

Are Adventist Schools Safe?

The answer may surprise you.

The Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll for 1995 showed that “a vast number of the [U.S.] public believes that violence in the public schools is increasing, not only in the nation’s schools (89%) but in local schools (67%) as well.”¹

The poll also showed that people with children in private or church-related schools were much more likely to think that violence in public schools had increased a great deal. This finding may suggest that parents send their children to private or church-related schools to escape the violence in public schools. Also, one might conclude that these parents think that private or church-related schools are violence-free or at least have fewer problems in this area than public schools.

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

About one in four students nationally report having serious problems in school with hostile or threatening remarks and physical fights. One in five students (22 percent) say that violence has decreased over the past year, yet an equal proportion say it has increased (21 percent).²

Violence is rampant in today’s world. It “runs the gamut from bullying to murder, and finds fertile ground in television programs, movies, videos, and superhero games, where it’s gussied up and glamorized.”³

Are violence and crime increasing in private and church-related schools? Are these schools as safe as parents perceive them to be? In 1991, Dale Johnson wrote an article for this *Journal* entitled “Coping With the Unthinkable: Violence in SDA Schools.”⁴ Violence in our schools may have been “unthinkable” in the past, but Adventist schools are not unaffected by the effects of violence, which can and do occur every-

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By Paul Plummer

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where. As Johnson wrote, "School violence spans geography, race, gender, and religion." No Adventist teacher in our K-16 system can afford to close his or her eyes to this problem.

A recent study of 24 Adventist schools in the Pacific Union Conference conducted by Plummer and Gifford found that violence has invaded our schools. Figure 1 shows the results of this study, which involved educational institutions of all sizes, from small, one-teacher schools to those with 400 or more students.⁶

One significant finding of this study was that 17 percent of schools had thefts more than once a month, while 61 percent reported that they had thefts less than once per month. Only 22 percent of the schools reported that they never had any thefts. This means that 78 percent of the schools surveyed have a problem with theft!

Problems with a schoolyard bully were reported by 54 percent of the schools studied, with 12 percent of the schools reporting bullying incidents more than once a month. Only 14 percent

Are violence and crime increasing in private and church-related schools?

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

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

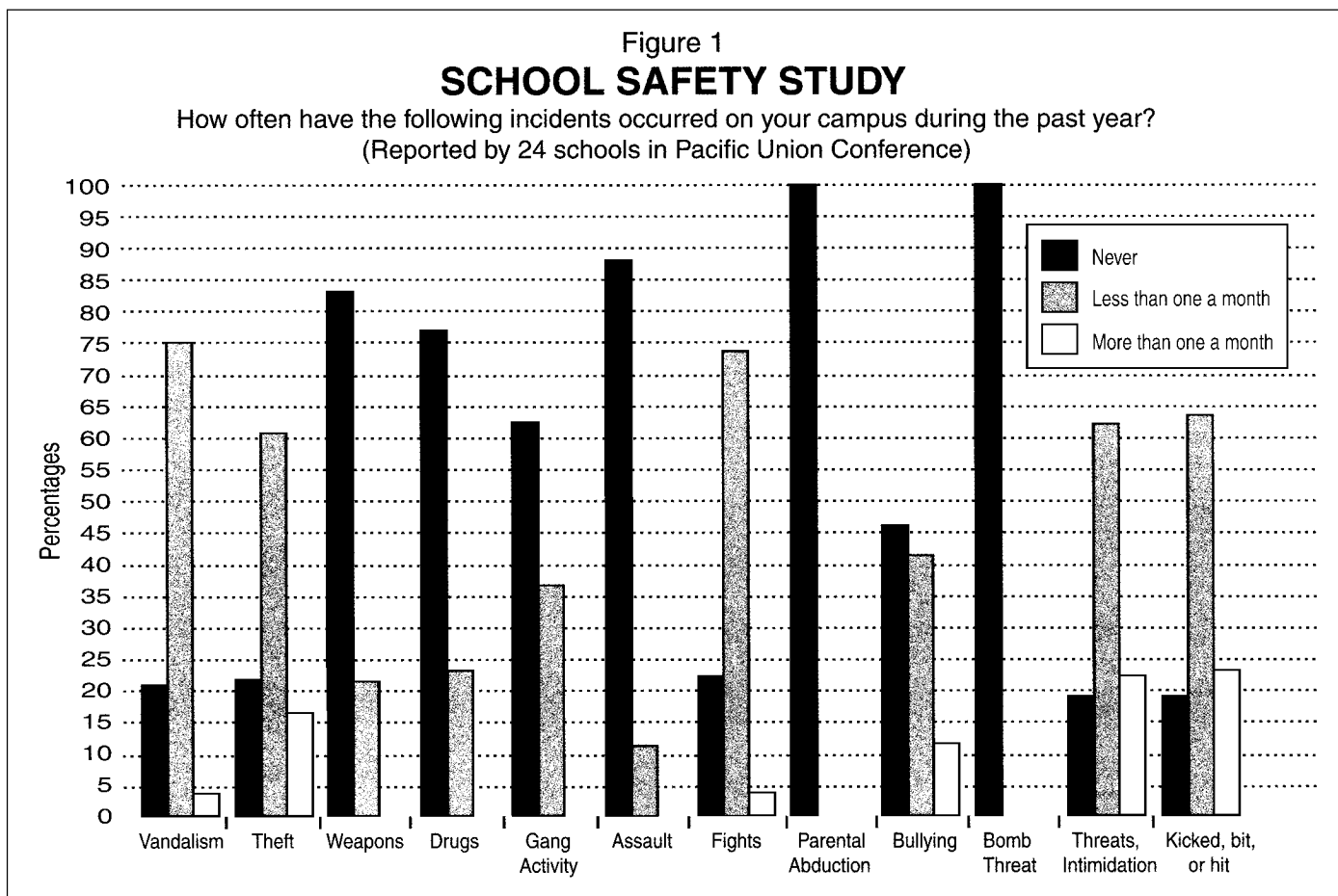
Adventist educators have usually played down such statistics or denied that crime or violence is a concern on their campuses. In general, public school

