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Trends in Student Misconduct: The 70s and 80s*

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Background

A concern over student discipline in schools is heard from many directions. Studies indicate that 14 to 25 percent of students in secondary schools fear for their safety, with the higher percentages occurring among junior high school students (Gallup, 1985; Wayne and Rubel, 1982). Some school staff are also apprehensive. A 1982 Teacher Opinion Poll (TOP) conducted by the National Education Association estimated that three percent of teachers across the country were concerned about physical attack by a student at least occasionally, and another 25 percent were concerned once or twice a semester (Sheridan, 1982). While two-thirds of secondary school principals in a recent national survey reported that disruptive classroom behavior had decreased over the past five years, they also reported an average of ten suspensions over a school year for every 100 students (Center for Statistics, 1986), an indication that all is not well. In addition, many large school districts now employ a school security force.

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Persistent concern has also been expressed by the public. When asked what were the biggest problems facing their local schools, respondents to Gallup polls have cited discipline most often in all but two of the last sixteen years. In the 1986 poll 23% of parents mentioned the lack of discipline in local schools, while 15% saw it as a serious problem in the school their own (oldest) child attends. This problem was second only to use of drugs (Gallup, 1986). Such concerns from various quarters are reflected in the Cabinet Council Report (CCHR Working Group; 1984) entitled Disorder in our Public Schools, and President Reagan's call for a return to "good old-fashioned discipline" at an Indianapolis conference in December 1983.

What then is the basis for this fear and concern? How serious a problem is crime and student misconduct in schools? Is the problem getting worse or better? This paper examines national data from the early 1970s to recent times in order to identify trends in student and teacher victimization in schools. It also examines school crimes and disciplinary incidents reported to school police departments in four large cities between the mid 70s and mid 80s. Attention will focus on serious and unlawful rule breaking such as physical attacks, robbery, theft and property destruction and also acts by students which may be disruptive of order in schools.

This paper extends the trend analysis of student victimization in a earlier report (Moles, 1984) from 1980 to 1985, and adds the trend comparison of big city statistics never previously examined. Parts of this paper are taken with minor changes from the earlier report by the author.

What Other Studies Show

When the public was asked what they mean by discipline the largest percentage, 54% nationally and 50 percent of public school parents, said obeying rules and regulations (Gallup, 1982). Hence, the public has a broad view of discipline, and does not think exclusively of serious incidents such as vandalism, violence and theft.

In the National Institute of Education's Safe School Study (SSS) conducted in 1976 eight percent of principals nationwide saw vandalism, personal attacks and theft as a fairly serious or very serious problem (NIE, 1978). But the student fear questions in that study were much less specific. They referred to avoiding parts of the school building, and worries about being "hurt and bothered" which could include dislike of smoking areas and noisy areas as well as more serious personal harassment and threats to person or property. Thus the public, students and school staff may have thought of different behaviors when each was asked about discipline and safety in schools.

In a 1980 nationwide survey in senior highs, few of the school administrators saw physical conflicts among students, conflict between students and teachers, student weapons possession or rape as serious or moderately serious school problems. Most frequently mentioned as at least moderate problems were absenteeism (48%), student use of drugs or alcohol (42%), class cutting (30%), vandalism of school property (22%) and robbery or theft (18%) (DiPrete, 1981). Student reports from the same survey, however, suggest that student fights were more common than

administrators reported. This lends support to the idea of asking students and teachers directly about their experience.

The NIE Safe School Study reviewed the few available studies on trends in school violence and vandalism up to 1976. Except for one study showing a decline in self-reported youthful offenders in schools from 1967 to 1972, the data appeared fairly consistent. The report stated:

"They indicate an increase in assaults on teachers from 1956 to 1974, but a leveling off thereafter; an increase in robberies and assaults in the early seventies; and an increase in vandalism in the mid-sixties which leveled off around 1970 or 1971. For the offenses usually summed up in the terms violence and vandalism, the data from these studies do not give evidence that the situation is currently growing worse."
(NIE, 1978, p. 35)

What has happened since then is the subject of this paper.

The Data Sources

Three principal data sources are used in the present study. The National Education Association's Teacher Opinion Poll (TOP) is used for information on teacher victims of crime, and the National Crime Survey of the U.S. Department of Justice is used for information on student victims in secondary schools. They both incorporate an established methodology for asking victims to report on incidents of assault, robbery and theft they have experienced. This approach provides a much more complete picture than the records of authorities because many crimes and incidents of misconduct in school are not reported to teachers or principals.

On the other hand, these two sources do not provide any breakdown geographically, and do not measure "victimless" crimes like narcotics violations and the possession of weapons. For such reasons, the third data source, offenses reported to the school police departments of large cities, was added. Crimes of violence are more common in large city secondary schools (NIE, 1978), so the selection of large cities should provide more cases for analysis and information of use where problems are more severe.

Teacher opinion polls have been fielded by the NEA for many years. Intermittently since 1956 the poll asked about attacks on teachers. For the period 1972-83 this kind of question was asked almost every year as was another on damage by students to teachers' personal property. For the period 1978-83 a question on personal property stolen by students was also asked. Typically, questionnaires went out each spring to national samples of 1500-2000 public school teachers, selected without regard to NEA membership. Response rates for the later years were in the 70-80% range, but are unknown for earlier years (see Table 2).¹

The second data source is the National Crime Surveys (NCS). These large sample surveys include about 60,000 households. Interviews are held twice yearly concerning any victim experience in the previous six months, and households stay in the panel for three years. The NCS began in 1973, has data currently available through 1985, and includes youth 12 and older. Questions are asked on assault, robbery and theft among other forms of victimization, and incident location is recorded along with other details of the events.²

In order to focus on secondary school students, only persons aged 12-19 who had last attended grades 7-12 were selected. And only their experience as victims within schools during regular school months (September through June) was counted. The incidents of interest are defined as follows:

1. assault - a physical attack or being hurt intentionally
2. robbery - theft from a person by force, weapons or threats
3. theft - personal property of any value stolen from such places as desks, lockers or elsewhere in school

These crimes were selected because there is no stigma attached to reporting them as would be true of rape, they can be readily described in behavioral terms, and they occur with some frequency. Attempts to commit each of these crimes will also be discussed.

