Impact of Violence Prevention Programs on the Attitudes Towards Guns and Violence Among Third Through Sixth Grade and Seventh Grade Students in the Bowling Green Independent School District

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IMPACT OF VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROGRAMS ON THE ATTITUDES TOWARDS GUNS AND VIOLENCE AMONG THIRD THROUGH SIXTH GRADE AND SEVENTH GRADE STUDENTS IN THE BOWLING GREEN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

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By
Michelyn Wilson Bhandari

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IMPACT OF VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROGRAMS ON THE ATTITUDES TOWARDS GUNS AND VIOLENCE AMONG THIRD THROUGH SIXTH GRADE AND SEVENTH GRADE STUDENTS IN THE BOWLING GREEN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT
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The purpose of this study is to assess the efficacy of violence prevention programs on the attitudes toward guns and violence among students in grades three through seven. This study represents an attempt to prove that third through sixth grade students who receive anger control training and seventh grade students who receive conflict resolution training will show a significantly lower attraction towards guns and violence than students receiving no such training. By understanding interrelation between adolescents’ attitudes towards guns and violence and their psychosocial functioning, the public can seek out ways of preventing violence.

To measure the impact and to provide information about the program’s strengths and weaknesses, the Attitudes toward Guns and Violence Questionnaire (AGVQ) was used. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was utilized to assess the differences in attitudes towards guns and violence between groups that participated in violence prevention programs and those who did not. Anger control training and conflict resolution training, as conducted in this manner and in this setting, did not lead to a significantly lower attraction towards guns and violence.
Chapter 1

Introduction

“Human violence against humans is not a post-modern, 20th century invention. Genocides, serial killing, thefts, and gang wars terrified our prehistoric ancestors (Curwin, 1995, p.72).” Fairy tales of the Grimm Brothers contain explicit violence, and Edgar Allan Poe’s work was frightening even without the mention of assault weapons. So, if our modern media are no more violent than pre-technology art and literature, why is there such a hysterical, sudden outcry to end violence? (Curwin)

Several groups have called for measures to prevent the scourge of violence, thus reducing the health affects of violence. At the 1985 Surgeon General’s Conference, a group of physicians were challenged to view violence as a public health problem and were challenged to seek out its causes and best methods of treatment (Koop and Lundberg, 1992). At the 98th annual convention of the National Medical Association (NMA), a panel of experts agreed that violence is indeed a public health problem. As a result, the NMA called for efforts to “facilitate the mobilization of nationwide efforts directed toward alleviating the frequency, intensity, and disabling consequences which our communities have directly experienced as a result of violence.” (Skolnick, 1993, p. 1284) Additionally, the Centers for Disease Control has listed violence
prevention as one of their top priorities and established a National Plan for Injury Control, which includes recommendations for the prevention of injuries from violence. (Rosenberg, O'Carroll, and Powell, 1992)

When comparing violence today to violence in the pre-technology era, one's perception of violence today is different. According to Curwin (1995), news reports and entertainment media influence one's perception of violence. Because the media seek to sensationalize violence, violence is portrayed as more heartless, more senseless, and more random. The belief that “It won’t happen to me” has been replaced with “They’re after me” (Curwin, p. 72). Living in a violent environment, young people learn to “watch their backs not look to their future” (Brendtro and Long, 1995, p. 52). By identifying and examining the culture of violence and its effects on adolescents, the public can seek out methods of violence prevention that can replace fears with peaceful solutions.

Public Health Relevance/Need for Study

Children are growing up in an environment where they are regularly confronted with violence. Children are witnessing violence in their home, school, community, and in the media. They see people fighting to solve their problems, leaving them in a survival-mode mentality.

Violence follows a continuum in children’s lives. The continuum ranges from entertainment violence to chronic and direct exposure to violence within their immediate environment. The degree to which they are affected by violence is likely to increase as they progress along the continuum. The amount and
severity of violence that children are exposed to varies across society. However, few children are exempted (Levin, 1994).

Atnafou (1995, p. 2) noted the following statistics on children and violence:

1. “In a Chicago survey of 536 elementary school children, one in four had seen someone shot and 35% witnessed a stabbing;
2. A UCLA survey found that 90% of children taken to the hospital’s psychiatric clinic were witnesses to violence; and
3. Nationwide, 3.3 million children are at risk of exposure to spousal abuse each year.”

The Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher (1996), which surveyed a total of 2,524 public school students in grades seven through 12, revealed the following regarding social tension and violence in schools:

1. 25% reported having very serious problems with hostile or threatening remarks between different groups of students;
2. 24% reported threats or destructive acts, other than physical fights;
3. 21% reported turf battles between different groups of students;
4. 26% reported physical fights between different groups of friends; and
5. 26% reported gang violence.

Children who witness violence experience various health affects. Some responses to witnessing violence include posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), poor attention span, difficulty sleeping, anxiety, and depression. School-aged children may become loners, may show little interest in activities, or may have
diminished memory. Some children begin engaging in risky behaviors, such as alcohol and drug use and sexual activity. All of these have negative effects on one’s quality of life. (Atnafou, 1995)

In addition to the health effects of violence, schools and communities must pay for other’s violent acts. The frequency and increasing severity of violent acts among students make managing conflict very costly in terms of time lost to instructional, administrative, and learning efforts (Johnson and Johnson, *Reducing School Violence*, 1995). More people ages 15-24 die from gunshot wounds than from all natural causes of death combined, and more than half of all gunshot victims are under the age of 25 years. Costs per child gunshot victim average $3 million per fatality and nearly $390,000 per hospitalized survivor. (Children’s Safety Network, 1997).

