

Profile of the Weapon Carrying Student in Selected Public Middle and High Schools

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Abstract

This study examines those students who were found to be in possession of a weapon on the campus of a public middle or high school over a period of four school years. Official police reports of weapon carrying were reviewed to determine the type of weapon, the sex, race, and age of the student involved, and how the weapon was discovered. The individual student's previous criminal record was checked to determine if the child had previously been charged with any delinquent acts. Information on the child's disciplinary record and whether the child had been staffed as "special ed" was also obtained from a "predisposition report" prepared for the juvenile court. It was statistically significant that weapon carriers did not have excessively delinquent backgrounds, were not those who frequently misbehaved in school, nor were children who were "special ed" more likely to carry a weapon than other students. Males were found to carry weapons twice as frequently as females, firearms were almost exclusively carried by males. Edged weapons were nearly 6 times more prevalent than firearms, and 80% of the firearms were recovered before they were used in a crime.

Introduction

Americans live in a violent society. The nightly news is replete with reports of shootings, stabbings, sexual assaults and crimes of unspeakable horror like the bombing of the Federal office building in Oklahoma City in April of 1995. Unfortunately, violence and crime have also come to be a significant part of the educational environment. According to one study (Boothe, Bradley, Flick, Keough, & Kirk, 1993), 98% of middle and high school principals believe that violence has gotten worse in the nation's schools within the past five years.

Schools were once believed to be a sanctuary, an island of tranquillity in a sea of upheaval and disharmony. Whatever went on elsewhere, parents felt that their child would be safe once they walked through the schoolyard gate. Unfortunately, schools, like the microcosms of society that they really are, have become one of the places where children are likely to be victimized. According to the National Crime Victimization Survey, over 23 million students reported being victimized at least once in the months preceding the survey (Bastian & Taylor, 1991).

The rate of teen violence has increased dramatically (Bastian & Taylor, 1991) and increasing numbers of weapons are turning up in our nation's schools. In response, educators have installed razor wire, walls, fences, security cameras, and metal detectors. They have also hired armed and unarmed security guards and uniformed police officers in an attempt to enhance the safety of the educational environment. In spite of these precautions, as well as other sanctions such as expulsion from school and criminal prosecution, over 21 million students brought a "weapon or other object to school for protection" during the 1988-89 school year (Bastian & Taylor, 1991).

Dealing with an issue before it has a chance to become a full-blown problem has been identified as a viable and desirable tactic in many disciplines. Whether it involves

the early identification of those at risk for adolescent suicide, drug use, or even dropping out of school, the development of a profile allows child-serving professionals to intervene and prevent the behavior from becoming destructive. If the weapon-bearing school child can be identified before they have an opportunity to use the weapon it will provide an important and perhaps lifesaving tool for both educators and law enforcement officials.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to determine if there are common dimensions that are statistically significant among students who have been found to be in possession of a deadly weapon at school. The results of this study, if in fact common dimensions are identified, will provide a profile of the child who brings a weapon to school. This in turn will allow intervention at the school level and prevent others from being victimized by such a child.

Research Question

The research question is: Are there common dimensions among weapon carrying students that are statistically significant? If in fact there are statistically significant common dimensions, what is the strength of the relationship between the various dimensions?

Delimitation

This study was conducted using data obtained from the St. Petersburg Police Department, St. Petersburg, Florida, and the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office, Largo, Florida. Data on the students were drawn from arrest reports from August of 1990 through June of 1994 for 23 middle schools and 14 high schools, and delinquency files from the Department of Juvenile Justice. The generalizability of this data is unknown. However, no special assumptions are present that indicate the research wouldn't have broad relevance to those interested in school safety.

Review of the Literature

The phenomenon of children bringing weapons to school is a relatively recent one. In fact it is only within the last few years that the entire issue of children arming themselves has garnered attention from researchers.

In testimony before the Judiciary Committee of the Senate (Hearings on the possession of weapons among children, 1992) Lt. Thomas Byrne of the Chicago Police Department's School Patrol Unit testified that in the first year of the unit's operation (1990-91 school year) they recovered 183 firearms in and around schools. With less than a month remaining in the 1991-92 school years, 180 firearms had been located.