The third data source is a set of statistics on criminal and disciplinary incidents reported to the school police departments of major cities. School systems in ten of the largest cities were contacted for data on offenses in schools over recent years. Four provided usable annual reports back to the mid 1970s or earlier. One had only arrest records, and the five others either had no annual statistics available, or did not send what they said they had after repeated inquiries. The individual school systems are not identified in this paper. The four are, however, geographically dispersed with two on the East coast and two on the West coast. In each location one system is considerably larger than the other.

For the eleven school years 1975-76 to 1985-86 each system provided annual statistics which are the basis of the following analysis.

Offenses of an interpersonal nature such as assault and robbery and others likely to have been committed by students were selected. Offenses counted by all or most of the four systems were given priority to facilitate comparisons.

Student Victims of Crime

The national data on student victims for the years 1973-85 are presented in Table 1. For each year, Table 1 shows estimates of the number of victims in the national population of youths described above, and the percentage of secondary school students represented by the victim population estimates. The numbers of students in grades 7-12 in public schools in each year were inflated about ten percent to take account of private school enrollments.³ The number of victims in each case is only approximate since all incidents of being victimized are counted, and a small but unknown percentage of students were victimized more than once in a year.

Looking first at the differences between completed and attempted crimes, there are contrasting patterns. For assault, in each year a greater percentage of students were victims of attempts by a factor of two to one or more. On the other hand, completed thefts were reported over thirty times more often than attempts, probably in large part because it is often difficult to detect an attempted theft since it usually does not involve personal contact and there may be no evidence of the attempt. For robberies both completed and attempted acts involved about the same percentage of student victims.

The pattern across years for completed assaults is a rise from 0.15% (15/100 of one percent) of students victimized in 1973 to 0.24% in 1974 and thereafter a fairly steady rate until 1984 when it rose to 0.34% and then fell to 0.19% in 1985. Through the period 1974-83 the rates of completed assaults on students in schools were very nearly identical. The only statistically significant differences (.05 level used throughout) are the rise from 1973 to 1978 and from the low point in 1979 to 1984, and the drops from 1978 to 1979, and from 1984 to 1985. The overall pattern as shown in Table 1 is for rather similar rates in most years with a higher than average rate in 1984 followed by a lower than average rate in 1985.

Attempted assaults showed no pronounced shifts in the period 1973-85 moving from lows of 0.47 and 0.48% in 1974-75 and 1980 to highs of 0.64% in 1977 and 1978 and 0.68% in 1985. The overall pattern shows no rise in attempted assaults, and none of the cross-year comparisons are statistically significant.

The percentages for completed robberies vary from lows of 0.03 to 0.04% of students robbed at school in 1979-80 and 1983-84 to a high of 0.13% in 1975. That is significantly higher than the 1979-80 and 1983-84 figures. It appears that robberies were down in the most recent two year period from a higher previous level.

For attempted robberies the same general pattern holds, and at almost the same percentages. After a high 1973 figure of 0.17% of students victimized, the figure stays in the 0.07 to 0.10% range until 1979-80 when it dropped to 0.04% and remained at this level or lower thereafter. The statistically significant differences are the drop from 1973 to 1976 and from 1973 to all years 1979 and later.

Both assaults and robberies within schools are experienced by only a tiny fraction of students as they are reported in the National Crime Surveys. Only a little more than half of one percent have been victims of even the most common event, an attempted assault, in the highest year. In contrast, rates for completed thefts are many times larger than those for assaults or robberies. Approximately 8 to 12% of students report having had an object stolen at school in the years 1973-85. But again the higher figures are in the early years: 11.96% in 1973, 11.11% in 1974 and 11.23% in 1975. Then the figures drop to 9-10% for 1976-79 and 7.4 to 8.9% for all years thereafter. The 1973-75 figures are significantly higher (.05 level) than all later percentages and 1976-79 rates are significantly higher than 1980, 1982 and all years after.

Rates for attempted thefts are much smaller -- never even half of a percent in any year. They also follow a declining path from 0.27 to 0.35% in the years 1973-78 down to the 0.15 to 0.20% range in all years thereafter. The drops from 1976-77 to 1979 and all later years are statistically significant. Too few incidents occurred in 1985 of attempted thefts, and of completed and attempted robberies for rates to be calculated.

In summary, the National Crime Survey evidence for the period 1973-85 does not suggest that crimes in secondary schools against students were rising. On the contrary, assaults showed little change. Robberies went down in the most recent period, and attempted robberies show a long term decline. Thefts also show a long term decline as do attempted thefts. Sharp drops in theft, far and away the most common of these interpersonal crimes, occurred in 1976 and 1980.

The constant level of assaults is mirrored in two Gallup youth surveys. In 1977 and again in 1985 three to four percent of teenagers reported being physically attacked at school. In contrast to the NCS data, these Gallup surveys showed about the same proportion of teens having property stolen at school in 1977 and 1985 (Gallup, 1985).