By understanding the continuum of violence and the interrelation between adolescents’ attitudes toward guns and violence and their psychosocial functioning, the public can seek out ways of preventing violence that can replace fears with peaceful solutions. Educators and others can work to provide peaceful school communities that offer a safe place to learn, and foster the development of individuals equipped with skills to pursue their goals non-violently and effectively (Shapiro, Dorman, Burkey, & Welker, 1996).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to assess the efficacy of violence prevention programs on the attitudes towards guns and violence among students in grades three through seven.
Research Design

This study was focused on the impact of two violence prevention programs on attitudes toward guns and violence. To provide a measure of overall impact and to provide information about a program's strengths and weaknesses, the Attitudes toward Guns and Violence Questionnaire (AGVQ) was used. The AGVQ is an empirically based measure of these attitudes for community samples of youth. Results from a factor analysis of the AGVQ indicated that it is a reliable (replicated across a wide age-range) and valid (demographically representative) measure of violence-related attitudes of youth (Shapiro, Dorman, Burkey, & Welker, 1996).

The data from the questionnaire were collected and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was the primary method of statistical analysis. ANOVA was utilized to assess the differences in attitudes towards guns and violence between groups who participated in violence prevention programs and those who did not.

Treatment Group

The sample consisted of third through sixth grade students who were enrolled in Anger Control Training (ACT) class at Parker-Bennett Elementary School and seventh grade students who were enrolled in a Consumer Family Science (CFS) class, which included a unit on conflict resolution training, at Bowling Green Junior High School.
Control Group

The control group consisted of a random¹ (unbiased) selection of third through seventh grade pupils from both Parker-Bennett and Bowling Green Junior High who did not participate in violence prevention programs. To assure that the selection was unbiased, all students were assigned numbers that were placed in a container and randomly drawn out. This process continued until the desired number of control group participants was achieved.

Assumptions

For the purposes of this study, the following assumptions were made:

1. Since the AGVQ was administered as a class activity, almost none of the students declined participation.

2. When completing the AGVQ, the pupils responded honestly.

Delimitations

1. Because of classroom-time restrictions, a posttest only design, rather than a pretest/posttest design, was chosen for this study.

2. The sample and control groups were small.

3. The survey was self-administered. Therefore, the results may have yielded dishonest or inaccurate responses.

Limitations

1. The questionnaire does not measure or control for all the factors that affect adolescents' attitudes about guns and violence.

¹ Each student in grades 3-6 and grade 7 was given an equal opportunity to participate.
2. Questionnaire completion required a reading level of grade 3.3. Some students, even in grades above 3, may have found this level challenging.

Definitions

A. Anger Control Training (ACT): A learning-based component of Aggression Replacement Training (ART) that teaches the inhibition of anger, aggression, and antisocial behavior (Goldstein, 1988).

B. Conflict Resolution: A method or strategy that enables people to interact with each other in positive ways in order to resolve their differences (Stomfay-Stitz, 1994).

C. Guns: Gun refers to the kind of firearms that people sometimes fight each other with, not rifles used for hunting (Shapiro, Dorman, Burkey, & Welker, 1996).

D. Violence: The intentional use of physical force against another person or against oneself, which either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury or death (Rosenberg, O’Carroll, and Powell, 1992).

Summary

Chapter 1 provided an introduction to the study. The broad need for the study was to examine how adolescents are affected by violence and what factors draw them to violence, to learn how to reduce their using violence as a problem solving tool, to restore school-based quality of life, and to reduce the costs to society. The purpose of this study was to determine if violence prevention programs have a positive impact on attitudes towards guns and violence. Once an understanding of the nature of the conflict and an understanding of the
factors surrounding youths’ attitudes toward guns and violence is gained, 
schools and communities can work to provide peaceable school communities 
and youth who look to the future rather than live to survive. Also included in 
Chapter 1 was a description of the research design, treatment and control 
groups, limitations, and definitions relevant to this study.
Chapter 2

Review of Related Literature

Johnson and Johnson (Reducing School Violence, 1995) point out, "As violence increases, pressure for safe and orderly schools increases." Schools are at an impasse. By looking at violence in society and schools and examining the underlying factors supporting violence, one can gain a better understanding of what types of prevention programs will work. Factors that will be discussed are as follows: (1) violence in American society, (2) the nature of violence, (3) firearms, (4) violence in schools, and (5) violence prevention programs.

Violence in American Society

Violence is a problem of society. It has gone beyond being just a problem for the law enforcement and the criminal justice systems. Family members or acquaintances commit more than half of all homicides. Most of these acts of violence do not stem from criminal activities such as robbery; they are a result of violent arguments between people who know each other (Rosenberg, O'Carroll, and Powell, 1992). Deborah Prothrow-Stith (1994), Assistance Dean for Government and Community Programs at the Harvard School of Public Health proclaims, "More than 90 percent of homicide victims are killed by someone of the same race, half are killed by someone they know, and 20 percent are killed by a family member."
According to Joycelyn Elders (1994, p. 260) former Surgeon General:

"The problem of violence in this country has increased markedly in recent years, including extraordinary increases in homicide and suicide rates among our young people. Since the 1950s, suicide rates among our youth have almost quadrupled. Homicide rates among young men are 20 times as high as most other industrialized countries.... We now have a problem of children killing children."

