seemed fearful due to threats, particularly, damage to the teachers' personal property. They went further to allege a direct link between violence and teachers' leniency. It can be argued that the teachers have not relinquished their roles as strict disciplinarians, but that they may feel constrained in exercising their authority given the level of violence now experienced in the schools

With the incidents of violence on different school campuses, it is necessary to question the environments from which these students come. Some students thought that their parents did not really care about their interests since the parents did not show up when summoned by school administrators to the school. This is why one principal remarked, "For some students, there is a disconnection

## **Violence in Jamaican High Schools by Grant**

between the school and their parents.” He noted that “many of the students are taken [to the school] by aunts or some other relative, at the time of their admission.” This principal further stated that “the biological parents, particularly fathers, are never seen because they are either dead, imprisoned or migrated”. That means fathers are absentee figures in the lives of their children. With inadequate support from parents, in particular fathers, children are lacking some of the basic values and moral which should be passed on from parents.

A number of the guidance counselors reported that it is difficult for children growing up in violent environments to display positive behaviors at school, and this makes teaching and learning more difficult. From reports given by the guidance teachers, it is evident that many of the violent students were persistent in their disruptive behaviors and that students from inner-city schools were more violent than students in rural schools. The theory on school violence speaks to schools as places of learning. As seen from the research, if students are constantly disturbed by the occurrences of violence, learning will become increasingly difficult. Education is delivered within a specific organizational structure and social climate; therefore, if this structure is under attack by external forces, the desired goals will not be achieved

The type of security measures provided on each school campus was of concern where 70% of students reported that security was inadequate. Students reported that a number of schools have “watchmen” not security guards, who were not equipped to deal with the problem of violence. In addition, many of these watchmen were familiar (friends and relatives) with students and community members hence their ineffectiveness. One’s personal security plays an important role in his/her total functioning because one is constrained by the social network. Therefore, having a clearly defined security policy, an incident reporting system, good administration and security, professional standards and training for educators, a crisis management plan, and the active involvement of students should impact positively on school violence.

Several disciplinary strategies for violent students were identified. The most common form of discipline was detention, followed by suspension and expulsion. However, the administrators were clear that if an activity was illegal, there was no hesitation to call in the police. In so doing, schools were following their own policies and those of the Ministry of Education and Youth.

The schools that had the most problem with violence received school resource officers as a part of the government’s Safe School Program, and have seen a substantial reduction in violent activities. However, some school resource officers indicated that school administrators could be more supportive of their role in the schools and that they could be more effective with the students, if trained specifically for that task. According to Knight (quoted in Virtue, 2007):

Initially, some schools rejected the police presence in the schools. I think they believed they did not need us. Some also believed that if

the police were stationed in their schools, their institutions would be in the 'limelight'. But the fact is, if you have bad students, you have bad students.

Presently, school resource officers are more accepted on school campuses. Nonetheless, more consideration about the duties that school personnel demand of them and the economic efficiency of having their loyalty divided between community and school enforcement is necessary.

Significantly, while deans of discipline and the guidance counselors were inclined to acknowledge the presence of violence in schools, principals were inclined to deny it. The researcher saw the opposite situation in only one school. Both a denial of violence and an overreaction to one can be detrimental to resolving issues of violence in schools. Howell (2000) put it, "Denial that violent problems exist precludes early intervention efforts, while overreaction in the form of excessive police force and publicizing of violence may inadvertently serve to increase a violent cohesion, facilitate its expansion, and lead to more crime." For example, the Ministry of Education's decision to put school resource officers in schools could either suppress violent activities or escalate them by encouraging more students to become violent to frustrate the efforts of the police.

The presence of violent students makes other students and teachers feel unsafe. Some students mentioned that the presence of violence is unsettling when the schools failed to acknowledge or understand the emotional impact on students of observing or being aware of their peers' victimization. This was even more the case when students perceived that some teachers did not care about their safety. Student conflicts with outside groups that eventually came onto the school campus were also disturbing for both students and teachers. Additionally, drug possession and sale, extortion, fights, and intimidation of teachers and other students were all identified as gang-related activities that occurred regularly in high schools. All of these activities and the lack of a transparent response to them seriously diminished the learning environment.