Teacher Victims

The national data on teacher victims for the years 1972-83 are presented in Table 2. These data and the following discussion came from a previous paper by the author (Moles, 1984). Table 2 displayed the percent of teachers who were victims of physical attacks, property damage or theft by students, although the question wording and reference periods vary somewhat over the years 1972-83 as the table footnotes indicate. In each year where comparisons across types of incidents are possible, the largest proportions of teachers reported items stolen, as was also true of students. Next most common was property damage, and least frequent was physical attacks by students. Over twenty percent of teachers had personal property stolen in each year the question was asked, but only two to six percent were attacked.

There are data on attacks for each year 1972-83 except 1982. The basic pattern is for similar percentages of teachers to have been attacked in 1973-78 (2.4 to 3.3%) and then more in 1979-83 (4.6 to 5.7%). Assuming conservatively at least 1,000 respondents per year (see Table 2), this jump is statistically significant at the .05 level, but variations within the earlier or later periods are not.

Teacher reports of personal property damage are available for every year 1972-83. Here the pattern is more irregular. Putting aside the high 24.7% of teachers victimized in 1972 when no limit was placed on when the incident occurred, all other years are in the 7-14.5% range except the 30.7% in 1979. In that year only, the qualifying terms intentionally damaged or maliciously damaged were not included, and so accidental damage may also have been included. Unlike other years, incidents occurring away from school were mentioned in the question, and this too probably increased the number of incidents reported. In addition, for 1979 alone the words "by student" were all put in capital letters. Whether this brought more student offenses to mind is unknown.

Aside from the anomalous years 1972 and 1979, the remaining years still show an irregular pattern. In 1973, 7.4% of teachers had personal property maliciously damaged by students within the school year. In 1974 the figure jumped to 11.4%, a statistically significant increase. It then declined gradually to 8.0% in 1977, a statistically significant decrease from 1974, and then turned sharply upward again in 1978 and later. All these most recent figures are statistically significant increases over the 1977 level; the 1982-83 drop is not.

The last kind of teacher victimizational reported in the TOP is personal property stolen. Unfortunately, this was only asked in 1978-83. All years except 1979 show very similar rates of 21.4 to 23.4%. As with personal property damage, 1979 is significantly higher than the other years at 31.1%, but again the different question wording in 1979 must be considered. Incidents on and off school grounds were requested separately. If only 1979 incidents on school property were

counted, then 27% of teachers were victimized, although this too is significantly higher than all other figures for 1978-83. Capitalizing "by a student" in the question stem may have heightened attention to students.

In summary the Teacher Opinion Poll data for 1972-83 show several patterns: (1) an increase in physical attacks on teachers in 1979 to a level at least 50% higher than before, (2) an up-down-up pattern for personal property damage with the latest stable increase occurring in 1978, and (3) a high but level rate of theft since it was first measured in 1978.

Offense Statistics

The statistics from the four large city systems were collected by school police agencies within each school system. School security officers in blazers or other dress are stationed in many secondary schools in these systems, and may routinely visit other schools. Reports of incidents come from them and also from school principals and other staff with administrative responsibilities for criminal and disciplinary problems. Doubtless, many such offenses do not get reported to the building or school system authorities. Students and staff may consider the offense minor or the victim may fear retaliation to mention only two reasons why offenses may not be reported.

Nevertheless, offense statistics do serve a useful function, because they reflect how much publicly acknowledged disruptive behavior exists in the system and must be confronted. These four school systems all collect information on crimes against persons such as assault and

robbery, crimes against property (theft, vandalism, etc.) and various other offenses including the possession of weapons and narcotics. One system reports disciplinary incidents which are too minor to be treated as crimes, but may involve such things as petty theft and minor assaults.

The data for specific offenses and the totals for all offenses are displayed in tables 3-6 corresponding respectively to school systems A and B in the East and C and D in the West. Systems A and C are larger than B and D.

All further reference to statistics on systems A through D can be found in these tables. Since the number of offenses is very much dependent on the number of students in the system, an overall index of incidents per 100 students has been calculated for each school system. This index includes all offenses, and not just those to be discussed below. The index for systems A and C has moved up over the eleven year 1975-86 period. The index for disciplinary incidents in system B has also moved up, but simplified reporting requirements in early 1978 probably explain the large increase at about that time in the index and most individual disciplinary incidents. The crime index for system B has stayed level, and that for system D moved down slightly.

Crimes against persons have the potential for being more disruptive of learning in schools than crimes against property because of the interpersonal confrontation involved in the former. However, theft or destruction of school property used for instructional purposes can also limit teaching and learning opportunities, and vandalism can also lower staff and student morale. Thus, it is worth analyzing both crimes against persons and crimes against property in some detail. Drug and weapons offenses will also be examined.

Crime Against Persons

The most common crime against persons is assault, sometimes called battery. In most systems assault with a deadly weapon is recorded separately, and will be discussed later. In system A assaults declined by about one-third from the mid 70s to the mid 80s. On the other hand, in system C, the other very large system, assault/battery went up over the same period. Within assault and battery, assaults by students on other students in system C almost doubled by around 1980 and then fell back. Assaults by students on faculty generally stayed level. The large jump in cases for the last year 1985-86 is largely due to assaults by adults on students, which a local authority says is caused by child abuse cases being filed against teachers.

In system D cases of battery almost doubled over the eleven years. In system B assaults dropped by over one-third. The same pattern of sharp declines held for assaults on students, on faculty or staff and on security officers in system B.

