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**Lethal Violence in Schools**  
**A National Study**  
Final Report

Edward Gaughan, Ph.D.  
Professor of Psychology  
Principal Investigator

Jay D. Cerio, Ph.D.  
Professor of School Psychology  
Chair, Division of School Psychology

Robert A. Myers, Ph.D.  
Professor of Anthropology  
and Public Health  
Director, Alfred University Interdisciplinary Program in Violence Studies

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This report was written to share our findings with other institutions concerned about the welfare and safety of students throughout the United States. We want people to be aware of the prevalence and nature of this problem, and ways in which we may be able to prevent it.

For more information contact:  
[Susan C. Goetschius](mailto:Susan.C.Goetschius@alfred.edu)  
Director of Communications  
Alfred University  
One Saxon Drive Alfred, N.Y. 14802-1205  
607.871.2170

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And finally, we extend our thanks to a former colleague, Dr. Timothy Z. Keith, now of the University of Texas at Austin, who was our research/statistical consultant.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **Teen-agers say revenge is the strongest motivation for school shootings.**
  - 87 percent said shootings are motivated by a desire to “get back at those who have hurt them.”
  - 86 percent said “other kids picking on them, making fun of them or bullying them” causes teen-agers to turn to lethal violence in the schools.
  
- **Students recognize that being a victim of abuse at home or witnessing others being abused at home may cause violence in school.**
  - 61 percent said students shoot others because they have been victims of physical abuse at home.
  - 54 percent said witnessing physical abuse at home can lead to violence at school.
  
- **Students have access the guns.**
  - 61 percent of the respondents said they know students who could bring a gun to school if they wanted to.
  - 24 percent of students say they could “easily get a gun if I wanted to.”
  
- **The potential for violence in our nation’s high schools is widespread.**
  - 37 percent of respondents said there are “kids at my school who I think might shoot someone.”
  - 20 percent of respondents have heard rumors that another student plans to shoot someone, and 20 percent have also overheard another student actually talking about shooting someone at school.
  - 8 percent of respondents said they have thought about shooting someone at school.

- 10 percent of the students said they have thought about how to shoot someone at school.
- **More than 10 percent of our nation’s teen-agers may be inclined toward violence, and more than 2.5 percent of them could be considered dangerous, meaning they have both the propensity toward violence and the means to accomplish it.**
- **Students say their schools are not safe.**
  - more than a quarter of the respondents said their schools are only “somewhat” safe, or not at all safe.
  - 75 percent of the respondents were concerned about a shooting taking place in their schools.
  - students consider rural schools to be most dangerous, suburban schools the safest.
- **Only half the students would tell an adult if they overheard someone at school talking about shooting someone.**
  - If students do tell anyone, they are most likely to tell a teacher, least likely to confide in a coach.
- **Better relationships between teachers and students are one way to stop lethal violence in the schools.**
  - 23 percent said teachers should care more about their students
  - 12 percent said teachers should intervene to stop bullying, and take a more active role in their students’ lives
  - 12 percent said teachers should listen more and pay more attention to their students.
- **Overall, 13 percent of the students told us there is nothing that can be done to stop school shootings.**
  - The 12 percent of the students who are inclined toward violence were twice as likely to say that nothing can be done to stop shootings.
  - Students who are considered the most dangerous (2.6 percent of the sample) are even more likely (two in five) to say there is nothing that can be done to stop the violence.

## INTRODUCTION

American public schools are safe places, perhaps even safer than American homes. The tragic school shootings that are the focus of this report have occurred in less than one-hundredth of one percent of schools. The probability of being shot at school is similarly low. But shootings have occurred at schools, have been largely unpredictable, and have raised the anxieties and concerns of students, families, teachers, and the public at large. Between 1974 and 2000, the National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC) of the United States Secret Service identified 37 incidents. At least 20 incidents have been reported in the national media since 1992, and eight since 1999, and these do not include several planned shootings that were prevented by authorities. Why do these shootings occur? Why do they occur where they do? What can we do to protect our children?