C. Everett Koop and George D. Lundberg (1992, p. 3075) explained, "The leading cause of death in both black and white teenage boys in America is gunshot wounds." In 1990 homicides accounted for 50 percent and 27 percent of all deaths among black males and females ages 15 to 24 years, respectively. These figures from the National Center for Health Statistics show a marked increase from 1987. That year homicide accounted for 42 percent of all deaths among African-American males and 26 percent of deaths of females 15 to 24 years of age (Skolnick, 1993).

Adolescent homicide rates have reached the highest in U.S. history. Between 1985 and 1991, the homicide rate among teenaged males had more than doubled (Johnson and Johnson, Reducing School Violence, 1995). Every day, gunfire kills 16 individuals under the age of 19 (National Center for Health Statistics, 1996). Annual rates of firearm homicide for youth 15-19 years of age increased 155 percent between 1987 and 1994 (National Summary of Injury Mortality Data, 1996).
Violence is also a growing problem in the workplace. Incidences included disgruntled workers killing co-workers at post offices and restaurants. The estimated dollar cost to U.S. businesses for workplace violence is nearly $4.2 billion (Johnson and Johnson, Reducing School Violence, 1995). Elders (1994) explained that the total medical cost of all violence in the U.S. was $13.5 billion in 1992.

With the many factors contributing to violent behavior, the most effective way to deal with this problem is to address it from several angles--social, political, mental, religious, and behavioral (Skolnick, 1993). Christina Johnson, a 14 year old student at Masterman High School in Philadelphia, wrote: “My generation is slowly killing itself...it’s time for the young to take the initiative, stop the madness, stop the violence.” (Peirce, 1995, p. 190)

The Nature of Violence

Many studies looked at the etiology of violent behavior. Some of these studies will be discussed. However, one must first look at the general culture of violence. While the U.S. has strong laws against violence, they are inconsistently applied. Most violence remains a private affair. However, America’s infatuation with violence extends to the media, sports, politics, the military, and even church and school. Abortion protests, rap music with brutal themes, and even some cartoons are examples of the existing culture of violence in America (Brendtro & Long, 1995).

Brendtro and Long (1995) explain the roots of violence as such: (1) broken social bonds, (2) stress and conflict, (3) the culture of violence, and (4)
unhealthy brains- neurologically triggered aggression. In another study done by Lindquist and Molnar (1995), violence was attributed to poverty, disintegrating home environments, child abuse, our violent culture, our materialistic culture, and our pressure to achieve. Social workers attempt to explain the nature of violence as relating to ego deficits, poor frustration tolerance and impulse control, poor judgment, depressed affect and boredom, and negative identity (Shachter & Seinfeld, 1994).

In a quest to determine what attracts young people to violence, Shapiro, Dorman, Burkey, and Welker (1992) found four factors that could explain why some young people are prone to violence. One factor is excitement; youth may hold the attitude that guns are intrinsically exciting, stimulating, and fun. The second factor is the power and safety that guns may bring. Third, youth have come to a point of comfort with aggression. They have respect for the people who use aggression. The fourth factor contributing to the nature of violence among youth is called aggressive response to shame, which involves youths’ perceived sense of disrespect from others, in combination with the feeling that the only way to rid their shame is to use physical aggression.

"The American culture of violence is reflected in history, attitudes, belief systems, and coping styles of the population in dealing with conflicts, frustration, and the quest for wealth and power (Shachter & Seinfeld, 1994, p. 347)."

According to Reising (1995, p. 270), "Unless the nation learns to control violence, ‘our collective future will become a nightmare.’"
Firearms

Are today's teenagers more violent than those in the years prior, or are their acts merely deadlier? Now, disputes more frequently end in death; whereas, before, fists were used in contrast to guns--specifically handguns. According to the Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (BATF) there are more than 200 million firearms in the United States--more than enough to arm every adult and teenager in the country (Firearms and youth, 1996). Also, according to the BATF as of December 31, 1994, there were 18 times more gun dealers than McDonald's stores in California.

Firearms are becoming easier to get and are more likely to be used. A report of studies by the National Network of Violence Prevention Practitioners (NNVPP) (1996) states: "A national survey of students in grades 6-12 showed that nearly 60 percent of all respondents stated that they could get a handgun if they wanted one. One in five surveyed stated that they could get a gun within an hour." Another report by the NNVPP (1996) of a study of suburban high school students states that 20 percent of the respondents approved of shooting someone who had stolen from them, and of this same group, eight percent condoned shooting someone who insulted or offended them.

Firearms of all types play a large role in youth crime; whereas, handguns play a major role in youth suicide. According to the National Center for Health Statistics (1996), every day in 1994, 16 children aged 19 and under were killed with guns. Every six hours a youth aged 10-19 committed suicide with a firearm—a total of 1,564 young people. The 1994 report from the National
Center for Health Statistics stated, "Firearms kill more people between the ages of 15 and 24 than all natural causes combined."

Firearms not only contribute to the death rate but they also contribute to pain, suffering, and lost quality of life. The estimated cost of firearm injuries in pain, suffering, and lost quality of life was $75 billion in 1992 (Textbook of Penetrating Injury, 1995). The estimated cost of direct health care expenditures for firearm related injuries in the United States in 1995 was $4 billion (Kizer, 1995). The author of Children's Environments, K. Christoffel (1995), stated, "The firearm injury epidemic, due largely to handgun injuries, is ten times larger than the polio epidemic of the first half of this century."