What emerges from these figures is an increase in assaults in the western cities and a decrease in the eastern ones. The pattern is unchanged when minor assaults in system B are also considered. Not serious enough to be classified as criminal, minor assaults on students, and on faculty or staff both declined in system B over the last eleven years.

Robbery is generally much less common than assault in all four systems. In system A the number of robberies increased during the late 70s and early 80s and then dropped back to earlier levels. In system B unarmed robbery declined very markedly to well under half the

original level, whereas armed robbery continued at about the same level and by the mid 80s was as common as unarmed robbery.

In system C robbery decreased somewhat from the mid 70s to the mid 80s after rising in the interim. In system D robberies were seldom recorded throughout the period, and remained basically level. Thus, in three of the four systems, robberies remained constant or decreased over the eleven years.

One further crime against persons which is similarly recorded across the systems is sex offenses. While much less common in most systems than assault or robbery, even a few sex offenses are likely to arouse strong fears among students and staff. The kinds of victims are not identified, but the statistics can quickly be summarized. In system A sex offenses stayed about level through the period. In system B only rapes were counted, and fewer than ten rapes or attempted rapes were reported in any year. In system C sex offenses increased several fold, and then practically doubled again in the most recent year, 1985-86. Finally, in system D sex offenses increased manyfold from a base of about ten cases per year; the maximum count was 91 in 1983-84. In summary, regarding sex offenses the West coast cities registered very large increases while the East coast cities changed little.

Closely related to crimes against persons are acts which harass others. These are not crimes unless there is a threat of harm, but verbal intimidation can also disrupt order in schools and classrooms. If directed toward a teacher, it can be unnerving and create stress which detracts from the teacher's ability to teach and the students'

opportunity to learn. If directed toward students, it can likewise detract from their ability to learn.

System A records acts of harassment without specifying toward whom the act occurs. Harassment is defined there as intentionally striking, shoving or kicking another, threatening to do so, using abusive or obscene language, alarming or annoying others. Over the 1975-86 period the large initial number of cases doubled while receding somewhat in the last year. In system B the closest equivalent is disruptive behavior which is listed as a non-criminal disciplinary incident. In the period 1975-86 it also doubled with almost all of the increase coming in the first four years, when simplified reporting requirements were also instituted. Disruptive behavior was by far the most common disciplinary incident at the beginning and the end of the period.

System C records no counterpart of harassment or disruptive behavior. In system D the analogous offense is "upbraiding, insulting and abusing teachers." This was not very common anytime during the period, the high being 39 cases in one year, and no clear trend is evident. While harassment is minimal or unidentified in the West coast cities, it is prominent and increased markedly in the East coast cities.

Crimes Against Property

These crimes typically include theft or larceny as it is legally called, burglary, vandalism and arson. Because burglary and arson were not reported by two systems, and burglary may often be committed by outsiders for profit, these two offenses will not be discussed.

Theft on school grounds is a very common crime, as it was in the Safe School Study where over eleven percent of secondary school students were victims in any four week period (NIE, 1978). With the present statistics, however, one cannot tell who was the victim of the theft.

Looking at the four school districts, in system A larceny increased by over fifty percent during the later 70s and early 80s, and then declined to its initial levels. In system B theft or vandalism of private property over \$50 was only recorded beginning in 1980-81, although an increase in the short period to 1985-86 is evident. However, minor larceny as a disciplinary (non-criminal) offense was counted from 1975 onward. It shows a tripling of incidents in the middle years when simplified reporting of disciplinary offenses occurred.

In system C theft increased somewhat, and then tapered off a little. Only in system D did theft decline during this period with a dramatic two-thirds decrease. This picture is quite mixed. In the two largest systems, reported theft increased substantially during the late 70s and early 80s to fall back later. The other two systems show divergent trends.

Let me turn now to vandalism which was combined with theft in system B. In system A vandalism began and ended at about the same level. In system C malicious mischief increased well over one hundred percent in the period 1975-86, and in system D vandalism remained essentially level. Thus, only in the larger West coast system C did vandalism, as a separate offense, increase over the eleven year period.

Weapons Offenses

All four systems report weapons offenses. Weapons may be carried as protection, or for planned attacks. Systems B and D report assaults with a deadly weapon. For system B the number of cases has remained

fairly level, and the same is true of system D. Armed robbery, recorded as a separate offense only in system B, also remained fairly constant over the eleven year period. Thus, the use of weapons for assault and robbery, as reported to school police departments in two systems, has remained at about the same level.

The possession of deadly weapons on school grounds is also an offense, and one which is recorded by all four systems. In system A weapons possession increased many times from under 200 cases to almost 1,500 cases in the last school year. An over one hundred percent increase was recorded between the 1980-81 and 81-82 school years.

In system B, firearms possession has increased slightly over the eleven year period. System B only began to record the possession of deadly weapons other than firearms in 1980-81, and shows a marked decrease in offenses since then. System C also differentiates between firearms and other weapons. The possession of firearms including assaults with firearms shows an approximate doubling of cases in the eleven year period. The possession or use of other weapons in assaults also shows a doubling of cases in the same period.

In system D firearms are also distinguished from other illegal weapons on campus, but assaults with a deadly weapons are counted separately as described above. Few firearms incidents occurred throughout the period, and except for an increase during the middle years the beginning and ending numbers of cases are similar. On the other hand, the use or possession of other weapons showed an approximate doubling of cases in the period.