The theory on school violence speaks to schools as places of learning. As seen from the research, if students are constantly troubled by the occurrences of violence, learning will become increasingly difficult. Education is delivered within a specific organizational structure and social climate; therefore, if this structure is under attack by external forces, the desired goals will not be achieved, hence the downward spiral in the quality of educational achievement. Disciplinary policies, disciplinary procedures and ecological environment are all dimensions of the school climate. All these dimensions help to define the parameters of acceptable behavior among administrators, teachers, and students, and assign some degree of institutional responsibility for school safety. From the research it is evident that there are some shortcomings on a number of school campuses, therefore if violence is to be reduced and/or eliminated, there are a number of issues that must be revisited. School climate theory maintains that if a communal school

## **Violence in Jamaican High Schools by Grant**

organization and environment is to exist, there has to be commitment on the part of all stakeholders. Therefore in developing a safe school environment, there has to be collaborative efforts between community organizations, government agencies, professionals, parents' associations, citizens and educators. Given the risk factors of school violence as identified in the theories on violence, it is important that all these agencies and units play a proactive role in combating violence.

### **PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS**

Violence in Jamaican schools is nothing new, but its continued presence and deadly implications definitely point to the need for effective solutions. Recommendations have been generated from the findings of this study to guide parents, school administrators, school guidance counselors/social workers, deans of discipline and policy-makers charged with guiding violent students. First, with respect to morals and values, parents should be the main source of student socialization. However, this fails when parents themselves are lacking positive morals and values. But, if students are exposed to conventional values and attitudes in their early socialization, it seems less likely that they will be involved in violence and join deviant groups.

Second, in supporting the parents, the school as an agent of socialization should play a proactive role and not merely a reactive role with violent students by further socializing and educating them about acceptable values and attitudes. School administrators, teachers, guidance counselors/social workers, deans of discipline should be trained to effectively detect early signs related to behavioral problems with the aim of resolving these issues in the schools. For example, there should be access to adequate social services, after school programs and, recreational areas to facilitate the monitoring of students after school hours. Social workers who are employed in school as guidance counselors have a tremendous role to play in addressing violence in schools, considering they have the skills crucial to the task of working with children and their families impacted by violence. Hence, a number of the recommendations can be implemented by guidance counselors/social workers who have the competence and skills, and are involved at the "micro level".

Usually, the perception of violence as encompassing leads school administrators either to react harshly with overly punitive and restrictive actions or to be so intimidated that they refrain from taking any action (Miller, 1982, 1992). Once school administrators acquire the knowledge and transcend the denial about violence in their midst, they can initiate, maintain, and evaluate their solutions to violence. The administrators, who are most successful in their effort to confront negative activities, are those who develop a specific approach to the problem (Lal, 1991). They must believe that nothing is more important than providing a safe school environment and should be willing to take the necessary steps to accomplish this goal (Lal et al., 1993).



Moving beyond the general recommendations identified earlier, some specific recommendations are:

1. Develop a multi-systemic approach that includes the school, the family, and the community to reduce violence since predictors for violence include these domains.
2. Assemble a support team. In assembling a support team, it is important for school personnel to be knowledgeable about the types of violent activities on the campus. Awareness and proactive prevention efforts against these problems should be a part of each personnel member's job description as multiple "eyes and ears" are necessary to combat the problem of violence in schools.
3. Develop a special counseling unit in all high schools with counselors trained at the post graduate level. This unit should address the needs of violent students, victims, and teachers. In addition, there should be special counseling classes for violent students. Students should be taught alternatives to negative behaviors, including proper interpersonal communication, building self-esteem, and setting appropriate goals.
4. Develop a range of school-based violence prevention education programs. This would be a proactive measure to deliver anti-violence messages to all students in innovative ways.
5. Implement in-school peer mediation programs to enhance student skills in anger management, impulse control, conflict resolution, listening, and cooperation. This training should also be available to teachers should they desire to have it.
6. Involve violent students in school activities. In so doing, the students should develop a bond or sense of ownership or care for their school and those therein. Examples of possible involvement include requiring participation in a school clean-up day, and activities in student organizations or assigning them roles such as form monitors, prefects (class leaders), and teacher assistants.
7. Provide mentorship. Utilize virtuous and even some prominent citizens, senior students, alumni, and school personnel to expose the students to life alternatives outside of the bounds of their communities. This exposure and support should help the violent students to develop a meaningful focus or vision for their future.
8. Students who are assessed as being a threat to the safety of teachers and students should be removed from the institution and be placed in special facilities with programs for behavior modification and rehabilitation.
9. Require special awareness training seminars for all school personnel. This awareness training will enable teachers to detect the earliest signs of violent activities in their schools.
10. Offer school resource officers training to effectively work in the schools. Presently, some of these officers feel ill-prepared for their task. Deploy more officers in schools on a consistent basis to address school gangs.