The use of firearms as a solution to conflict is menacing. The safety and well being of youth throughout America is being threatened. The number of deaths and injuries due to handguns among young people is jolting. The above statistics are evidence of the impact such violence is having on youth. For America to reduce the gun violence in schools and communities, changes in the gun-prone attitudes of elementary-age students will need to be made (Clough, 1994).

**Violence in Schools**

Violence in schools is on the rise. It is increasing in urban, suburban, and rural areas. School violence can happen inside school buildings, on school grounds, or on the way to and/or from school (Preventing school violence, 1994).

Several studies indicate this increasing violence. According to the 26th Annual Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitude Toward the Public Schools (1994),
"fighting, violence, and gangs" has moved to the top of the list to tie with "lack of discipline" as the biggest problem facing schools. Currently, more than 2,000 students are attacked on the school ground, 900 teachers are threatened, and 40 are assaulted per day. Each day 100,000 kids bring guns to school, and 40 children are killed or injured by them (Merina, 1995).

The Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher (1996), which surveyed a total of 2,524 public school students in grades seven through 12, revealed the following regarding social tension and violence in schools:

1. 25% reported having very serious problems with hostile or threatening remarks between different groups of students;
2. 24% reported threats or destructive acts, other than physical fights;
3. 21% reported turf battles between different groups of students;
4. 26% reported physical fights between different groups of friends; and
5. 26% reported gang violence.

The following results of the 720-affiliate school districts that responded to the National School Boards Association Best Practices Series (1994) were reported:

1. 82% of the schools reported increasing violence over the last 5 years;
2. 60% of schools reported weapons incidents;
3. three-fourths of the schools reported that their school had dealt with violent student-on-student attacks in the past year; and
4. 13% reported a knifing or shooting.
One study showed that often school violence was a result of teasing, bullying, and horseplay, which simply had gotten out of hand. Children are learning to use violence to solve problems. The trend of using violence to solve problems increases the potential for serious violence (Johnson and Johnson, *Reducing School Violence*, 1995).

When students choose to act violently, many serious problems can result and people get hurt. Students may lose friends, get suspended, get expelled, get arrested, or have to pay for medical bills and property damage. These penalties can negatively affect their chances for a successful future. From one student's act of violence, every student suffers. Fear and tension develops in and around the school causing the school to become a poor learning environment. All of these factors form a cycle. Not only do the students suffer but the school and community also suffer (Preventing school violence, 1994). Prevention of violence can be achieved by uniting the home, school, and community in efforts to protect children and youth (Elders, 1994).

**Methods of Violence Prevention in Schools**

As violence increases, pressure for safe and orderly schools increases. Recent media accounts of violence in urban, suburban, and rural schools have called for serious attention to this matter. The existence of violence in the schools is a mirror image of violence in society. Due to the complexity surrounding the nature of violence, school-based violence prevention programs need to be addressed through comprehensive efforts in order to provide a safe environment for learning and social growth.
A variety of prevention methods can be utilized. Certain large cities are utilizing a variety of approaches to protect kids. These include weapons confiscation, character education, a media campaign to prevent violence, and peer mediation and conflict resolution. Suggestions for prevention measures that will and will not work are provided.

Public schools in Chicago, Illinois, have hired their own security staffs composed of parents and other paid community members. The obvious presence of more adults, especially parents, has proven to be effective. “In four years, crimes that endangered children have dropped 18 percent, and arrests made on school property for murder, aggravated battery, robbery, and other serious crimes have fallen 46 percent,” according to Crouch and Williams (1995).

Buffalo, New York public schools began requiring students to store backpacks and schoolbags in their lockers as soon as they enter school. Additionally, security teams search lockers. The number of assaults dropped from 211 in 1992-93 to 156 in 1993-94, while the number of confiscations dropped from 346 to 151 (Crouch & Williams, 1995).

A school system in Memphis, Tennessee, set up a weapon hotline to reduce crime through confiscating weapons. The school system, in conjunction with Crime Stoppers and the Memphis Police Department, developed the Weapons Watch hotline. Crime Stoppers pays students $50 for reporting weapons on campus. Students calling in a weapon report will remain anonymous and are given a verification number to claim their reward, if a
weapon is found (Crouch & Williams, 1995). Since using the hotline, 120 weapons have been confiscated. According to Crouch and Williams (1995), the total number of weapons confiscated has risen from 279 in 1992-93 to 314 in 1993-94.

Students in Baltimore, Maryland, expressed that they felt safe while in school, but on the way to and from school they felt unsafe. Based on these findings, a group of churches, businesses, and other institutions decided to form a "safety corridor." The safety corridor is provided two hours before and after school. Volunteers from the centers are trained to handle crises that affect a child. Many of the volunteers sit on the front steps of these safe havens to let the students know people are looking out for them (Crouch & Williams, 1995).

The Cleveland Public School system developed a program called "Watch Your Hands." In 1990, the school system began teaching elementary students what is and is not acceptable behavior. Many times children do not know what is considered appropriate behavior. Staff from the schools teach students both good and bad examples of using the hands. Some good uses of the hands are handshaking and drawing, while hitting and punching are inappropriate uses of the hands. In addition to teaching how hands should and should not be used, the program also covers sexual misconduct, fighting, and even cheating on tests (Crouch & Williams, 1995).

The program stresses parental involvement. Some schools even provide training sessions for the parents. However, the key to the program is the use of
reinforcement. Lessons for each grade are designed to build upon the preceding year (Crouch & Williams, 1995).