What is to be made of these statistics regarding weapons on campus? It would appear that in the smaller cities B and D the use of weapons in assaults and robberies has remained fairly constant. The possession of weapons there has shown some increase, but only for firearms in system B and for other weapons in system D. In the larger cities, however, there is an unequivocal pattern of large increases in weapons offenses of all kinds recorded. The East coast city in particular shows a manyfold increase. Such dangers in schools are no doubt part of the concern of organizations such as the AFT (n.d.) which have called for the removal of disruptive and potentially violent students from the schools.

Drug Offenses

The use of marijuana, cocaine, and other narcotics has increasingly attracted the public's attention. Some students may come to school under the influence of such drugs, while others may buy and even use drugs at schools. Although some narcotics incidents on school grounds surely involve non-students, it seems likely that most are caused by students.

Each of the four systems records drug offenses. In system A the overall category narcotics shows a decline of over fifty percent during the eleven year period. System B lists the crime of "controlled substances" which was down a little, and the disciplinary incident possession of contraband which also declined after an increase in the middle of the eleven year period.

System C distinguishes marijuana from other controlled substances excluding alcohol. For marijuana the number of cases dropped a little

more than one-fourth from start to finish of the period, and for other controlled substances the drop was closer to fifty percent. In system D the same distinction between offenses is made as in system C. Here marijuana cases went up fifty percent or more, and controlled substance offenses increased from 6-12 per year in the first three years to 100, 28 and 20 in the last three years. The increase is large proportionally, but the numbers are small. Thus, in three of the four systems, drug offenses dropped to some extent during the period from the mid 70s to the mid 80s. Only in system D did drug offenses increase.

Trespassing

This offense, recorded in all systems, gives some indication of the amount of intrusion by outsiders into the schools. It is a rough gauge of how much the offenses discussed previously may be the work of non-students. In the two larger systems, trespassing decreased over the eleven year period. In the other two smaller systems, it held level or increased.

It is difficult to draw any conclusions about the role of outsiders in crimes on school grounds from these statistics. Trespassing is a common enough event to place it in the middle of the range of frequency of offenses, in most of the systems most of the time, so the possibility of extensive involvement by outsiders is there. How much involvement and with which crimes cannot be determined.

Discussion

All the student and teacher victimization data reviewed in this paper contradict the notion of a progressive worsening of the school crime problem. The increases in property damage and assaults on teachers by students came in the late 1970s. For theft from teachers and all offenses against students, crimes in schools as reported by the victims themselves remained essentially level or declined in the 1970s and 1980s. Assaults showed little change, robberies went down in the most recent years, and thefts showed a long term decline.

There are very few other sources of information on victims of serious crimes in schools in recent years. Some comparisons can be made to the Safe School Study (SSS) conducted in 1976 since the NCS and the TOP also collected data in the same year. For example, an estimated 2.4 million public school students (11%) reported an item over \$1 in value stolen in one month in the Safe School Study compared to 2.4 million public and private school students (9.8%) who had any item stolen in a year in the National Crime Survey. For robberies the figures are 112,000 students (0.5%) in one month (SSS data) and 23,800 students (0.1%) in a year (NCS data). A recent study has also calculated that the Safe School Study identified much more crime in a school year than did the NCS, including up to 30 times more robberies (Cook, 1982).

Why should there be such large disparities in the student victimization data? Several factors may be at work. Multiplying the monthly Safe School Study victims by the nine or ten months per school

year may not be entirely accurate since some students will be victimized repeatedly in that period. The six month recall period in the NCS is likely to miss some incidents because people forget events farther back in time. The one month recall period for the Safe School Study interviews was carefully determined after comparing results for different recall periods (NIE, 1978).

The most important reason for the disparity may well be that in the Safe School Study students were interviewed in school and only asked about incidents at school. In the NCS, they were interviewed at home and asked about incidents in all settings. Thus, school-related incidents would be much more salient for students in the Safe School Study. In addition, students may have been reluctant to mention crimes at school if they had not previously been discussed at home. And in some cases another family member who may not have known of certain incidents responded for the student.

For these reasons it is probably unwise to treat the percentages and estimated numbers of student victims from the NCS as an accurate picture of the extent of interpersonal school crime at any one time, granted that there are also possibilities of over-estimation in the Safe School Study. However, the changes from year to year in the NCS data should give an accurate picture of trends in school crime because any biases in reporting are very likely the same from year to year. Hence, the main conclusions about student victimization from this study still appear sound. Assaults showed little change, robberies went down in the most recent period, and thefts showed a long term decline.

These findings parallel the NCS trends in teenage victimization for all locations. A recent report notes that from 1973 through 1984 teens (12-19 year olds) have experienced a decline in theft victimization rates and a reduction in robbery rates. Simple assaults increased and aggravated assaults decreased from 1973 to 1984 (BJS, 1986).

Thus, societal forces rather than school factors may explain the overall trends. One such condition could be the smaller number of youth today. With declining secondary school enrollments, there may be less of a critical mass of disaffected youth in schools and in the community. Another possibility is tougher law enforcement. But each theory must explain why only theft, robbery and aggravated assaults have declined. That subject, unfortunately, cannot be investigated in this paper.

For the data from the TOP 1972 through 1983 no problem of undercounting is evident. Approximately 0.5% of teachers were physically attacked by students in one month according to SSS data, and 2.9% within the school year by TOP data. The teacher victimization rate is much less in the Safe School Study than in the Teacher Opinion Poll, which is the order to be expected if one month estimates are compared to one year estimates. There was, however, an increase in physical attacks on teachers in 1979 to a new high level, an up-down-up pattern for personal property damage with the latest increase in 1978, and a fairly constant rate of theft from 1978 when it was first measured through 1983.