Few clear answers are forthcoming for these crucial questions. Many experts, academicians, and organizations, including the Surgeon General's Office, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the United States Secret Service, the National School Safety Center, and the U.S. Department of Education have addressed the issue of violence in the schools. Having reviewed most of these materials we have come to endorse the conclusion of the U.S. Secret Service in their "Interim Report on the Prevention of Targeted Violence in the Schools" (October, 2000); that is that "There is no accurate or useful profile of the school shooter."

Alfred University's Division of School Psychology is vitally interested in the causes of teen violence. As those who educate school psychologists, we are often called upon to explain why school shootings occur, as well as how to prevent lethal violence in the schools. In this report, we attempt to add to the existing knowledge on lethal school shootings by tapping a resource heretofore largely ignored – the students themselves. We wanted to know, directly from teen-agers, their answers to questions such as these:

- What are the reasons for lethal violence in our schools?
- How widespread is the potential for violence?
- What schools are unsafe?
- Which students are most dangerous?
- What can we do to prevent school shootings?

## METHODOLOGY

Over the past two years, students and faculty of the Division of School Psychology at Alfred University followed media accounts, research results, and expert opinion on the causes of lethal school violence and attempts to develop useful assessments of risk. Checklists of risk factors and characteristics of previous offenders result in lists of symptoms and features that these youngsters display. The problem is that these features are common to most students dealing with emotional and behavioral problems, but do not distinguish those at risk for school violence from this much larger

group. The danger in profiling from these characteristics is the number of false positives that would occur, and the concomitant unwarranted danger to privacy and civil rights.

So we are left largely with opinion, as informed as it might be, about causes of school shootings. Those that have had the highest visibility include access to firearms, being bullied or mistreated in school, family dysfunction, and various psychological disorders. The first objective for this study was to test these theories and opinions about school shootings with actual students.

Despite the lack of a valid discriminating profile, there are characteristics of events that have occurred frequently with instances of school shootings. School shootings, for the most part, are not impulsive acts. They seemed to be planned and premeditated. As a matter of fact, shooters seem to think about these acts much before they are committed; to generate a plan or scenario for how to go about the shooting; and to frequently tell others about their thoughts and plans. The second objective of this study was then to investigate with students the extent to which these conditions exist in their own schools, with people they know or have heard about. And the third objective was to discover to what extent students harbor these thoughts and feelings themselves – to assess risk from the students own self-reports.

The Division of School Psychology developed the plan for this study at Alfred University. We asked students to tell us their opinions of 16 different possible causes of lethal school violence that have been proposed in the academic, professional, and popular literature. The students were also asked to report their awareness of conditions that have been linked to previous school shootings. For example, we asked students whether they had heard of or knew of other students who had spoken of committing such acts. Finally, we asked the students themselves about their own thoughts, whether they themselves had contemplated committing such acts. The surveys also asked demographic and other descriptive information to facilitate data analysis.

The Division then commissioned Harris Interactive<sup>1</sup> to conduct a national internet survey of public school students in grades 7-12. The sample was selected from Harris Interactive's existing panel of more than seven million students. The 2,017 responses were weighted using propensity score adjustment to reflect a nationally representative sample of junior and senior high school students. Propensity score adjustment uses regular, repetitive, parallel telephone and on-line surveys to adjust for any self-selection bias in on-line surveys. The efficiency and accuracy of the methodology was demonstrated during the 2000 elections, when Harris Interactive predicted national and state election results more accurately than most traditional polls (Harris Interactive was the only major poll to predict a dead heat in the 2000 presidential race). That success played an important role in our decision to use the online survey method. The surveys themselves were anonymous, so we cannot identify individual respondents.