In a survey of 758 high school students in a "large prominent city," Shelly and Wright (1993) found that 22% of the respondents owned a gun. Twelve per cent of the students carried a gun "occasionally" and 23% reported carrying a gun regularly. In the same study, in which inmates in correctional facilities were also surveyed, 69% indicated they carried a gun when they needed self-protection, while 70% of the students indicated that they felt that "protection" was a very important reason for obtaining a gun. Those students who carried guns either "regularly or occasionally"

made up 35% of the population, and 3% reported carrying a gun to school "all" or "most" of the time, with an additional 5% carrying a gun to school "now and then".

Callahan and Rivera (1992) reported significant findings on a survey of 970 eleventh grade students regarding firearm possession. They found that 84% of the students reported that handguns were "readily accessible", with the strongest association to handgun access being gang membership, selling drugs, interpersonal violence, battery, battery on a teacher and expulsion. They also determined that handgun ownership (which had a median age of 15 for first acquisition) did not vary significantly by sports participation, church membership or employment. However students who did not expect to go to college reported a three times greater prevalence of handgun ownership.

Callahan and Rivera (1992) also found that the highest prevalence of easy gun access was reported by African American males (59%), easy access was most common in the lowest social class, and males were 8 times more likely to own a firearm than females. They also determined that 4% of the respondents had carried a gun to school.

Sheley, McGee, and Wright (1995) found that in selected inner city high schools, the likelihood of being victimized by a weapon was not uncommon. Twenty percent of students as a whole and nearly one-third of males had been shot at, stabbed or otherwise injured by some type of weapon while either in transit to or from school, or while actually at school.

In a survey of Baltimore high school students, Hackett, Sandza, Gibney, and Gareiss, (1987) found that nearly one half of all males had carried a gun to school at least once.

In one of the most frequently cited surveys (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1991), the Centers for Disease Control, as part of the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) surveyed students about their weapon carrying habits. Of the 11,621 students who participated in the survey, 19.5% indicated that they had carried a weapon (defined in the instrument as a "gun, knife or club") within the preceding 30 days. Of those who identified the type of weapon, 55.2% carried knives, 24% carried clubs and 20.8% carried a firearm. Males were determined to be four times more likely to carry a weapon than females. In total, of the 11,621 students who completed the survey, 4% reported having carried a gun within the preceding 30 days.

The National Crime Victimization Survey (Bastian & Taylor, 1991) found that 3% of students surveyed had taken a weapon or "other object" to school to protect themselves. The National Adolescent Student Health Survey (1989) found that 4.4% of students surveyed had carried a knife "nearly every day" at school during the year preceding the survey.

Another survey of students was conducted by Asmussen (1992) and involved 859 public school students in grades 10, 11 and 12 in an unnamed Midwestern city with a population of less than 250,000. Of those responding, 10.4% reported carrying a weapon in the days preceding the survey. Tenth graders (usually ages 15-16) had the highest incidence of weapon carrying, making up nearly 50% of all weapon-carrying students. When broken down by sex, 25% of males reported carrying a weapon as compared to 6.6% of females, which is consistent with the findings in the YRBS conducted by the Centers for Disease Control. Asmussen also found that knives were the weapons of choice for those that admitted carrying a weapon, followed by a

handgun and club. Particularly alarming was the finding that nearly 50% of those students who carried a weapon also carried a second weapon at the same time.

Asmussen (1992) also reported that 9% of those who reported carrying a weapon did so for their own protection, yet 70% of these students reported that they had never been approached by anyone with a weapon. Fifty four per cent of the respondents reported that they had seen another student carry a weapon while 70% had "heard" that another student was in possession of a weapon at school. While nearly half (46.9%) of the students advised that they would report a weapon on campus to a staff person, over 50% would **not** report a weapon because they didn't want to get involved, report a friend, or they feared retaliation.

The Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (Hickey & Austin, 1991) conducted a survey involving 2,693 students and 1379 faculty members in 31 public schools throughout Illinois at four levels; central cities, suburban, small cities and rural areas. The Authority reported that almost one third of the respondents admitted bringing a weapon to school for self-protection during the 1989-90 school year. They also found that 5% of the students brought a gun to school during that time period. Of particular importance is, "The percentages of urban, suburban, small town, and rural students who reported bringing a weapon to school for self protection were not significantly different (p 40)."

