U.S. Department of Justice
Office of Justice Programs
National Institute of Justice

International Summaries

A Series of Selected Translations in Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice

From Sweden

Crime Prevention in School: Some Research Directions

Several Swedish research studies explore the ability of schools to prevent crime by influencing and changing the direction of children's behavior.

Introduction

During recent times, contemporary society has gained many advantages, including higher incomes, more leisure time, better housing, health care, and education. Not all these changes have been positive, however, especially for children.

Most Swedish children live in urban areas with one or two working parents and spend a great amount of time in day care, school, and organized activities. The careers, living situations, and recreation that make up modern life have been developed by adults for adults. As a result, the children often lack stimulating and challenging environments in which to have fun and adventure. In many cases, the schools have taken the responsibility of providing a place where children can feel secure and challenged. The social and economic differences existing among groups in society translate into contrasts in such areas as quality of life, health, housing, and leisure activities. These societal differences also place great demands on schools to establish norms and instill moral values in children.

Today's urban child must learn to function in a large social group providing strong emotional attachments. Second only to influences by the family, these school relationships are critical to a child's self-image and greatly influence total adjustment and future life situations. A child's relationships with teachers, as well as the school atmosphere, are also important contributing factors to a child's development.

This collection of papers from Sweden explores the ability of schools to prevent future crime by influencing and changing the direction of children's behavior. The authors examine the school's historical role of social control in Sweden; the school's ability to predict—and possibly change—the direction of a child's behavior and course of development; bullying behavior and the school's responsibility to prevent it.

These papers, which review research and summarize studies by the authors, are presented as springboards for future investigation on schools' role in crime prevention.

This is a summary of Brottsforebyggande Arbete I Skolan—Nagra Forskiningsron, en Konferens–rapport. Edited by Margit Gummesson and Lars Alexandarsson. Published by the Swedish Crime Prevention Council. Stockholm. 1989. 114 pp. The original contains several other articles on the same topic. NCJ 125622. Summary published fall 1990.

Schools and Criminality

by Jerzy Sarnecki

Crimes increased dramatically in Sweden from the beginning of the 20th century to the mid-1970's. At that time, the crime rate began to drop considerably, and violent crime is now at a lower level than in the mid-1970's. Property and traffic crimes, however, have increased, as have crimes committed by those in the 15- to 17-year age group.

Over the years, the social role of teenagers has been diminished to the point that their place in society is unclear. At the same time, the ability of parents to control teenagers' behavior has eroded: often both parents work, and their jobs may be far from home.

In earlier times, children worked alongside parents or other adults in agriculture, trades, or factories; this arrangement not only allowed children to produce something of value to family and society, but also permitted informal adult supervision. Once this situation changed,

however, teenagers—especially those in large urban areas—began spending their time in the streets, often participating in delinquent activities.

In addition to education, schools were instituted to remove children from the streets and establish social controls. Society, then, transferred much of the responsibility for control from parents to the schools.

School performance, future criminal activity linked

In 1986, Project Metropolit, a longitudinal study using a 1953 birth cohort, gathered data on 287 boys between the ages of 11 and 15 who were suspected of committing crimes. Researchers found that boys who went on to commit further crimes had worse grades, demonstrated poorer adjustment skills, and skipped school more often than the controls.

The most direct link was between the subjects' school attendance records and their adjustment as adults. Early truancy was a better predictor of drug abuse, long prison sentences, inability to support oneself and one's family, and even early death, than crime at an early age or poor home environment.

Difficulties in adjusting at school appear to be early warning signals that a student is "at risk" of poor social and economic status in later years. Since these difficulties can be identified early, many researchers suggest that the schools could establish preventive mechanisms.

Do Schools With Enriched Curriculums Prevent Crime?

by Lennart Grosin

Studies done in England, the United States, the Netherlands, and New Zealand support the theory that schools with enriched curriculums produce better student grades and performance. This appears true even when other factors such as a student's socioeconomic status are controlled.

Studies on enriched schools

Galloway, Rutter, Gottfredson, Graham, Stedman, and Ramsey have presented data indicating that schools can have a significant impact on student learning problems and social adjustment. There are no definitive answers, however, on how and why these schools yield better results.

Stedmar's (1985) research in U.S. high schools indicates that success primarily stems from emphasis on basic skills and repetitive learning exercises and tests. Other factors include positive school atmosphere and sophisticated learning methods. Ramsey et al. found that modifying the enriched curriculum to reflect the ethnicity of minority students helped them identify with both the school and their ethnic groups.