In some of the data analyses, we used three indices developed by Harris to measure students' quality of life, degree of alienation, and media usage. These indices allowed us to explore whether students who scored high or low on these characteristics differed from each other in their responses. The indices were constructed as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> Harris Interactive (Nasdaq: HPOL) is a worldwide market research, polling and consulting firm. It is best known for The Harris Poll and its pioneering use of the Internet to conduct scientifically accurate market research.

**Alienation index:** determined by their responses to the questions, “I feel left out at home,” “What I think doesn’t matter at home,” and “What I think doesn’t matter at school.” Students were classified as having high, medium or low alienation indices.

**Quality of life index:** measured by their responses to the questions, “I have a lot of friends,” “I get along well with my parents,” “I am often bored,” “I often feel sad and unhappy,” “I have been happy at school this past year,” and “I get into trouble a lot.” Students were classified as having high, medium or low quality of life depending upon their responses to those questions.

**Media usage:** based on how much time each week they spend watching videos, playing video games or computer games, how much time they spend in chat rooms and how much time they spend looking at websites. Those who spent less than eight hours a week total were classified as low media users; those who spent nine to 17 hours a week were classified as medium media users; and those who spent more than 18 hours a week were classified as high media users.

## RESULTS

### Section 1: Why do school shootings occur?

**Students say revenge is clearly the major reason for school shootings.**

Respondents were asked to rate 16 possible reasons for school shootings on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) scale. Their answers are as follows:

Rank	Reason	% agreeing
1	They want to get back at those who have hurt them.	87
2	Other kids pick on them, make fun of them or bully them.	86
3	They don’t value life.	62
4	They have been victims of physical abuse at home.	61
5	They have mental problems.	56
6	It is easy for them to get a gun.	56
7	They do not get along with their parents.	55
8	They have witnessed physical abuse at home.	54
9	They drink alcohol or use drugs.	52
10	They do not have any good friends.	49
11	They see violence on TV, in movies, in videos and in computer and video games.	37
12	Violence is a way of life in their neighborhood.	34
13	Other kids encouraged them to do it.	28
14	Their teachers don’t care about them.	26
15	They are afraid for their own safety.	20
16	They are bored.	18

For all groups of students, getting back at those who hurt them; having other kids pick on them, make fun of them or bully them; not valuing life; and being a victim of abuse were consistently among the top five reasons, regardless of what variables were used to analyze the data. Consistently ranked at the bottom among the reasons were being bored; being afraid for their own safety; and being encouraged by others to shoot.

If we look at the means of responses students offered for each of 16 reasons, we get a similar picture. The top four reasons were:

1. Other kids pick on them, make fun of them or bully them.
2. They want to get back at people who have hurt them.
3. They don't value life.
4. They have been a victim of physical abuse at home.

There were some variations in ranking based on gender. The top five reasons endorsed by boys were: getting back at those who hurt them; other kids pick on them, make fun of them or bully them; they don't value life; they have mental problems; and they have been a victim of physical abuse at home. For girls, the top reasons were: other kids pick on them, make fun of them or bully them; they want to get back at those who have hurt them; they have been a victim of physical abuse at home; they don't value life; and they have witnessed physical abuse at home.

**More than any other variables, however, media usage and race were correlated with how students perceived the causes of lethal violence.**

Differences in how high, medium and low media users perceive reasons for school shootings

Overall Rank	Reason	% High	% Medium	% Low
1	They want to get back at those who hurt them.	86	86	89
2	Other kids pick on them, make fun of them or bully them.	85	85	89
3	They don't value life.	63	60	64
4	They have been a victim of physical abuse at home.	<b>56</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>62</b>
5	They have mental problems.	57	54	56
6	It is easy for them to get a gun.	<b>54</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>61</b>
7	They do not get along with their parents.	<b>50</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>60</b>
8	They have witnessed physical abuse at home.	50	57	57
9	They drink alcohol or use drugs.	<b>47</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>57</b>
10	They do not have any good friends.	<b>48</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>56</b>
11	They see violence on TV, in videos and in computer and video games.	28	38	46
12	Violence is a way of life in their neighborhood.	<b>31</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>40</b>
13	Other kids encouraged them to do it.	<b>25</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>32</b>
14	Their teachers don't care about them.	27	27	27
15	They are afraid for their own safety.	19	19	23
16	They are bored.	19	15	19