Many schools are hiring guards, adding permanent police officers to their staff, and installing metal detectors, but more must be done, according to Curwin (1995). He suggests an anti-violence campaign containing the following three basic elements:

1. Teaching students alternatives to violence (i.e., conflict resolution, peer mediation, anger control, etc.);
2. Teaching students how to make more effective choices (i.e., selecting nonviolent alternatives); and
3. Models for students' alternative expressions of anger, frustration, and impatience (i.e., teachers, administrators, bus drivers carry out the desired behavior to model making positive choices).

This approach shows students that real people use these strategies and that they work (Curwin).

Violence has become the norm on urban streets. Many teenagers view walking away from a fight as "weak" and "uncool." However, focus groups conducted in Boston, Massachusetts by Jay Winsten, director of the Harvard School of Public Health's Center for Health Communications, showed that occasionally kids do find a way to avoid fights without losing face, especially when one group of teens has an obvious advantage over the other, such as a gun (Stevens, 1994).
Winsten hoped to convince kids that "the weak thing to do is to let their buttons be pushed and lose control over their lives." The campaign titled "Squash It!" wanted to portray walking away from a potentially violent situation as the cool, smart solution. The campaign utilized a hand gesture in which an open palm slaps down onto a vertical fist. Public service announcements (PSA's) featured professional and collegiate coaches who utilized the hand gesture and said, "If you're on the streets, stay in control. 'Squash It'!" The National Association of Broadcaster distributed the PSA's to local stations. This campaign was designed similarly to campaigns used to transform smoking "from a sexy, attractive behavior into an unsightly, smelly habit." This campaign was used as a complement to gun control, strict enforcement of criminal laws, educational reform, jobs creation, school-based programs on conflict resolution, and other essential approaches to violence prevention (Stevens, 1994).

Conflict resolution, as used in schools, has been ongoing for nearly two decades. It is based on the viewpoint that every person is responsible for "creating a peaceful school community, a place in which emotional, spiritual, and physical safety of all students and staff are ensured." (Townley, 1995, p. 80)

Peer mediation is just one component of this comprehensive approach. The success of peer mediation depends upon the entire school community—students, teachers, families, and the community—understanding the underlying principles of peer mediation (Townley, 1995). In a review of articles by Hoot and Roberson (1994), the authors cite comments by another author, Amy Hatkoff, who explained: "...schools (need) to recognize the hazards and temptations
facing young people and to provide preventative support and guidance...using community sources as mentors to help children actualize their potential and pursue a constructive path in life."

Each community should tailor programs to fit its specific needs. For all of the variety that exists among conflict resolution programs, two common characteristics abound:

1. Students are more likely to be receptive to learning new skills if they are learned from other students (Brown, Monson, & Stone, 1993), and
2. Young people must know they have many choices (besides being passive or aggressive) for dealing with conflict (Miller, 1993).

Even though conflict resolution has been in existence for two decades, results from such programs are difficult to determine. However, many studies describe the nature of peer mediation and conflict resolution. Of all the programs studied, Morse and Andrea (1994) most thoroughly described the underlying principles of peer mediation and its expected results.

Morse and Andrea (1994) portrayed a detailed look at a program that trains students to become effective peer mediators. Peer mediation, according to the authors, is possibly “one of the most promising ideas in years.” Mediation is useful in helping students resolve conflicts and in teaching students how to logically and competently communicate with one another.

Authors David W. Johnson and Roger T. Johnson (Why violence prevention, 1995) gave six principles that they think would be helpful to schools that are trying to provide an “orderly and peaceful place in which high-quality
education can take place.” These principles are based on managing conflicts constructively without physical or verbal violence. Such programs are developed to prevent violence and cultivate positive behavior.

The first principle is to go beyond violence prevention to conflict resolution training. In a survey of 51 violence prevention programs, which involve using metal detectors, police patrol, and anger management, Wilson-Brewer and colleagues found that less than half of the programs even claimed to reduce the levels of violence. Very few even had data to back up their claims to prevent violence (Johnson & Johnson, Why violence prevention, 1995).

Other principles described by Johnson and Johnson (Why violence prevention, 1995) are as follows:

1. Don’t attempt to eliminate all conflicts. Eliminating violence does not mean eliminating conflict.

2. Create a cooperative context. Do more than change individual students. Create a total school environment that promotes a learning community in which students live by nonviolence.

3. Decrease in-school risk factors. Three factors that place children and adolescents at risk are academic failure, alienation from schoolmates, and having a high level of psychological pathology.

4. Use academic controversy to increase learning. “An academic controversy exists when one student’s ideas, information, conclusions, theories, and opinions are incompatible with those of another, and the two seek to reach an agreement.”
5. Teach all students how to resolve conflicts constructively. Students need to learn how to manage conflicts constructively by negotiating agreements and mediating their peers’ conflicts.

This process will not be quick or easy. Just as it took 30 years to reduce smoking and 15 years to reduce drunk driving, it may take more than 20 or 30 years to assure that children and adolescents can manage conflicts constructively. Much practice will be required. Schools will need to implement these procedures for 12 or more years. The more practice, the greater the likelihood that these skills will be used beyond the classroom (Johnson and Johnson, Why violence prevention, 1995). The National School Safety Center (1995) in the School Safety Report to Congress re: School Safety states, “Promising school-based violence prevention programs require a comprehensive approach, early start and long term commitment, strong school leadership and disciplinary policies, staff development, parental involvement, community links/partnerships, and a culturally sensitive and developmentally appropriate approach.”