The offense statistics tell a somewhat different story, and were collected in a different way. They generally combine information on students, teachers and others as victims, and are filtered through the several levels of authorities who handle cases and compile system statistics.

Recorded assaults increased in the western cities, and decreased in the eastern ones. Sex offenses also increased in the West and remained steady in the East. No questions on sex offenses were asked of teachers in the TOP, and the relatively rare sex offenses against students reported in the NCS were not analyzed in this study.

Harassment and disruptive behavior were prominent and increased markedly in the eastern cities, while remaining minimal or unidentified in the West. By comparison, the TOP asked teachers in 1979-83 how much student behavior interferes with teaching. There was some decrease in the proportion of teachers seeing great or moderate interference from 1980 to 1983. This and the earlier victimization trend data (Moles, 1984) incorporated in this paper led Baker (1985) to conclude that "the data suggest a slight overall improvement" in interpersonal crimes in schools.

Robberies remained constant or declined over the years 1975-86 in three of the four cities, a pattern similar to the NCS student victimization reports. For the two largest city school systems, theft increased substantially during the late 1970s and early 80s. This does not match the long term decline noted among student victims at school in the NCS.

It may be that the thefts counted by large cities include many objects of school property which would not be reported as personal losses. In addition, these four cities cannot be considered typical of the nation, so these offense statistics may simply represent a small and sometimes aberrant part of the larger picture.

Nonetheless, they shed light on some offenses untapped in the student and teacher victimization analyses and perhaps more pronounced in big cities. The large increase in weapons use and possession in the larger cities is cause for alarm. Shootings and injury from other weapons in schools has fueled a lively debate in Detroit over banning of handguns, and control of student behavior.

Drug offenses were not probed in the victimization surveys either. The offense statistics show a drop in drug incidents in three of the four cities. This does parallel the national decline in marijuana and other illicit drug use among high school seniors from a peak in the late 70s to somewhat lower levels by 1983 (Johnston, O'Malley and Bachman, 1984).

Looking at the larger picture, one cannot deny that many students and teachers are victims, particularly of theft, and that many victims do suffer personal harm and loss of possessions. Even by the very conservative estimates from the NCS, in 1985 1,521,000 secondary school students were victims of theft, 38,000 were assaulted and 1,500 robbed. The true figures are probably considerably higher.

Thus, the concern expressed by the public, school personnel and students does have a real basis in the experience of many students and teachers even though they represent a small proportion of each group. The risks of being victimized vary with the school setting. Junior highs and schools in large cities are likely to have more crimes of personal violence than senior highs or schools in other locations according to the Safe School Study.

The concern with crime in schools is also justified from another standpoint. While students spend no more than 20 percent of their waking hours year-round in school, 40 percent of the robberies and 36 percent of the assaults on urban youth occurred in schools (NIE, 1978). Schools are riskier places for crimes of personal violence than elsewhere.

The late 1970s increase in physical attacks and property damage against teachers is also a cause for concern. The source of the increase is not clear. How much it reflects the mainstreaming at that time of more disruptive students into classes with teachers who are less well-equipped to handle them, keeping youth in school rather than suspending or expelling them, heightened awareness and willingness to report attacks among teachers, or other factors remains to be explored.

The main conclusion remains. There has been no progressive worsening of school crime during the 70s and 80s according to these national data on student and teacher victimization. What increases there were occurred in the late 1970s in attacks on teachers and damage to their personal property. For theft from teachers and all offenses against students, crimes in schools as reported by the victims remained essentially level or declined in the 1970s and 80s.

FOOTNOTES

1. Alton Sheridan and Tanya Terry of the Research Department in the National Education Association provided questions and response data from the NEA Teacher Opinion Polls in previous years, and answered numerous questions about their interpretation. I am most grateful to them for their assistance, and their knowledge of the history of the Polls.
2. Special tabulations and interpretation were provided by Michael Rand in the Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Surveys, U.S. Department of Justice. I am most appreciative of the time, energy and agency expense Mr. Rand applied to obtaining accurate data for this report.
3. The basic enrollment data for grades 7-12 come from annual fall surveys of public schools conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics. To this was added the NCES figures on special education and ungraded students in grade 9-12. (No similar data were available for grades 7-8, but the addition of these special groups of 9-12th graders changed the original calculations only minimally.) This combined number of public school students was then treated as 89.6% of total enrollment to allow for the 10.4% of all students who attended all kinds of private and parochial schools during 1976-77, the mid-year of the initial 1973-80 time series (see Nehrt, 1981). While more recent data shows this to be an overestimate for that period, it is close to the actual figure for the early 1980s, and so is kept for current purposes.