Of those who carried a weapon, 12.5% carried a knife or razor, 11.5% carried a belt buckle or chain, 6% carried a chemical spray, and 5% carried a gun or brass knuckles to school. Older students reported having brought a weapon to school more than younger students, and weapon carriers were found to be less willing to follow school rules and more likely to dislike school.

With the numbers of students carrying dangerous weapons regularly, it is apparent that schools must work collaboratively with law enforcement in dealing with these students. If the profile of the weapon-carrying student can be developed, then both school based administrators as well as law enforcement personnel can intervene before anyone can be victimized.

Methods

Introduction

This project consists of a study of archival data involving students who came to the attention of law enforcement by virtue of their possession of a weapon on a public school campus. This section will identify the procedure by which the weapons offenses were identified, how the involved students were identified, and how specific data on the incidents and the students was collected.

Research Site

The school system involved in this study was the Pinellas County School District, a public school system in Florida which provides educational services from kindergarten through 12th grade, as well as a vocational education program. The district has approximately 102,000 students and consists of 17 high schools (grades 9-12), 22 middle schools (grades 6-8), and 78 elementary schools (grades K-5).

The data concerning the students who were found to be armed at school were restricted to four school years (1991-92, 1992-93, 1993-94, and 1994-95). Because of

the longitudinal nature of the data, the demographic make up of the schools involved may have changed from year to year; however, aside from occasional shifting of school boundaries (in order to even out respective school loads), a review of school records failed to note any large modifications in student population profiles. The total student population for the schools from which the cases were drawn totaled 36,223, with 15,367 coming from high schools and the balance of 20,856 coming from middle schools.

Weapon Data Collection

Initially, the school system was asked to provide the names of the students whom they had moved to expel because of weapons possession. However current state law prohibits the sharing of this information, even in instances of bona fide research. Therefore it was decided that police reports for middle and high schools would be reviewed for incidents involving weapons.

In order to facilitate the study, a decision was made regarding which schools would be reviewed to determine which students brought weapons to schools. It should be noted that in many districts throughout the country, school administrators frequently minimize negative incidents like weapons possession by students (Hickey & Austin, 1991; Ordozensky, 1993). However in this study, all of the middle and high schools that were reviewed had a full-time law enforcement officer assigned to them. This officer (a School Resource Officer) represented either the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office or the St. Petersburg Police Department. Because of the excellent relationship between the law enforcement agencies and the school district, officers were always apprised when a weapon was found in the possession of a student, not only because it is good practice, but in almost all cases the possession of a weapon was a felony and an offense for which the student could be expelled.

All but five of the district's high schools and 3 of the district's middle schools were included for review. The exclusion of the few high and middle schools was based simply upon the availability of the data. Because several years of data was required, it was easier to limit the review to the two agencies that had an automated data base which could search for offenses involving weapons as sorted by the school's location. Those schools that were excluded were covered by law enforcement agencies that did not have the capability to conduct an automatic data search. To include these schools would have required a hand search of thousands of reports, just to locate weapons offenses at the respective schools.

For the purposes of this study, both of the law enforcement agencies conducted a search of incidents at the schools which they covered and identified all cases which involved, or could have involved a deadly weapon. Once the incidents were identified by title and report number, the reports were reviewed to determine if they did, in fact, involve weapons. Those that did not were eliminated. For example, one incident was titled as an "Aggravated Battery" which would very frequently involve a deadly weapon. Upon review, it was learned that the victim was beaten by a student hurling a desk across the room. Also eliminated from consideration were weapons offenses that did not involve school students during the day or at extra-curricular events. For example, an adult arrested for a weapons offense that occurred on the school's basketball court at night during a "pick-up" game was not included in the data set.

As each of the reports was reviewed, information was obtained from the arresting officer's offense report. The reports provided data on the person involved, including their name, sex, race, d.o.b. (date of birth), and age at the time of the arrest. The reports also noted the type of weapon involved. Weapons were categorized as firearms (those which met the statutory definition of a firearm), edged weapons (to include knives, razor blades, box-cutters, or any other implement designed to stab or cut), chemical weapons (e.g. mace, o.c. "pepper-spray", or tear-gas), brass knuckles or clubs, and "other weapons" such as non-firearm guns (BB guns, or pellet guns, toy guns and one stun gun). The reports also indicated how the weapons were discovered. Four types of discoveries were noted: (1) through information relayed to a school board employee such as a teacher, administrator, bus driver or other employee, (2) through information relayed directly to the School Resource Officer, (3) through an investigation after the fact (i.e. after a student had been threatened or injured from the weapon), or (4) through direct observation of a school board employee or the school resource officer.