## **Violence in Jamaican High Schools by Grant**

11. Have established guidelines for school resource officers to give them a frame of reference to discharge their responsibilities at the schools.
12. Fortify existing information sharing efforts among principals and school resource officers at the various high schools throughout the KMR to facilitate the monitoring of violent activity.
13. Develop and enforce zero tolerance violence policies that clearly spell out expectations for behavior and consequences. These policies should be posted in all offices and classrooms, and sent home to parents and guardians.
14. The maintenance of campus security. Securing campuses plagued with violence is a must. Community members should not have access to school campuses at will. All educational institutions should be adequately fenced with restricted entry and exit points manned by unarmed guards. In addition, there should be a reception area to which all visitors (including parents) report; visitors must not have direct access to classrooms.
15. Evaluate violence prevention strategies regularly for efficaciousness, and update or eliminate these efforts as necessary.

### **CONCLUSION**

From the analysis presented, there are several insights regarding violent activities by students, family involvement, and community involvement with school violence. The recommendations proposed if implemented should help to alleviate these challenges for the schools involved. I am cognizant of the fact that some of these recommendations are already been attempted in some schools. However, schools that are still seeing an increase in violence will benefit from these recommendations, if they implement some, if not all, of the recommendations suggested. In addition, there is suggestion for future research to give direction for further detecting and working with violent students.

### **References**

- Abel, W. (2007, March 31). Shackled to the past trapped in the present. Jamaica Gleaner Retrieved from <http://www.jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20040331/health/health1.html>.
- Agnew, R. (1992). Foundation for a general strain theory of crime and delinquency. *Criminology*, 30, 47-87.
- Anderson, Carolyn S. (1982). The Search for School Climate: A Review of the Literature. *Review of Education Research*, 52, (3) 368-420
- Bennett-Johnson, E., (2004). The root of school violence: causes and recommendations for a plan of action. *College Student Journal*, 38, (2), 199.
- Cloward, R. A. & Ohlin, L. E. (1960). *Delinquency and opportunity: A theory of*

- delinquent gangs. New York: Free Press.
- Douglas, L. (2006 April 9). Junior One Order and Clansman gangs plaguing St. Catherine Schools. Jamaica Observer. Retrieved from <http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/html/20060408T160000->
- Francis, P. (2008, March 24,) US woos Jamaican teachers - Recruitment drive triggers fears of new exodus. Jamaica Gleaner. Retrieved from <http://www.jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20080324/lead/lead1.html>
- Gardner, J. M.; Powell, C. A., Thomas, J.A. & Millard, D. (2003). Perceptions and experiences of violence among secondary school students in urban Jamaica. Pan Am J Public Health 14(2). Available from <http://www.scielosp.org/pdf/rpsp/v14n2/a04v14n2>
- Hawkins, J. D., Herrenkohl, T.I., Farrington, D.P., Brewer, D., Catalano, R. F., Harachi, T. W., and Cothorn, L. (2000). Predictors of Youth Violence. U.S. Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
- Henry, H. (2005 August 28). Uncovering the 'underworld' in your school: Career damilarealabi40@yahoo.comdamilarealabi40@yahoo.comdamilarealabi40@yahoo.com and education. Jamaica Observer. Retrieved from <http://jamaicaobserver.com/news/html/20050827t180000->
- Hirschi, T. (1969). Causes of delinquency. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Howard, E., Howell, B., and Brainard, E. (1987). Handbook for conducting school climate improvement projects. Bloomington, IN: The PHI DELTA KAPPA Educational Foundation.
- Howell, J. (2000). Youth gang programs and strategies: Summary. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
- Hoy, W. K., and Miskel, C. G. (1982). Educational administration: Theory, Research, and Practice, 2nd ed., 185-219. New York: Random House.
- Jamaica Crime and Safety Report – OSAC ( 2010). [Retrieved from https://www.osac.gov](https://www.osac.gov)
- Jamaica Gleaner, (2007, May 25). 'Violence does not originate in schools'. Retrieved from <http://jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20070525/news/news4.html>