The world is crying out for a new way of fighting—a way to be strong without being mean. Even though conflict is inevitable, Lantieri (1995, p. 14) states, "...we urgently need to find ways to end the violence between diverse groups of people that causes so much unnecessary pain and suffering.” Franklin Delano Roosevelt once said, “If civilization is to survive, we must cultivate the science of human relationships—the ability of all peoples, of all kinds, to live together in the same world at peace.”
Summary

Chapter 2 provided a review of literature related to violence. Violence in American society, the nature of violence, and firearms were highlighted. With an understanding of the larger topics, a further investigation of literature related to violence in schools and methods of violence prevention in schools was conducted.
Chapter 3
Methodology

This chapter contains a description of the methodology that was used in this study. It includes the hypothesis, a null hypothesis, a description of the population and sample, a description of the control group, and the procedures that were followed. A description of the survey instrument is provided, as well as a discussion of the data collection and analysis.

Hypothesis

Third through sixth grade students who receive anger control training and seventh grade students who receive conflict resolution training will show a significantly lower attraction towards guns and violence than students receiving no such training.

Null Hypothesis

Third through sixth grade students who receive anger-control training and seventh grade students who receive conflict resolution training will not show a significantly lower attraction towards guns and violence than students receiving no such training.
Population and Sample Selection

The population of interest was third through seventh grade students in America. The treatment groups consisted of students in grades 3-6 at Parker-Bennett Elementary School participating in Anger Control Training (ACT) and 7th grade students at Bowling Green Junior High School enrolled in the required Consumer Family Science class, which included a unit of training in conflict resolution. Both schools are part of the Bowling Green Independent School District, which draws from within the Bowling Green City limits.

Students participating in ACT were referred by teachers on the basis of their at-risk status. "At-risk", for the purposes of referral, was defined as exhibiting overly aggressive or overly introverted behaviors that may interfere with the learning process and place the student at risk of academic failure. ACT met for 30 minutes, one time a week, throughout the school year, for a total of 24 sessions. In ACT, students were taught to respond to anger-instigating situations "less impulsively, more reflectively, and with less likelihood of acting-out behavior." (Goldstein)

Conflict resolution training was taught 1 hour per day for 5 days in the required Consumer Family Science class. Conflict resolution training included the following topics: active listening, assertiveness, expressing feelings, perspective taking, cooperation, negotiation, problem solving, identifying and analyzing conflict, and countering expressions of bias.

The control groups were randomly (see footnote 1, chapter 1) selected 3-6 grade students at Parker-Bennett and randomly selected seventh grade
students at Bowling Green Junior High, all who had not received a violence prevention component such as ACT or conflict resolution training.

**Research Design**

A pre-experimental posttest only design was used for this research project. The control group was randomly selected; whereas, the treatment group was based on the students' class (intervention) enrollment.

**Instrument**

The instrument selected was the *Attitudes Toward Guns and Violence Questionnaire* (AGVQ). The AGVQ is a measure of violence-related attitudes in youth aged 8 to 18. It is an empirically based measure of these attitudes for community samples of youth. The AGVQ includes twenty-six items. The response format is a three point Likert-type scale with anchors of "disagree," "not sure," and "agree." The AGVQ requires reading skills at grade level 3.3 (Shapiro, Dorman, Burkey, & Welker, 1996). For purposes of this study, an additional set of thirteen questions about environmental factors, such as ownership of a gun or rifle and being a witness to gun shot, have been added to the AGVQ.

Psychometric analyses were conducted to assess the internal consistency and validity of the AGVQ. Part-whole correlations between each of the AGVQ items were calculated. Chronbach's alpha was .94. These results indicate a highly satisfactory level of internal consistency for the questionnaire (Shapiro, Dorman, Burkey, & Welker, 1996). Factor analysis of the pilot study and following studies showed a similar factor structure. Thus, replication was
considered successful, and the AGVQ seems to be a dependable measure of violence-related attitudes for youth across a wide age range and diverse demographic backgrounds. The possible range of test scores is 0 to 52, where 0 represents no expressed attraction towards guns and violence. (Shapiro, Dorman, Burkey, & Welker)

Data Collection Procedures

Prior to administering the questionnaire the parents received a written description of the procedure and were free to indicate nonconsent to their child’s participation. The staff of the Parker Bennett Family Resource Center and Bowling Green Junior High Youth Services Center, which are centers established by the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1991 for the purposes of removing non-cognitive barriers to learning, administered the questionnaire. The AGVQ was administered near the completion of the school year, when violence prevention programs had been completely implemented. Students were instructed to not include their names on the questionnaire to ensure complete anonymity and confidentiality. The AGVQ began with written directions, which were read aloud to all participants. The administrator read aloud the entire questionnaire to third grade pupils while they followed along. Each participant was instructed not to skip any of the items.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the students were analyzed and computed using SPSS. The AGVQ contained a total of 26 Likert-type items for analysis. The responses were coded for the analysis. The data were analyzed using the
statistical procedure called analysis of variance (ANOVA). ANOVA is a procedure for testing differences between two or more means for statistical significance.

Summary

Chapter 3 provided a discussion of the methodology used to test the hypothesis. The hypothesis and null hypothesis were stated in this chapter. The instrument used for data collection was discussed. The treatment group, as well as the control group, was identified. Data analysis procedures were also explained.
Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of this study was to assess the efficacy of violence prevention programs on the attitudes towards guns and violence among students in grades three through seven. Data were collected with the Attitudes Towards Guns and Violence Questionnaire (AGVQ) during the spring 1997 semester at Parker Bennett Elementary School and Bowling Green Junior High School. The sample studied was third through sixth grade students at Parker Bennett and seventh grade students at Bowling Green Junior High. The data were entered into an SPSS data file to determine the differences in attitudes towards guns and violence between groups that participated in violence prevention programs and those who did not. The dependent variables were the students' attitudes towards guns and violence, and the independent variable was the intervention.