As noted earlier, because possession of a weapon on campus is a serious crime under Florida law, the officers referred the incidents to the state attorney's office for prosecution. As part of the prosecutorial process, the Department of Juvenile Justice conducts a pre-disposition report (PDR) on each child so that the court and state attorney can make decisions in the best interest of the child and the community regarding the weapon incident. These PDR's contain a social history regarding the child and his/her family as well as other information germane to the child's behavior.

A letter requesting access to the students' PDR's was sent to the local district manager for the Department of Juvenile Justice who in turn referred the request to the Secretary for Juvenile Justice. After determining that the research was in the public interest, access to the PDR's was approved.

The PDR's were then reviewed in an attempt to identify whether the child lived with both parents, one parent, a blended family or in foster care. In addition, the reports were reviewed to determine whether the child was staffed as an exceptional child by the school system (e.g. Specific Learning Disabled, Emotionally Handicapped, Gifted, etc.), and what kind of disciplinary record the child had. Finally, the PDR was reviewed for any history of previous delinquent acts committed prior to the weapon incident, or if the child had any habit of delinquency.

Although some family histories in the PDR's were quite comprehensive, in many cases the information was not noted. The only information that was consistently available involved school discipline and if the child had been staffed as exceptional (i.e. "Special Ed"). Information on the family situation (i.e. with whom the child lived) was so inconsistent that it could not be included in the data. In addition, information on previous delinquencies was inconsistently entered in the PDR, so to ensure accuracy, the county criminal justice records were checked to determine if the child had been charged with any previous delinquent (i.e. criminal) acts.

Results

Subjects

The subjects in this study consisted of 154 students who had come to the attention of law enforcement as a result of being in possession of a weapon on school grounds. The 154 students consisted of 103 males and 51 females; of these 79 (51.3%) were White, 73 (47.4%) were Black, 1 was Hispanic (.6%) and 1 was Southeast Asian (.6%). The population of the schools involved totaled 36,223 students. The male-female composition was a near 50/50 split, and whites made up 81.7% of the population, blacks 18.3% of the population, with Hispanics and Southeast Asians representing less than 1% of the student body.

Weapons

A total of 154 weapon incidents were recorded in this study. There were 20 firearms (all handguns), 115 edged weapons, 7 chemical weapons, 3 brass knuckles or clubs, and 9 "other weapons" which included toy guns, BB guns, a pellet gun and one stun gun. Edged weapons were far more prevalent than any other type of weapon. In fact edged weapons were the weapons of choice more often than all other weapons combined, and nearly 6 times more prevalent than firearms.

As can be noted in Table 1, with one exception, it was always a male student who was found to be in possession of a firearm. Males also were found to be in possession of edged weapons at a rate one and one half times greater than females. Although the cases of chemical weapons were fairly rare, females preferred these weapons more frequently than did male students. Similarly, males exclusively were found in possession of brass knuckles/clubs and "other weapons".

Weapon totals by sex and weapon type

	<i>firearm</i>	<i>edged weapon</i>	<i>chemical weapon</i>	<i>brass knuckles</i>	<i>other weapons</i>	<i>total</i>
Male	19	70	2	4	9	103
Female	1	45	5	0	0	51
Total	20	115	7	4	9	154

Table 1. Weapons incidents reported to law enforcement by public schools in Pinellas County, Florida for the school years 1991 through 1994.

The ages of the students at the time of the incidents revealed that the median age was 14, the mean age was 13.63 and the mode was 13. The actual distributions are noted in Table 2.