Characteristics. Enriched schools share a number of other characteristics and instructional methods that hold promise for crime prevention:

- These schools prioritized learning goals; established clear, democratic, and educational leadership; and ordered sanctions for unacceptable behavior.
- Teachers concentrated on a few themes and then expanded these in individualized study.
- Teachers held high expectations of students, assessed student performance regularly, acknowledged good work, and provided incentives for continued success.
- Teachers in the enriched schools had positive relationships that encouraged cooperation on goals, curriculums, and discipline.
- The teachers and administration encouraged delegation of responsibility to students.

Only a few research studies on these schools have dealt with crime prevention, and most of these have been at the elementary school level. Some Swedish criminological research studies show that deviant behavior decreases when students in enriched schools are well adjusted, demonstrate good grades, and get along well with their peers. Sarnecki (1985) found that a student's adjustment to school and a teacher's assessment of attendance and behavior were more important in predicting criminality than a range of other psychological, psychiatric, and sociopsychological variables.

Rutter on school and crime

Rutter et al. (1979) is the only research study to include students' criminality as a variable among data on background factors, school climate, and performance. Rutter conducted the study in 12 schools, with students in grades four through nine. Researchers collected data on students' social background and earlier school performance to compare school settings and students' social, intellectual, and ethnic similarities. Rutter then studied the correlation between a school's instructional philosophy and social atmosphere, students' circle of friends, students' school performance, and their criminality. Students in the study came primarily from working class families and minority ethnic groups. Twenty-eight percent of fathers had been convicted of a crime, and a similar proportion of mothers had psychiatric problems. About 1 percent of the students had received one or more social welfare services.

The longitudinal study continued to follow the students through secondary school (from 11 to 15 or 16 years of age). Data on delinquency were collected on male students from 9 of the 12 schools when the students were 14 and 18 years old. For a juvenile, delinquency was defined as being prosecuted for at least one offense. The study showed that the best predictors of criminality at 18 years of age were student aptitude, acquired skills, and parents' occupation.

Rutter also used 46 process variables, which described the school environment,

organization, instructional methodology, and student adjustment, to evaluate the influence of teaching methods and school atmosphere on criminality. Rutter identified nine as having significant links to criminality at 18 years, and five as having high, if not significant, correlations.

Significant variables. These variables are listed below, in order of significance:

- Stability within the classroom.
- Security of being taught in one's native language and being placed in a class with others of one's age group.
- Camaraderie among one's classmates.
- Cooperation by teachers in planning courses and lessons.
- Cooperative regulatory decisions by teachers and administrators.
- Mastery of teaching methods.
- "Block instruction," which allows students to be assigned to a group at the beginning of school and to travel with that group throughout their educational career.
- Breaking class time into a series of shorter lectures or lessons.
- Rewarding students for good work.
- Giving extra work to enhance lessons.
- Holding students back a year, whenever necessary.
- Types of discipline.
- Lessons in which students furnished their own materials.

Researchers also found positive correlations between good school performance, consistent discipline by teachers, and joint student-administration determination of school rules. In general, Rutter showed that encouragement and incentives for performance had positive effects, while negative sanctions—particularly collective punishment and scoldings by the principal—had poor results and often led to criminality.

Olweus. Olweus (1989) drew similar conclusions. He found that bullying can be held in check in a climate characterized by warmth and positive interest on the parents' part, clear boundaries, swift reaction to unwanted behavior, moderate sanctions for unwanted behavior, school leadership, and adult supervision of the student's activities outside school.

Rutter and his colleagues also developed a combined measure of educational and social climate (categorizing it as associates, behavior, school results, and criminality) and found a significant correlation between this measure and school performance.

Rutter's study represents a research milestone in factors influencing student adjustment to and performance in school. However, Rutter has been criticized for establishing inadequate controls for students' background and for underestimating the significance of social factors and earlier school experiences. Critics also question either Rutter's analytic methods or his data, many aggregated at the school level. However, these weaknesses do not negate the important directions his research takes and the promising indications that there is much to discover about school difficulties and criminality.

Followup studies to Rutter

Mortimore's (1988) study had better control for students' background, used a larger number of schools (50), and collected individual data. Mortimore's results strongly support Rutter by pointing to the positive correlation between the quality of a school and a student's success.

Gray et al. elaborated on Rutter's work by evaluating students a year after they graduated or quit school. He analyzed the length of their job searches, their risks for unemployment, qualifications for their jobs, and their opportunities for advancement. Gray found that students with a high number of absences tended to quit school early—and also made lower scores on exams while they were in school.