\* boldface indicates wide variations in percentages of agreement

High media users were less likely than low media users to endorse the lack of friends; ease in getting a gun; not getting along with their parents; other kids' encouragement; violence in their neighborhoods; being victims of physical abuse themselves or witnessing physical abuse; and alcohol and drugs as reasons for violence in the schools. On each of those, the high media users were at least six percentage points, and sometimes as much as 10, below the low media users.

Differences in how students perceive reasons for school shootings by race/ethnic background

Rank	Reason	% White	% African-American	% Hispanic	% Minority
1	They want to get back at those who hurt them.	<b>89</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>79</b>
2	Other kids pick on them, make fun of them or bully them.	<b>87</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>83</b>
3	They don't value life.	63	61	62	62
4	They have been a victim of physical abuse at home.	<b>61</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>60</b>
5	They have mental problems.	56	57	58	57
6	It is easy for them to get a gun.	56	51	56	54
7	They do not get along with their parents	<b>55</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>53</b>
8	They have witnessed physical abuse at home	<b>56</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>48</b>
9	They drink alcohol or use drugs	<b>54</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>46</b>
10	They do not have any good friends	<b>49</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>52</b>
11	They see violence on TV, in videos and in computer and video games	37	41	37	38
12	Violence is a way of life in their neighborhood	<b>35</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>29</b>
13	Other kids encouraged them to do it	<b>29</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>26</b>
14	Their teachers don't care about them	<b>26</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>25</b>
15	They are afraid for their own safety	<b>20</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>20</b>
16	They are bored	18	18	18	18

\* boldface indicates wide variations in percentages of agreement

- African-Americans were less likely to say that getting back at others was a reason for violence.
- African-Americans also did not perceive bullying to be as great a problem as whites did.
- African-Americans were far less likely to say that the lack of good friends was a cause than were Hispanics.
- African-Americans were less likely to say that the lack of friends could be blamed for school violence, but more likely to agree that other kids' encouragement was a factor.

- Hispanics were less likely to blame violence in their neighborhoods as a reason for violence, and were far less likely than African-Americans to say that fear for their own safety prompts school shootings.

**To a slightly lesser degree, alienation correlated with what students perceive as the causes of school violence.**

Differences in how students perceive reasons for school shootings according to degree of alienation

Overall Rank	Reason	% High	% Medium	% Low
1	They want to get back at those who hurt them	91	89	81
2	Other kids pick on them, make fun of them or bully them	86	87	86
3	They don't value life	60	65	61
4	They have been a victim of physical abuse at home	<b>56</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>64</b>
5	They have mental problems	56	58	55
6	It is easy for them to get a gun	<b>54</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>55</b>
7	They do not get along with their parents	<b>51</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>58</b>
8	They have witnessed physical abuse at home	<b>50</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>55</b>
9	They drink alcohol or use drugs	50	53	52
10	They do not have any good friends	<b>49</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>58</b>
11	They see violence on TV, in videos and in computer and video games	<b>31</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>42</b>
12	Violence is a way of life in their neighborhood	<b>31</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>34</b>
13	Other kids encouraged them to do it	28	27	29
14	Their teachers don't care about them	<b>30</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>24</b>
15	They are afraid for their own safety	22	21	18
16	They are bored	18	19	18

\* boldface indicates wide variations in percentages of agreement

- Highly alienated students were just as likely as those with low alienation indices to blame other kids' picking on them, making fun of them or bullying them as a reason for school violence, but they were far more likely to say that getting back at someone who hurt them was a cause.
- 91 percent of those with high alienation indices said getting back at others was a reason, compared to 81 percent of those with low alienation indices.