Description of Study Sample

A total of 54 students in grades 3-6 and 61 students in grade 7 completed the AGVQ. However, eighteen (18) or 15.7% of the cases were excluded due to incomplete or missing data. Therefore, a total of 97 cases (3-6 treatment (n=25); 3-6 control (n=16); grade 7 treatment (n=26); and grade 7 control (n=30)) were utilized for this study, which was a posttest only design. A description of the study groups is summarized in Table 1.
Table 1

Description of Study Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Total Percentage</th>
<th>Percentage Grades 3-6</th>
<th>Percentage Grade 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>T</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>53.9</td>
<td>69.6</td>
<td>43.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>46.1</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>56.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>45.2</td>
<td>68.4</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>30.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades 3-6</td>
<td>46.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 7</td>
<td>53.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

T=Treatment Group  
C=Control Group

Descriptive Data

Data on the subjects' AGVQ scores (vioscores) are summarized in Table 2. The table displays the mean score and standard deviations. The information in Table 2 indicates that there were no significant differences between treatment and control groups' attitudes towards guns and violence.
Table 2

Vioscores for Grades 3-6 and Grade 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th></th>
<th>Control</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-6</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>16.32</td>
<td>9.56</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>19.73</td>
<td>9.69</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ns = no significance found at alpha = .05

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis: Third through sixth grade students who receive anger control training and seventh grade students who receive conflict resolution training will show a significantly lower attraction towards guns and violence than students receiving no such training.

To test this hypothesis, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed. As Table 2 indicates, the analysis found no significance between treatment and control groups at either grade level. At grades 3-6, the vioscore for the treatment group was 16.32, compared to the score of 16.56 for the control group. In grade 7, the vioscore for the treatment group was 19.73, compared to the score of 19.60 for the control group, also not a significant difference.
Other Results

Subjects in this survey were asked thirteen additional questions that might indicate environmental factors that influence one’s attitudes towards guns and violence. These questions were also analyzed using ANOVA. In the 3-6 grade groups, significant differences correlating with negative attitudes towards guns and violence were noted. Those differences were gun ownership (significant at .003) and being shot in real life (significant at .009). In the grade 7 group, the factors found to be significantly correlated to negative attitudes toward guns and violence are as follows: gun ownership (.001); rifle ownership (.008); and family member being shot (.04).
Chapter 5
Discussion

Summary of Results

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine if any significant difference in attitudes towards guns and violence existed between third through sixth grade students who had Anger Control Training classes and third through sixth grade students who did not and between seventh grade students who had a unit of conflict resolution training and seventh grade students who did not. The ANOVA revealed no significant difference between the treatment and control groups.

Discussion

Violence is a public health problem. In addition to the costs associated with each child gunshot victim ($3 million per fatality and $390,00 per hospitalization), schools and communities suffer other effects of violence. Children who witness violence experience various health affects, such as posttraumatic stress disorder, poor attention spans, difficulty sleeping, anxiety, and depression. As a result of such responses, some children begin engaging in risky behaviors, such as alcohol and other drug use and sexual activity.
In response to the costs associated with violence, schools have implemented various programs to reduce the effects of violence (i.e., poor academic performance and absenteeism). Conflict resolution and ACT are two such programs designed to prevent violence and, thus, reduce the costs of violence.

Logic would follow that students who receive ACT or conflict resolution training would have significantly lower scores on the AGVQ. However, the results of this study indicated no significant difference in attitudes between students who received an intervention and students who did not receive an intervention. As a result of finding no significant differences, the research hypothesis for this study could not be supported.

Limitations

The results of this study are limited by the fact that the AGVQ did not measure or control for all the factors that affect attitudes about guns and violence in adolescents. Other factors outside the focus of this study may have had a greater influence on the students’ attitudes than did the interventions. Additionally, the AGVQ was administered as a posttest only. Therefore, a comparison of attitudes before and after the intervention could not be made.

Another concern is that the respondents may not have been completely honest when answering the AGVQ. The instrument was a self-report questionnaire, and the students may have been concerned about the confidentiality of the responses as some of the items may have been considered sensitive.
Other possible limitations were the duration and intensity of the study. The study for grades 3-6 was conducted over the course of one school year (1 time per week for 30 minutes), and the study for grade 7 was only for 5-one-hour sessions. This time frame may not have been long enough nor intense enough to allow for behavior change.

**Conclusions**

Based on the statistical analysis, no significant differences between groups were found in this study, thus leads to the following conclusion:

Anger control training and conflict resolution training, as conducted in this manner and in this setting, did not lead to a significantly lower attraction towards guns and violence.

**Implications**

Although the results of this study found no significant effects, it still holds some implications for school-based violence prevention. It seems most practical to utilize the school setting as a means of providing interventions to prevent violence. The results suggest that more comprehensive (various activities across curriculum) and more time-intensive interventions are needed at the elementary and junior high levels in order to change attitudes towards guns and violence.

**Recommendations**

Based on the results of this study, the following suggestions are made for future studies.
1. Other factors influencing students’ attitudes towards guns and violence need to be included in future studies.

2. Interventions should be incorporated utilizing various types of activities and throughout the school curriculum and in a more time-intensive manner.