Gray also found a correlation between school and peer group, exam results, suspension, and the tendency to get behind during the last voluntary year of school. Though they often found jobs rather quickly at good short-term wages, students with poorer school adjustment generally did unskilled work with few future prospects. Further, their risk for unemployment was high.

Galloway was able to identify a link between truancy and crime. The influence of peers, previous behavior, and school performance appeared to start a chain of experiences that indirectly affected the future possibilities and social adjustment of individual students. One of these experiences was criminality.

Individual Prognosis of Crime

by Hakan Stattin

Data from two longitudinal Swedish studies are used to explore which circumstances in a child's early life negatively affect future social adjustment and criminality.

When studying criminality, it is important to remember that deviant behavior does not occur in a vacuum, but usually in tandem with other social and personal problems. For instance, these study data show that approximately 52 percent of the persons in official police records are also found in other official records, including those of registered alcoholics or mental patients.

Early warning. Criminal behavior seldom begins without early indicators, which usually include adjustment problems. Conflict or "acting out" behavior, aggressiveness, and impulsiveness warn of later social adjustment difficulties. Loeber and Dishion show that the risks for future antisocial problems are greater when the problem behavior begins early, occurs frequently, takes various forms, and manifests itself in multiple settings (such as school, home, and recreational settings). Recent research has shown observable forms of behavior as early as

4 or 5 years which could systematically be linked to social maladjustment tendencies.

The Loeber and Dishion study asked teachers to rate 10-year-old boys on a scale of 1 to 7: 1 was defined as "having a trusting working relationship with teachers and positive, warm relations with teachers and schoolmates," and 7 was defined as "being aggressive towards teachers and schoolmates, disruptive, disrespectful, and actively rebellious."

Results show conclusively that boys who had been identified as aggressive were involved in significantly more criminal activity later in life (up to age 26) than those who had been judged as less aggressive at 10 years. Of the boys with a rating of 5 or more, 55 percent were later convicted of several criminal acts. In contrast, only 2 percent of boys rated between 1 and 4 had one registered crime, and only 14 percent had several.

Predicting behavior. But the question is, how certain can these predictions be when based on behavior at age 10? Rating the boys as low aggressive (1–4) or high aggressive (5–7), researchers used cluster analysis to examine different patterns of criminality. Boys with no criminal record were placed in a separate cluster. The most common pattern that emerged was a single property crime, followed by a single drug offense, traffic offense, or repeated property crimes. The boys most involved in crime had committed repeated drug, property, and traffic crimes; this group was followed by boys with multiple drug and property crimes and crimes against persons. The least common pattern represented six boys who fell into all crime categories. Boys who had been rated as highly aggressive were overrepresented in multiple crime clusters, although three boys in this group had been rated low aggressive. Further, some of those who had been rated high aggressive did not appear in the criminally active groups or at least not in the multiple crime category.

Using the same group of boys, researchers also examined early criminality in relation to later criminal activity. Data indicated that 46 percent of teenagers with some criminal behavior later committed crimes as adults. However, an equally good chance of predicting crime could be made from aggressiveness at 10 years.

Researchers also examined extreme cases of criminal activity. Of the 15 boys who had committed frequent crimes as teenagers, 14 appeared in the police register when they were between the ages of 18 and 26 years.

It is also important to consider the child development process. Research has shown that many children give up criminal activity as they mature. Various measures of social adjustment, such as adjudication, conflicts with parents, and adjustment difficulties in school, are closely linked to an individual's biological maturity at 14 to 15 years. As the young person matures, this relationship diminishes and essentially disappears, a fact that makes it difficult to predict future behavior by using earlier behavior.

What leads to a criminal career?

How does a criminal career develop? The author uses a concept called "problem gravitation" to look at longitudinal data and track different types of social adjustment problems as they tend to gravitate towards a certain group of persons. Problem behaviors of all types tend to become more and more associated with a smaller group of individuals, usually persons having difficulties in many areas. This suggests that the problem of developing criminality should be viewed from a person-based perspective rather than a variable-centered one.

Bullying: What We Know, What We Can Do

by Dan Olweus

Most research on bullying has been conducted in Scandinavia, where public interest in the subject peaked during the 1970's and early 1980's. Between 1982-83 in Norway, three 10- to 14-year-old children committed suicide following severe bullying. These highly publicized incidents led to serious media discussions and a nationwide bullying prevention campaign.