- Highly alienated students were also less likely to say that being a victim of physical abuse; witnessing physical abuse in the home; or not getting along with parents were causes.

**Overall, violence on TV, in movies, in videos and in computer and video games ranked 11<sup>th</sup> as a cause of lethal violence. However, there were two notable exceptions to the ranking.**

- Younger students' responses placed it eighth in the list of 16 reasons.
- Those whose grades were mostly D's and F's ranked it ninth.

**Across every variable except race, however, there were wide differences in students' ideas about media violence as a reason for school shootings. Some of the variations are:**

- 41 percent of girls said it was a cause, compared to 33 percent of boys.
- Students whose grades were mostly D's and F's were far more likely to see it as a problem than those who received mostly B's and C's (49 percent cf. 34 percent).
- Respondents with a low quality of life index perceived it as less of a problem than those with a high quality of life index (32 percent cf. 43 percent).
- 46 percent of low media users endorsed violence in the media as a cause for school shootings, compared to only 28 percent of those who are high media users.
- Highly alienated respondents were considerably less likely to see it as a problem than those with low alienation indices (31 percent cf. 42 percent).
- Those from neighborhoods with no crime were more likely to say violence in the media is a problem than those who come from neighborhoods where there is a lot of or some crime.
- 40 percent of the respondents who said they don't feel safe in school blamed violence in the media, compared to 37 percent of those who said their schools are extremely safe or very safe, and 34 percent of those who said their schools are safe.
- 40 percent of rural residents and 39 percent of urban students agreed it is a problem, compared to 34 percent of suburban residents.
- Those who live in the Midwest and South were more likely to view media violence as a cause than those who live in the East or West.
- Respondents whose mothers had a high school education or less were more likely to blame violence in the media than those whose mothers have a college degree.

## Section 2: How widespread is the potential for violence?

Because this is a baseline study, we do not have information to tell us if teenagers think that guns are easier to get than in the past, or if more of them have access to guns than they did before. Data from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey<sup>2</sup> indicate that over the 1990s, fewer students were carrying guns, and specifically, fewer were carrying guns to school. The findings that 61 percent “know someone who bring a gun to school,” and that 24 percent of the students believe that they could “easily get a gun if I wanted one,” are troubling in that teen-agers believe weapons to be readily available. The apparent easy access to guns youths say they have has some serious implications. According to the 2001 report by the Surgeon General on youth violence, the so-called “violence epidemic” of 1983-1993 was tied to more youths carrying guns. “During this era, instant access to weapons, especially firearms, often turned an angry encounter into a seriously violent or lethal one, which, in turn drew the attention from the police in the form of an arrest.... That undercurrent of violent behavior could re-ignite into a new epidemic if weapons carrying rises again.”<sup>3</sup>

We wanted to know how many students contemplate lethal violence and how readily they can obtain weapons.

Question	% agreeing
I know kids who could bring a gun to school if they wanted to.	61
I could easily get a gun if I wanted to.	24
There are kids in my school who I think might shoot someone.	37
I heard about someone who has made a plan to shoot someone.	19
I have heard another kid talking about shooting somebody at school.	20
I have thought about shooting someone at school.	8
I have thought about how I would go about shooting someone at school.	10

**Sixty-one percent of the respondents say they “know kids who could bring a gun to school if they wanted to.”**

- Among those who said they do not feel safe at school, the percentage jumps to 74, but even among those who rate their schools as safe or very safe, 50 percent knew someone who could bring a gun to school.

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<sup>2</sup> Youth Risk Behavior Survey is a national school-based survey conducted every two years by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in collaboration with federal, state and local partners.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Service. (2001). *Youth Violence: A Report of the Surgeon General*. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Protection and Control; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Mental Health Services; and National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Mental Health.