Table 1.--Student Victims of Crime in Schools

Victims ^a	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985
Completed Assault													
% of population	0.15	0.24	0.24	0.23	0.22	0.29	0.16	0.26	0.18	0.23	0.25	0.34	0.19
Victims in pop.	36,447	56,470	58,583	54,711	51,938	67,102	36,085	56,842	38,475	48,927	52,950	70,976	38,335
Completed Robbery													
% of population	0.09	0.09	0.13	0.10	0.06	0.10	0.04 ^b	0.04 ^b	0.11	0.09	0.03 ^b	0.03 ^b	- ^b
Victims in pop.	21,629	22,148	32,254	23,854	14,225	22,094	5,640	11,245	22,458	18,780	8,874	5,443	1,497
Completed Theft													
% of population	11.96	11.11	11.23	9.84	9.72	10.04	9.61	7.80	8.91	8.56	8.27	8.00	7.41
Victims in pop.	2,867,763	2,668,282	2,700,241	2,356,280	2,311,872	2,324,810	2,143,408	1,696,820	1,898,989	1,806,032	1,737,775	1,660,945	1,520,561
Attempted Assault													
% of population	0.36	0.47	0.48	0.58	0.64	0.64	0.52	0.48	0.67	0.62	0.54	0.54	0.68
Victims in pop.	134,666	113,724	116,194	137,914	151,126	147,896	115,831	104,977	141,743	131,217	112,616	111,492	138,837
Attempted Robbery													
% of population	0.17	0.09	0.10	0.07	0.09	^b	0.04 ^b	0.04 ^b	0.04 ^b	0.04 ^b	0.03 ^b	0.03 ^b	- ^b
Victims in pop.	39,920	22,127	23,187	16,805	21,012	6,646	7,604	11,210	7,202	11,548	9,725	4,161	8,437
Attempted Theft													
% of population	0.34	0.27	0.28	0.35	0.33	0.28	0.15	0.20	0.15	0.13	0.17	0.12	- ^b
Victims in pop.	80,401	64,761	68,433	83,018	78,420	63,999	33,444	42,964	32,694	28,045	35,955	25,187	16,000

a. Victims refers to estimated numbers of student victims in secondary schools based on weights assigned to each person interviewed which reflect their probabilities of selection in the U.S. population.

b. Fewer than 10 victims interviewed each year, so yearly estimates are unreliable. Percents are averages for 1979-80 data combined, 1981-82 data combined, and 1983-84 combined. Percents for 1985 uncalculated.

Note: The NCS questions on assault were: "Did the person(s) have a weapon such as a gun or knife, or something he was using as a weapon, such as a bottle or wrench?" and "Did the person(s) hit you, knock you down, or actually attack you in any way?" For attempted assault, it was "Did the person(s) threaten you with harm in any way?" For theft, respondents were asked "Was something stolen or taken without permission that belonged to you or others in the household?" For attempted theft, it was "Did the person(s) ATTEMPT to take something that belonged to you or others in the household?" Robbery involves both an assault and theft derived from these questions. Attempted robbery is an attempted theft with either an assault or attempted assault.

SOURCE: National Crime Surveys, U.S. Department of Justice

Table 2. Teacher Reports of Physical Attacks, Damage and Theft of their Personal Property: 1972-1982.

Percents with Victim experience	1972	1973 ^a	1974 ^a	1975 ^a	1976 ^a	1977 ^b	1978 ^c	1979 ^d	1980 ^e	1981 ^e	1982 ^e
physically attacked	5.4 ^f	3.3 ^g	3.0	2.4	2.9	3.0	3.2	5.7	5.2	4.8	*
personal property maliciously damaged	24.7 ^f	7.4 ^g	11.4	10.5	8.9	8.0	11.9	30.7	14.3 ⁱ	12.9 ⁱ	14.5 ⁱ
personal property stolen	*	*	*	*	*	*	23.4	31.1	22.5 ⁱ	21.4 ⁱ	23.4 ⁱ
Number of respondents ^{**}								1777	1738	1265	1295
Response rate ^{**}								82.7%	80.3%	74.0%	69.3%

* Question not asked in this year

** Information not available for years before 1979. Samples of at least 1000 teachers in each year were probably selected according to the NEA Research Department staff.

- a. The question wording in 1973-76 was "Have you as a teacher been physically attacked or have you had your personal property maliciously damaged by a student this school year?"
- b. Data taken from 1977 NEA Membership Survey.
- c. The question wording in 1978 was "Have you or other teachers in your school been physically attacked or had your personal property stolen or maliciously damaged by a student this school year?"
- d. The question wording in 1979 was "Have you been physically attacked or had personal property stolen or damaged BY A STUDENT either on school property or away from school this school year?"
- e. The question wording in 1980-82 was "Has your personal property been stolen or intentionally damaged by a student within the past 12 months?"
- f. The 1972 question did not set a limit on the reference time period. It said "Do you have personal knowledge of a teacher in your school who has either been physically attacked or had his property damaged maliciously by a student?" However, the answer category for assaults said "I was attacked this year by a student" but "I had my personal property damaged by a student" without a time limit was used for property destruction.
- g. Includes response that teacher was both physically attacked and had personal property maliciously damaged.
- h. Wording in 1979 did not qualify damage as "intentional" or "malicious". See d. above.
- i. Includes response that property was both stolen and intentionally damaged.

Table 3. System A: Selected Incidents Reported to School Police Department 1975-86

	75-76	76-77	77-78	78-79	79-80	80-81	81-82	82-83	83-84	84-85	85-86
Crimes against Persons											
Assault	2385	2402	2268	1856	493	1673	1415	1564	1412	1660	1626
Robbery	475	611	645	1097	1481	1564	1151	1116	1252	1074	410
Sex Offenses	93	82	63	68	73	108	87	84	86	106	97
Harrassment	1234	1188	1443	2226	3463	2164	2420	2426	2537	2486	2141
Crimes against Property											
Larceny	1831	2313	3103	4201	4199	4154	4013	3978	3331	2971	2268
Criminal Mischief (vandalism)	538	552	373	570	656	859	567	508	550	654	396
Other Crimes											
Weapons Possession	148	171	183	317	457	661	1635	2033	2075	1653	1487
Trespass	1020	1231	1270	1650	1569	1262	1123	979	839	942	795
Narcotics	573	680	793	782	458	470	435	306	408	317	200
TOTAL of ALL CRIMES	10896	11382	12140	15312	15337	15707	15615	15557	15082	14718	11781
per 100 students	0.99	1.06	1.17	1.53	1.59	1.66	1.69	1.69	1.63	1.58	1.26