Table 3 below, illustrates the prevalence of the type of weapon by age. For example, for 12 year olds who were found to be armed, 82.8% carried an edged weapon. For 13 year olds, 78.4% carried edged weapons, 10.8% carried a firearm, 2.7% carried brass knuckles or a club, and 8.1% carried some "other weapon." By the time a student reached ages 16 and 17, with the exception of the 2 "other weapons", they focused on carrying either a firearm or an edged weapon. In the case of firearms, for ages 11 through 17, only one age group was not represented, 11 year olds. The 14 year olds represented 30% of the firearms carriers, followed by 15 year olds at 25% and 13 year olds represented 20% of the firearm population. Combining these three age groups shows us that for firearms, 75% are 13 - 15 years old.

For edged weapons, 13 year olds were the most frequent carriers. When you add 14 and 15 year olds to the edged weapon category, these students are responsible for nearly almost 61% of the edged weapons, and nearly 82% of the edged weapons can be accounted for by adding 12 year olds to the matrix.

Weapon possession by age

Age	Number	Percent
11	9	5.8%
12	29	18.8%
13	37	24%
14	36	23.4%
15	25	16.2%
16	13	8.4%
17	5	3.2%
Total	154	100%

Table 2. Weapons incidents reported to law enforcement by public schools in Pinellas County, Florida for the school years 1991 through 1994. Shown by age of student for all weapon types.

Type of weapon by student age.

Age	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	Total
Firearm	0	1(5.0)	4(20.0%)	6(30.0%)	5(25.0%)	2(10.0%)	2(10.0%)	20
edged weapon	9(7.8%)	24(20.9%)	29(25.2%)	24(20.9%)	17(14.8%)	9(7.8%)	3(2.6%)	115
chemical weapon	0	2(28.6%)	0	4(57.1%)	1(14.3%)	0	0	7
brass knuckles	0	1(33.3%)	1(33.3%)	0	1(33.3%)	0	0	3
other	0	1(11.1%)	3(33.3%)	2(22.2%)	1(11.1%)	2(22.2%)	0	9

Table 3. Weapons incidents reported to law enforcement by public schools in Pinellas County, Florida for the school years 1991 through 1994. Shown by age of student and type of weapon.

When analyzed by sex (Table 4), it was determined that some groups were under-represented in the weapon carrying population, while others were over-represented. As noted earlier, males and females were split 50/50 in both racial groups. White males, who made up 41% of the total population, made up 44% of the weapon carrying population. White females, who also made up 41% of the student population, represented only 7% of the weapons carriers. Neither of these groups was significant. For Blacks, who made up 18.3% of the total population, their over-representation in the weapon carrying population (47%) was significant $\chi^2(4, N = 73) = 20.97 p < .05$.

Of the 154 cases, only 31% of the students had been staffed as "special ed" students such as those who are emotionally handicapped, specific learning disabled, mentally handicapped etc. Information on the number of "special ed" children in the total population was not available. The presence of these children within the weapon carrying population was not statistically significant.

Weapons by sex and race

	White			Black		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
firearm	11 (55.0%)	0	11	8 (40.0%)	1 (5.0%)	9
edged weapon	50 (43.5%)	11 (9.6%)	61	19 (16.5%)	33 (28.7%)	52
chemical weapon	2 (28.6%)	0	2	0	5 (71.4%)	5
brass knuckles	2 (66.6%)		2	1 (33.3%)	0	3
other	3 (33.3%)	0	3	6 (66.6%)	0	6
Totals	68	11	79	35	39	75

Table 4. Weapons incidents reported to law enforcement by public schools in Pinellas County, Florida for the school years 1991 through 1994. Sorted by race and gender. (* One Hispanic female with an edged weapon, and one Southeast Asian Male with an edged weapon were not included in this table.)

How Weapons Were Discovered

As was noted earlier, each police report was reviewed to determine under what circumstances the weapon in question was discovered. Except for those instances where the weapon was located as a result of a latent investigation (i.e. after the fact), weapons were discovered and the student disarmed before someone was injured or before a more serious crime had occurred. As can be noted in Table 5, in the case of firearms, 55% were discovered through tips made to school employees, and 10% were reported to the SRO's. A total of 15% were located as the result of a school board employee actually seeing the weapon, discovering it during a search for other contraband (e.g. marijuana), or through the actions of the officer during a "stop and frisk" situation. For firearms as whole, 80% of them were seized prior to being used in a crime.