- Students with a low quality of life were more likely to say that they knew someone who could bring a gun to school than those with a high or medium quality of life.
- Significantly more of those who said their neighborhoods had some or a lot of crime knew students who had access to guns than those who said they lived in safer neighborhoods.
- The more highly alienated respondents were, the more likely they were to say they knew kids who could bring a gun to school.
- Older students were more likely to know a student with access to guns than younger students.
  - 70 percent of rural students said they knew someone who could bring a gun to school.
  - Students who live in the South were more likely to agree than those who live in the East (66 percent cf. 56 percent).
  - Those who said their mothers had a high school education or less (an indicator of lower socio-economic status) were also more likely to agree with the statement than those whose mothers had some college.

**Nearly a quarter (24 percent) of all respondents said they could “easily get a gun if I wanted one.”**

How safe students feel at school again had a definite impact on how many agreed with the statement.

- 31 percent of those who do not feel safe at school agreed they could get a gun if they wanted one.
- Those with a perceived low quality of life were also more likely to agree than those with a high quality of life (29 percent cf. 19 percent).
- Among those with a high alienation index, 28 percent said they could get a gun, compared to 20 percent of those with a low alienation index.
- Older students were three times more likely to have access to a gun than those in seventh and eighth grades.
- Among rural students, 34 percent said they could get guns, compared to 23 percent of those who live in urban areas and 20 percent of those who live in suburban areas.

**Thirty-seven percent agree “there are kids at my school who I think might shoot someone.”**

- 40 percent of girls think there is someone at their school who might shoot someone, compared to 34 percent of boys.
- Younger students seem less concerned than 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders.
- White students are also more likely to agree. Forty percent say there are students at their schools who might shoot someone, compared to 26 percent of African-American students, 24 percent of Hispanic students and 25 percent of minority students.

- 44 percent of rural students said there are students at their school capable of lethal violence, significantly more than suburban students and urban students.
- Students with high alienation indices and those with medium alienation indices were far more likely to agree than those with low alienation indices.
- Among those with a lot of or some crime in their neighborhood, 45 percent said there are students at their school who might shoot someone, compared to 31 percent of those who said their neighborhoods had no crime.
- Students who said they feel unsafe in school were more than twice as likely than those who feel safe at school to say there are kids in their school who might shoot someone.

**One in five students has heard about someone in their school who has a plan to shoot someone. This refers to the number of students who have heard rumors that one of their fellow students has a plan to shoot someone.**

- 23 percent of the girls say they have heard about someone in their school who has a plan to shoot someone, compared to only 15 percent of the boys who said they have heard that type of rumor.
- Older students are far more likely to say they have heard about someone with plans to shoot someone than students in seventh and eighth graders.
- African-American students were the least likely to say they had heard about someone with a plan for lethal violence, and Hispanic students were the most likely.
- Students in rural schools are more likely to have heard such rumors; 23 percent say they have heard of someone with a plan to shoot someone, compared to 18 percent of suburban students and 19 percent of urban students.
- Slightly more students who mostly get D's and F's agreed with the statement than did students who get better grades.
- Students whose quality of life is low are more likely to say they have heard rumors of a plan for a shooting than those who have a high quality of life
- Students with a medium alienation index were more likely to say they had heard of someone planning to commit lethal violence than those with either low or high alienation indices.
- Those who reported their neighborhoods have some or a lot of crime were more apt to have heard rumors about shootings than those who said their neighborhoods are safe.
- Among those who said they do not feel safe at school, 30 percent have heard rumors of plans for a school shooting, compared to 13 percent of those who say they feel very safe or extremely safe at school.