administrators and teachers have been more willing to acknowledge their concern about school safety than have Adventist educators.

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

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

The National Center for Education Statistics recently published a study showing what percentage of American students in grades six through 12 had heard reports about, witnessed, worried about, or were victimized by bullying, physical attack, and robbery.⁷



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

As Adventist educators, we need to take a proactive stance when it comes to school violence and safety concerns. The articles in this special issue should help each of us to acknowledge the problems of violence and crime on our campuses. They will suggest positive

ways to make our schools safer places where the peace and love of Christ pervades the campuses, and everything possible has been done to banish fear, crime, and violence.✍

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REFERENCES

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2. *The Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher*, 1996; "Students Voice Their Opinions On: Violence, Social Tension and Equality Among Teens, Part 1," (New York: Louis Harris and Associates, Inc., 1996), pp. 7, 9.
3. "How to Teach Children About Living in a World With Violence," *Instructor* 105:1 (July/August 1995), p. 65.
4. Dale Johnson, "Coping With the Unthinkable: Violence in SDA Schools," *The Journal of Adventist Education* 53:2 (December 1990/January 1991), p. 21.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Unpublished study by Dr. Paul Plummer and Trina Gifford, May 1995.
7. May Jo Nolin and Elizabeth Davies, "Student Victimization at School," *National Center for Education Statistics* (October 1995), p. 2.
8. Bernard James, "School Violence and the Law," *Momentum* (February/March 1995), p. 31.

Fifty-six percent of students in grades six to 12 knew that bullying occurred, while 42 percent had witnessed it, 18 percent were worried about bullying, and eight percent had actually experienced it. The graph shows the percentages for physical attack and robbery or theft.

Bullying, threats, physical attacks, and thefts were the most common kinds of violence in the SDA schools studied by Plummer.

School officials can respond in one of two ways to the growing concern about violence and crime on school campuses—reactively or proactively.⁸ A reactive response waits until acts of violence or crime occur on campus. The perpetrators are identified, and appropriate discipline is administered.

The proactive stance calls for school officials to be on the lookout for signs of trouble. They devise plans in advance to respond to any signs of violence or crime that might arise on campus. This

Figure 2
Reports by U.S. students in grades six to 12 of the occurrence, witnessing, worry about, or victimization, by selected incidents: 1993