For edged weapons however, the percentages drop, with only 38.3% of weapons seized as a result of information passed on to school employees, and 13% seized because of information provided to the school officer. For chemical weapons, school board employees were informed in only 14.3% of the cases, while SRO's got the word in 28.6% of the incidents. Although the incidents involving chemical weapons or brass knuckles were comparatively few, none were seized as a result of direct observation.

Previous Behaviors

One of the initial research questions was to determine if there were any shared dimensions among those students who were found to be in possession of a weapon on school grounds. For that purpose, two primary areas of previous behavior were reviewed. The child's delinquent behavior was investigated in two categories, and further broken down into two sub-categories. For each child, involvement in misdemeanor or felony crimes was reviewed, and arrests were categorized as either non-violent or violent.

How weapons were discovered

	firearm	edged weapon	chemical weapon	brass knuckles	other weapons	Total
information to faculty	11 (55%)	44 (38.3%)	1 (14.3%)	2 (66.7%)	5 (55.6%)	63
information to SRO	2 (10%)	15 (13.0%)	2 (28.6%)	0	2 (22.2%)	21
investigation after the fact	4 (20%)	27 (23.5%)	4 (57.1%)	1 (33.3%)	0	21
direct observation	3 (15%)	29 (25.2%)	0	0	2 (22.2%)	34
Totals	20	115	7	3	9	154

Table 5. Weapons incidents reported to law enforcement by public schools in Pinellas County, Florida for the school years 1991 through 1994. Sorted by weapon type and circumstance of initial report.

As can be noted in Tables 6 through 9, previous delinquent acts do not serve as a predictor of future weapon carrying. For previous violent felony acts (Table 6), only 8% of the weapons carriers had been previously charged with such a violation, which was significant $\chi^2 (3, N = 154) = 10.31 p < .05$.

Violent Felony

Weapon carrying students previously charged.

prior charges	0	1	2	3
firearm	15 (75%)	3 (15%)	1 (5%)	1 (5%)
edged weapon	108 (94%)	6 (5%)	1 (1%)	0
chemical weapon	7 (100%)	0	0	0
brass knuckles	3 (100%)	0	0	0
other	9 (100%)	0	0	0
totals	142 (92%)	9 (6%)	2 (1%)	1 (1%)

Table 6. Weapons incidents reported to law enforcement by public schools in Pinellas County, Florida for the school years 1991 through 1994. Previously charged violent felonies. Sorted by weapon type.

Similar results were also observed with regard to previous violent misdemeanors (Table 7), where 83.7% of the weapons carriers had never been previously charged. This too was significant $\chi^2 (3, N = 135) = 9.722 p < .05$, but only for firearms and edged weapons. When the other weapons were included in the analysis, the results were not significant.

For non-violent acts, it was determined that felonies were non-predictive of future weapons carrying. In the case of previous non-violent felony arrests (Table 8), 87.7% of the weapon carriers had never been previously charged, which was significant $\chi^2 (2, N = 154) = 11.87 p < .05$. For non-violent misdemeanors (Table 9), 74.7% of the weapons carriers had never been charged previously, and that too was significant $\chi^2 (4, N = 154) = 7.40 p < .05$.

School disciplinary referrals and their potential as a predictor of future weapon carrying were also analyzed and the results were very similar to those for previous delinquencies. For minor school violations (e.g. being tardy to class or missing a detention) the number of violations ranged from 0-18, with 65% of the weapon carriers having fewer than three referrals, which was significant $\chi^2 (2, N = 154) = 7.21 p < .05$.

For major school violations (e.g. defiance, disruptions or violations that were also a crime) 46.8% had never been referred previously which was significant χ^2 (64, $N = 154$) = 92.59 $p < .05$ (Table 9).

Violent Misdemeanor

Weapon carrying students previously charged.

prior charges	0	1	2	4	6
firearm	14 (70%)	5 (25%)	0	0	1 (5%)
edged weapon	100 (87%)	12 (10%)	3 (3%)	0	0
chemical weapon	6 (86%)	1 (14%)	0	0	0
brass knuckles	3 (100%)	0	0	0	0
other	6 (67%)	2 (22%)	0	0	1 (11%)
Totals	129 (84%)	20 (13%)	3 (2%)	0	2 (1%)

Table 7. Weapons incidents reported to law enforcement by public schools in Pinellas County, Florida for the school years 1991 through 1994. Previously charged violent misdemeanors. Sorted by weapon type.