**Twenty percent say they have heard another student talking about shooting someone at school. This refers to the number of students who have directly overheard other students say they want to shoot someone at school.**

- Students in seventh and eighth grades were far less likely to say they had heard someone talking about shooting someone at school than those in 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades and those in 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades .
- Hispanic students were least likely among the ethnic groups to say they had heard another student talking about using lethal violence.
- Rural and urban students were more likely to have overheard another student talking about shooting someone than those who live in the suburbs.
- Students who get mostly D's and F's in school were far more likely to have heard another student talking about shooting someone than those who get mostly A's, or mostly B's and C's.
- Those with a low quality of life were twice as likely as those with a high quality of life index to say they had heard someone talking about shooting someone.
- Highly alienated students were also more likely to agree with the statement than those with a medium alienation index or a low alienation index.
- Students living in neighborhoods with more crime are more likely to say they have heard another student talk about carrying out a shooting at school.
- 32 percent of the students who say they do not feel safe at school said they have heard another student talking about shooting someone, compared to 12 percent of those who say they are extremely safe or very safe at school.

**Eight percent of the respondents said they have thought about shooting someone at school.**

How students responded to the question, "I have thought about shooting someone at school."

	% Agree	% Neutral	% Disagree
<b>Total</b>	8	7	85
Male	11	10	79
Female	5	4	91
<b>Grade in school</b>			
7 <sup>th</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup>	3	6	91
9 <sup>th</sup> -10 <sup>th</sup>	9	8	83
11 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup>	11	7	82
<b>Race</b>			
White	7	7	85
African-American	11	5	84
Hispanic	7	6	87
Minority	8	5	86
<b>Location</b>			
Urban	8	9	84
Suburban	8	7	85
Rural	9	5	85
<b>Region</b>			
East	7	8	85
Midwest	8	5	88
South	8	7	86
West	10	10	80
<b>Academic performance</b>			
Mostly A's	7	4	90
Mostly B's and C's	8	8	84
Mostly D's and F's	16	17	67
<b>Quality of life</b>			
High	4	3	93
Medium	6	5	89
Low	15	13	72
<b>Alienation in life</b>			
High	14	12	74
Medium	8	7	85
Low	3	4	94
<b>Crime in neighborhood</b>			
A lot/some	8	11	80
Hardly any	9	7	84
None	6	3	91
<b>Safety in school</b>			
Extremely/very safe	4	4	92
Safe	10	8	83
Somewhat/not at all safe	12	11	77

- Fewer girls than boys said they have thought about shooting someone at school.
- Only 3 percent of those in seventh and eighth grade agreed with the statement, compared to 11 percent of those in 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades.
- African-American students are slightly more likely to say they have thought about shooting someone than white, Hispanic or minority students
- 16 percent of those students who said they get mostly D's and F's have thought about shooting someone at school, compared to 7 percent of those who get mostly A's and 8 percent of those who get mostly B's and C's.
- 12 percent of those students categorized as high media users said they have thought about shooting someone at school, compared to 5 percent of those with medium media usage and 6 percent of those with low media usage.
- 14 percent of those who have a high alienation index said they have thought about shooting someone, while 8 percent of those with medium alienation indices and only 3 percent of those with low alienation indices agreed with the statement.
- 12 percent of students who do not feel safe at school said they have thought about shooting someone, compared to only 4 percent of those who feel extremely safe or very safe at school and 10 percent of those who feel safe at school.

**Ten percent of the respondents said they have thought about how to shoot someone at school.**

How students responded to the question, "I have thought about how I would go about shooting someone at school."

Responses to "I have thought about how I would go about shooting someone at school."	% Agree	% Neutral	% Disagree
<b>Total</b>	10	6	84
Male	13	8	79
Female	6	4	90
<b>Grade in school</b>			
7 <sup>th</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup>	1	5	94
9 <sup>th</sup> -10 <sup>th</sup>	11	8	81
11 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup>	15	5	80
<b>Race</b>			
White	9	7	85
African-American	12	5	83
Hispanic	10	4	86
Minority	11	4	85
<b>Location</b>			
Urban	8	7	85
Suburban	10	7	83
Rural	12	5	84
<b>Region</b>			
East	10	6	84
Midwest	10	5	85
South	8	7	84
West	10	8	82
<b>Academic performance</b>			
Mostly A's	7	6	88
Mostly B's and C's	10	6	84
Mostly D's and F's	18	13	68
<b>Quality of life</b>			
High	6	4	89
Medium	7	4	89
Low	16	11	73
<b>Alienation in life</b>			
High	13	10	77
Medium	6	5	89
Low	9	4	87
<b>Crime in neighborhood</b>			
A lot/some	11	9	80
Hardly any	10	6	84
None	10	4	86
<b>Safety in school</b>			
Extremely/very safe	7	5	88
Safe	10	7	83