Table 4. System B: Selected Incidents Reported to School Police Department 1975-1986

	1975-76	76-77	77-78	78-79	79-80	80-81	81-82	82-83	83-84	84-85	85-86
Crimes against Persons	666	655	573	532	435	432	395	410	362	400	382
Common Assault on Student	396	415	360	354	259	270	264	298	263	293	284
Common Assault on Faculty/Staff	181	171	152	121	115	113	86	72	72	77	66
Common Assault on Security Officer	89	69	61	57	61	49	45	40	27	30	32
Assault with a Deadly Weapon	73	77	55	69	58	67	68	65	105	80	57
Robberies and Attempts - Unarmed	279	183	111	108	71	105	74	82	58	48	27
Robberies and Attempts - Armed	49	31	27	29	17	33	42	42	51	29	31
Rapes and Attempts	3	4	3	3	1	0	4	2	-	8	1
Other Selected Law Violations											
Controlled Substances	174	132	161	164	167	117	71	73	103	157	136
Firearms	50	44	28	48	34	58	66	91	122	66	66
Trespass	159	148	219	319	258	224	298	354	347	307	253
Theft/Vandalism-Private Property over \$50						257	298	348	377	379	349
Possession of Deadly Weapon (not firearms)						112	106	116	67	37	57
TOTAL OF ALL CRIMES*	3230	3078	2437	2414	1913	1834	1793	1940	1786	1798	1530
per 100 students	1.95	1.94	1.59	1.66	1.40	1.41	1.46	1.62	1.53	1.59	1.37
Disciplinary Incidents											
Minor Assaults on Student	523	511	662	636	501	432	481	510	504	508	490
Minor Assaults on Faculty/Staff	63	50	67	81	63	46	39	43	38	39	30
Minor Larceny	425	416	1060	1407	1468	1386	1555	1618	1330	1207	925
Disruptive Behavior	701	618	1051	1523	1510	1285	1494	1603	1537	1604	1526
Possession of Contraband	210	272	515	685	564	524	339	287	313	265	147
TOTAL DISCIPLINARY INCIDENTS	2297	2167	3980	5327	4996	4641	5222	4945	4435	4331	3878
per 100 students	1.38	1.36	2.60	3.67	3.65	3.57	4.25	4.12	3.79	3.83	3.46

Table 5. System C: Selected Crimes Reported to School Police Department

	75-76	76-77	77-78	78-79	79-80	80-81	81-82	82-83	83-84	84-85	85-86
Robbery	309	337	310	443	435	341	297	269	216	252	311
Assault/Battery	828	838	894	1045	1966	1258	1018	915	904	1096	1900
Student/Student	384	366	348	465	713	715	556	534	523	550	684
Student/Faculty	274	300	357	400	546	375	324	237	237	285	355
Adult/Student	55	67	118	92	613	101	78	101	106	197	813
Sex Offenses	72	96	113	168	250	284	337	310	256	332	653
Theft	1987	2232	2109	2051	2663	2774	3045	2823	2601	2457	2680
Malicious Mischief	685	920	910	1756	2428	2673	2623	2205	2082	2295	2453
Narcotics	1146	1472	1267	920	993	860	817	856	782	828	727
Marijuana	863	1036	867	633	665	631	599	609	573	662	526
Other Controlled Substances (alcohol excluded)	220	358	321	223	286	169	185	203	168	150	173
Loitering/Trespass	538	576	450	561	534	407	302	318	219	291	305
Firearms on Campus including assault with	66	61	89	122	173	163	116	84	109	134	137
Other Weapons on Campus	398	311	304	299	515	663	549	522	539	690	782
TOTAL OF ALL CRIMES	10332	11122	10547	11553	14102	14584	13667	13153	11659	12485	16147
per 100 Students	1.70	1.85	1.81	2.08	2.58	2.71	2.51	2.39	2.09	2.21	2.79

Table 6. System D: Selected Crimes Reported to School Police Department 1975-1986

	1975-76	76-77	77-78	78-79	79-80	80-81	81-82	82-83	83-84	84-85	85-86
Crimes against Persons											
Threat of Injury to School Employee	46	40	60	57	63	37	43	29	35	27	20
Assault with a Deadly Weapon	43	36	32	70	49	35	32	37	54	50	38
Battery	130	117	106	175	192	139	148	222	211	218	225
Robbery*	23	34	15	24	12	20	30	30	30	26	20
Sex Offenses	12	13	5	10	19	45	61	60	91	73	34
Upbraiding, Insulting and Abusing Teachers	20	22	9	14	35	24	39	36	39	14	-
Crimes against Property											
Theft*	1499	1120	759	629	679	587	654	535	510	579	477
Vandalism	533	461	421	525	496	450	448	401	412	353	492
Dangerous Drugs/Narcotics											
Marijuana	152	124	150	209	162	152	200	198	342	220	136
Controlled Substance (excludes alcohol)	11	12	6	16	17	26	14	20	100	28	20
Weapons on Campus											
Firearms	5	6	28	18	14	21	28	6	3	6	10
Other Illegal Weapons	55	28	37	40	39	28	71	92	102	59	83
Loitering/Trespassing	117	90	102	126	60	113	126	120	92	121	77
TOTAL OF ALL CRIMES	3975	3144	2551	2938	2614	2280	2672	2643	2978	2535	2429
per 100 students	3.34	2.66	2.22	2.62	2.38	2.07	2.45	2.45	2.76	2.33	2.21

*Explicitly includes attempts.

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