Non-Violent Felony

Weapon carrying students previously charged.

prior charges	0	1	3	4	6	8	14
firearm	13 (65%)	5 (25%)	1 (5%)	0	1 (5%)	0	0
edged weapon	106 (92%)	4 (4%)	2 (2%)	1 (1%)	0	1 (1%)	1 (1%)
chemical weapon	6 (86%)	1 (14%)	0	0	0	0	0
brass knuckles	3 (100%)	0	0	0	0	0	0
other	7 (78%)	1 (11%)	0	0	0	1 (11%)	0
totals	135 (88%)	11 (7%)	3 (2%)	1 (.6%)	1 (.6%)	2 (2%)	1 (1%)

Table 8. Weapons incidents reported to law enforcement by public schools in Pinellas County, Florida for the school years 1991 through 1994. Previously charged non-violent felonies. Sorted by weapon type.

Discussion

This study was undertaken to determine if there were any common dimensions among those students who bring weapons to school. Viewed separately, this research provided few extraordinary findings. In fact this study looks only at students who were found to be in possession of a weapon. It is not known how many more weapons were carried every day without being discovered.

In an attempt to determine if any of the common dimensions were statistically significant, Chi square tests were conducted. Several were found to be significant and it was determined that neither previous school discipline, nor previous arrests were predictive of weapon carrying. From a pragmatic perspective this means that any child has the potential to be carrying a weapon, not just those who are known to be delinquent or disruptive. Those responsible for school safety must recognize that they must be ever vigilant for weapons, as the "trouble maker" is not necessarily the weapon carrier.

Weapon carrying students previously charged.

prior charges	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
firearm	10 (50%)	5(25%)	2(10%)	2(10%)	0	0	1(5%)
edged weapon	90 (78%)	18(16%)	2(2%)	3(3%)	0	2(2)	0
chemical weapon	6 (86%)	0	0	1(3%)	0	0	0
brass knuckles	3 (100%)	0	0	0	0	0	0
other	6 (67%)	1(11%)	0	1(11%)	0	0	1(11%)
total	115 (75%)	24(16)	4(3%)	7(5%)	0	2(1%)	2(1%)

Table 9. Weapons incidents reported to law enforcement by public schools in Pinellas County, Florida for the school years 1991 through 1994. Previously charged non-violent misdemeanors by weapon type. Percentages may not equal 100% because of rounding.

It should also be noted that 82.6% of the weapon carriers were ages 12, 13, 14, or 15 at the time of the offense. There were however comparatively few 16 and 17 year olds in the weapon carrying population. Some might argue (as is common in self reported drug use and delinquency studies done in high schools) that those most likely to offend have already dropped out of school (mandatory school attendance ends at 16 in Florida) and therefore would be absent from the study population. However this does not necessarily apply to this study population because it has already been shown that weapon carriers do not fit the profile of the disruptive, frequently delinquent student that is representative of the high school drop out.

It was also learned that firearms are comparatively rare, and that edged weapons appear nearly six times more frequently than firearms, and in fact they are more prevalent than all other weapon categories combined.

Although this study did not identify the reasons that students arm themselves, some students and adults argue that students arm themselves for protection. If that is, in fact, the case, why are edged weapons so prevalent and chemical weapons such as "pepper spray" or mace, (which are primarily a defensive weapon) so rare? While the ready availability of edged weapons (e.g. in the kitchen knife drawer) may play a part in this, the questions beg further study.

In addition to the positive news that firearms are comparatively rare, how these particular weapons were discovered is also promising. The data indicated that when you combine the percentage of firearms that are discovered through information passed on by other students, with those firearms seized by alert police and school personnel, 80% of the firearms were seized before they could be used to victimize others. In addition, a review of the other weapon categories indicates that high percentages of these weapons were recovered before they could victimize others. This means that students are concerned for their safety and will "turn in" their classmates.

The issue of students arming themselves will not go away. Although technological advances may allow us to discover weapons more readily, for the immediate future we are going to be forced to deal with the issue. Further research is needed, both in replication of this study, but also to evaluate those students who bring a weapon to school, to evaluate those students who actually use the weapon to harm another, and the basic question of why students bring weapons to school.

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