## **Violence in Jamaican High Schools by Grant**

- Jamaica Gleaner, (2002, May 23). Boot camps proposed to stem violence  
Retrieved from <http://jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20020523/news/news1.html>
- Jamaica Gleaner, (February 2008, 27). Take a stand against school violence.  
Retrieved from <http://jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20080227/cleisure/cleisure1.html>
- Jamaica Star, (2008, February 21). Girls, VP clash over make-up.  
<http://www.jamaica-star.com/thestar/20080221/news/news1.html>
- JTA says school violence worsening. (2003, August 20). Jamaica Observer.  
Retrieved from <http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/html/>
- Kowalski, T.J. & Reitzug, U.C. (1993) Contemporary School Administration: an introduction. New York: Longman.
- Lal, S. R. (1991). A study of strategies employed by junior high school administrators to overcome disruptive gang-related activities. CA: Ed. Dept. University of California,
- Lal, S. R., Lal, D. & Achilles, C. M. (1993). Handbook on gangs in schools: Strategies to reduce Gang-related activities. Washington, DC: Educational Resource Information Center.
- Lipsey M. W., Derzon, J.H., (1998). Predictors of violent and serious delinquency in adolescence and early adulthood: a synthesis of longitudinal research. In: Loeber R, Farrington DP, editors. Serious and violent juvenile offenders: risk factors and successful interventions. Thousand Oaks (CA): Sage Publications; 86-105.
- Meeks-Gardener, J. M., (2004, July 13). Project to reduce violence in schools now underway. Jamaica Information Service. Retrieved from [www.jis.gov.jm/education/html/20040712T120000-05](http://www.jis.gov.jm/education/html/20040712T120000-05).
- Meeks-Gardner, J.M., Powell, C.A., Grantham- McGregor S.M., (2007). Determinants of aggressive and prosocial behavior among Jamaican schoolboys. West Indian Medical Journal, 56, 1, 34 – 41.
- Merton, R. K. (1938). Social structure and anomie, American Sociological Review, 3, 672-82.
- Miller, W. B. (1982). Youth gangs: A look at the numbers. Child Today , 11, 10-11.
- Miller, W. B. (1992). Crime by youth gangs in the US (OJP No. 92-C-002). Washington, D. C. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

Miskel, C., and Ogawa, R. (1988). Work motivation, job satisfaction, and climate. In N. J. Boyan (Ed.). *Handbook of research on educational administration*, 279 -304. New York: Longman.

Owens, R. (1998). Organizational behavior in education. (6th edition). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Resnick MD, Ireland M, Borowsky I. (2004). Youth violence perpetration: what protects? What predicts? Findings from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 35, (18) 424.e1-e10

Rosenthal, B. S., Wilson, W. C., & Baboolal, T., (2004). "Exposure to community violence and psychological distress: Experiences of Jamaican and Black American college students." *Caribbean Journal of Social Work*, 3: 24-37.

Samms-Vaughan, M.E., Jackson, M.A., & Ashley, D.E. (2004). Urban Jamaican children's exposure to community violence. *West Indian Medical Journal*, 54(1), 21.

Shaw, C. & McKay, H. (1942). *Juvenile delinquency and urban areas*. Chicago, IL: University Press.

Virtue, E. (2007, June 17). Jamaica Observer. Retrieved from <http://jamaicaobserver.com/news/html/20070616t210000->.

Welsh W.N., Stokes, R. & Green J. R., (2000). A Macro-Level Model Of School Disorder. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 37(3) 243-283.

## Appendix 1

### *Students' Views on Security Measures*

The questions solicited answered pertaining security on school campus.

(a) *Do you feel safe at your school? 'Yes No' If no, why not? (Circle all that apply)*

8. Students are regularly involved in fights.
9. Students carry weapons to school.
10. There is no security guard or school police on my school campus.
11. There is no security fence around the school campus.
12. School is located in a violent community.
13. Community members have free access to my school.
14. Other \_\_\_\_\_ (Please indicate)

## Violence in Jamaican High Schools by Grant

(b) *Are any of the following security devices at your school? - Select all that you are aware of.*

- |   |     |                   |
|---|-----|-------------------|
| 1. Electronic detection system(s)               | Yes | No                |
| 2. Closed Circuit T.V.                          | Yes | No                |
| 3. Automatic Communication link with the police | Yes | No                |
| 4. Central Monitoring station                   | Yes | No                |
| 5. Portable emergency signal device             | Yes | No                |
| 6. Security Fencing                             | Yes | No                |
| 7. School Police                                | Yes | No                |
| 8. Security guards                              | Yes | No                |
| 9. Public address system                        | Yes | No                |
| 10. Other _____                                 |     | (Please indicate) |

(c) *Question: Are you aware of any strategy/ies being used to reduce the violence on your school campus? 'yes' 'no' . If yes, that strategy/ies is being used?*