This report discusses the extent of bullying and the characteristics of both victims and perpetrators. A 16-item questionnaire was distributed in fall 1983 to school children in Sweden and Norway. Data indicated that about 15 percent (145,000 children) of Swedish grade school students had been involved in occasional bullying incidents: approximately 9 percent were victims, and 7 percent were perpetrators. Slightly more than 3 percent (32,000 students) were the target of bullying at least once a week, and another 2 percent (17,000 students), more often.

Olweus also asked teachers for impressions of classroom bullying incidents and information on any safeguards. Overall, Swedish teachers saw bullying as a significant problem for a large number of children. Further, though bullying has been increasing since the mid-1970's, teachers said that few, if any, safeguards had been established. These impressions were confirmed in a separate 1980 study, which gathered data from the Göteborg, Malmö, and Vasterås school districts; the data indicated that as children grow older, their chances of being victimized by bullies decreases (from 11.4 percent in grades 3–6 to 5.6 percent in grades 7–9).

Study data also revealed that, especially during the early teens, boys were not only more likely to be victims, but also were more likely (80 percent) to be the bullies. When girls were bullied, the

actions tended to take the form of their being ostracized, and in most of these cases, (60 percent) the perpetrators were boys.

In 1986, Olweus conducted followup analysis of the characteristics of victims and perpetrators. This study deflated commonly held myths about bullying: bullying does not appear to be related to class size or school performance of either the perpetrator or the victims. Nor is bullying directed at children whose personal features are outside the norm (red hair, obesity, glasses, or odd clothing).

Victims of bullying incidents

The data did indicate that bullied children are more anxious, unsure of themselves, and cautious than other children. When attacked, they cry or withdraw. They have negative feelings about themselves and their situations and are overwhelmed by school. They feel alone and often do not have close friends. These victims seldom provoke attacks and have a negative attitude toward guns, knives, and other violent objects. If male, the victims are often physically weaker than other boys.

Some parents indicated that the victims were anxious and sensitive at an early age. However, it is possible that long-term bullying may have increased these tendencies. One group of data indicated that bullied boys have closer contacts and more positive relations with their parents, particularly their mothers, than with other children.

Bullies

Bullies, on the other hand, were noticeably more aggressive than other children. They had positive attitudes toward use of objects of aggression and violence. They were impulsive, needed to dominate, and showed little sympathy for their victims. They scored high in self-esteem, were physically strong, and often demonstrated antisocial or rule breaking behavior.

A followup study by the author indicated that 60 percent of male bullies in grades 6 through 9 were later convicted of at least one offense by age 24. Even more dramatic was the fact that 35-40 percent of these bullies had three or more convictions by age 24, while only 10 percent of the control population had convictions. The past victims had a lower than average rate of criminal activity.

Significant factors

Olweus also analyzed the upbringing of both the bullies and their victims. Data revealed three significant factors:

- The warmth shown by the parents or other primary caregiver toward the child during the early years.
- The primary caregiver's tolerance of and response to the child's aggressive behavior.
- The disposition of the parent to use "power-oriented" childrearing methods, including corporal punishment and violent emotional outbreaks.

The school and bullying

The incidence of bullying varies greatly among schools, and in some the risk of being a victim is 4 to 5 times higher than in other schools. Based on his research, Olweus believes that a school prevention program should include:

- A system for increased detection.
- Supervision of schoolyard.
- Attractive school milieu.
- Availability of telephone for calling for assistance.
- Teachers' workshop on prevention.
- Study circles for school and home.

In the class, teachers should set regulations that deter bullying, organize positive class activities, and stress sanctions that will follow bullying. Teachers and school administrators can also work with the perpetrators and their parents to prevent bullying. Recruiting the help of neutral class members may also be an option.

Most of all, schools need to acknowledge their responsibility to help prevent bullying and take control. Based on his research, Olweus developed a prevention program that includes a study guide, a videotape, and lesson plans. The program has been used in over 1,000 schools in Sweden and Norway, and preliminary results are positive. For example, in 42 schools (2,500 students) in Bergen, Norway, bullying decreased at least 50 percent after 2 years of program implementation.

Summary

Overall, these papers suggest that the schools have both the capability and the responsibility to intervene and respond when children are not thriving. The Swedish Crime Prevention Council and the National School Administration are striving toward the goal of using the school setting to build a crime prevention framework.

The Assistant Attorney General, Office of Justice Programs, coordinates the activities of the following program Offices and Bureaus: National Institute of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and Office for Victims of Crime.