3. A long-term study should be conducted to determine if the intervention has benefits that exist beyond the course of a school year.

4. Conduct an assessment of the target population to determine which risk and protective factors exist. Based on the assessment, select an appropriate science-based program to replicate and evaluate at the local level. The Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence at the University of Colorado, Boulder, has gathered research on various violence prevention programs and has prepared a list of effective and promising programs.

5. A randomized clinical trial should be performed to evaluate the efficacy of both interventions.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A
WHAT'S YOUR OPINION?

Directions: On the next few pages, there are some questions that ask for your opinion about different things. "Opinion" means what you feel or think about something. This is not a test because these questions do not have right answers and wrong answers. Everybody has different opinions and everybody has the right to have their own opinions.

The people who made up these questions want to know what kids think and feel about different things. So your job is just to answer the questions by giving your opinion. Most of these questions have to do with problems between people, fighting, and guns, because these are important things for us to think about. When the questions are about guns, they don't mean rifles for hunting, they're asking about the kind of guns that people sometimes fight each other with. You can feel free to be honest when giving your opinions because no one will put their names on the papers and your teacher will not know what you said.

Here's how this works. You will read an idea, and then you'll decide whether you agree with the idea, disagree with it, or you're not sure about it. Give your answer by drawing a circle around the circle that says whether you agree, disagree, or are not sure like this:

If you agree with the idea, you'd give your answer like this:

If you're not sure what you think about the idea, give your answer like this:

If you disagree with the idea, give your answer like this:

If you change your mind about your answer, just erase your first circle and make your new one. Let's try some just for practice. What is your opinion about these three things?

Baseball is my favorite sport.

Walking in the rain is kind of fun.

I like TV programs about police officers.

If you have any questions about how to do this, just go ahead and ask.
Now, here are the questions.

<p>| | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>You've got to fight to show people you're not a wimp.</td>
<td>AGREE</td>
<td>NOT SURE</td>
<td>DISAGREE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>If someone disrespects me, I have to fight them to get my pride back.</td>
<td>AGREE</td>
<td>NOT SURE</td>
<td>DISAGREE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Carrying a gun makes people feel safe.</td>
<td>AGREE</td>
<td>NOT SURE</td>
<td>DISAGREE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Carrying a gun makes people feel powerful and strong.</td>
<td>AGREE</td>
<td>NOT SURE</td>
<td>DISAGREE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>If people are nice to me I'll be nice to them, but if someone stops me from getting what I want, they'll pay for it bad.</td>
<td>AGREE</td>
<td>NOT SURE</td>
<td>DISAGREE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I'd like to have a gun so that people would look up to me.</td>
<td>AGREE</td>
<td>NOT SURE</td>
<td>DISAGREE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>It would be exciting to hold a loaded gun in my hand.</td>
<td>AGREE</td>
<td>NOT SURE</td>
<td>DISAGREE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>I wish there weren't any guns in my neighborhood.</td>
<td>AGREE</td>
<td>NOT SURE</td>
<td>DISAGREE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I bet it would feel real cool to walk down the street with a gun in my pocket.</td>
<td>AGREE</td>
<td>NOT SURE</td>
<td>DISAGREE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>I'd feel awful inside if someone laughed at me and I didn't fight them.</td>
<td>AGREE</td>
<td>NOT SURE</td>
<td>DISAGREE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>It would make me feel really powerful to hold a loaded gun in my hand.</td>
<td>AGREE</td>
<td>NOT SURE</td>
<td>DISAGREE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>I'd like to have my own gun.</td>
<td>AGREE</td>
<td>NOT SURE</td>
<td>DISAGREE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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13. Most people feel nervous around someone with a gun and they want to get away from that person.

14. The people I respect would never go around with a gun because they're against hurting people.

15. I think it would be fun to play around with a real gun.

16. If someone insults me or my family, it really bothers me, but if I beat them up, that makes me feel better.

17. If somebody insults you, and you don't want to be a chump, you have to fight.

18. I don't like people who have guns because they might kill someone.

19. Carrying a gun makes people feel powerful and strong.

20. A kid who doesn't get even with someone who makes fun of him is a sucker.

21. Belonging to a gang makes kids feel safe because they've got people to back them up.

22. If I acted the way teachers think I should out on the street, people would think I was weak and I'd get pushed around.

23. I wish everyone would get rid of all their guns.
24. I'd feel awful inside if someone laughed at me and I didn't fight them.

25. I don't like being around people with guns because someone could end up getting hurt.

26. Kids in gangs feel like they're part of something powerful.
Thanks for telling your opinions! Now, here are a few questions about your own life.

How old are you?  

What grade are you in?  

Are you a boy or a girl?  

What is your cultural group? (Circle one)  
- African-American (Black)  
- White  
- Hispanic  
- Other group

Have you heard guns being shot in your neighborhood?  

Is there a gun in your house?  

Is there a rifle for hunting in your house?  

Do you know someone who has a gun?  

Do you know someone who has a rifle for hunting?  

Have you ever held a gun?  

Have you ever held a hunting rifle?  

Do you have your own gun?  

Do you have your own hunting rifle?  

Have you ever seen somebody get shot in real life?  
- If you said yes, how many times have you seen somebody get shot?  

Have you ever been shot with a gun?  
- If you said yes, who did that to you?  

Has anyone in your family ever been shot?  
- If you said yes, who was shot?  

Have any of your friends or relatives ever been shot?  
- If you said yes, how many of your friends or relatives has this happened to?