Somewhat/not at all safe	13	8	79
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- Boys were more than twice as likely as girls to say they had thought about how to shoot someone at school (13 percent cf. 6 percent).
- Only 1 percent of seventh and eighth graders said they had thought about it, compared 15 percent of those in 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades.
- 12 percent of rural students said they had thought about it, compared to 8 percent of urban students and 10 percent of suburban students.
- 18 percent of those students whose grades are mostly D's and F's have thought about how to shoot someone in school, while 7 percent of those whose grades are mostly A's and 10 percent of those whose grades are mostly B's and C's said they have thought about it.
- 13 percent of those who are considered high media users have thought about it, versus 6 percent of moderate media users and 9 percent of low media users.
- 16 percent of those with high alienation indices said they have thought about how to shoot someone, compared to 10 percent of those with medium alienation indices and only 4 percent of those with low alienation indices.
- 7 percent of those who feel extremely safe or very safe at school have thought about how to shoot someone, compared to 10 percent of those who said they are safe at school and 13 percent of those who do not feel safe at school.

### Section 3: Which Students Are Dangerous?

We correlated the raw responses to determine the number and possible identifying characteristics of potentially violent students.

**More than 10 percent of the respondents may be inclined toward lethal violence, and more than 2.5 percent could be considered dangerous.**

Students were asked two questions that reflect their inclinations toward school shooting:

- 8 percent of the respondents said they have thought about shooting someone at school.
- 10 percent said they have thought about how they would go about shooting someone at school if they wanted to.
- 12 percent agreed with **one or both statements**; these are the students considered to be inclined toward lethal violence.

Students were asked one question that indicates they have the means to carry out a school shooting if they wanted to:

- 24 percent said they could “easily get a gun if I wanted one.”

We determined that those who had agreed with all three statements, indicating that they had thought about shooting someone at school; had made a plan to do so; and had the means to carry out a shooting – 2.6 percent of the respondents – were the most likely to actually carry out lethal violence in the schools and thus the most dangerous.

When the regressions are conducted by urbanicity and by geographic region, the same four predictors are usually among the most important. There were some interesting differences, however.

- For urban students, ethnic orientation became more important, with white students more likely to indicate violent thoughts.
- For suburban students and those in the South, there seemed to be a negative correlation between helping out in the community and a propensity toward violence, with dangerous students less likely to help out in the community.
- Rural students were the only ones for whom grades were among the most important predictors. Rural students with poor grades were more likely to express violent thoughts.
- For Midwestern students, both the mother’s educational level (often an indicator of socio-economic status) and media usage were important. Students with more educated mothers and students who spent more time involved with electronic media were more likely to say they had dangerous thoughts.

Although students with poorer grades are more likely to say they have thought about shooting someone at school and have thought about how they might carry out a

shooting, grades (academic performance) did not predict dangerousness, nor did ethnic orientation and family status.

**High media users are likely to be highly-alienated, have a low quality of life index and get poorer grades, but without further analysis, high media use does not appear to correlate with “dangerousness.”**

Because the pervasiveness of violence in the media is so often blamed for violence in society, we decided to survey students about their media usage habits and to determine if there is a relation between the amount of time spent immersed in electronic media (and therefore the amount of time they might be exposed to simulated violence) and a propensity toward lethal violence in the schools. Students, responding to another section of the survey, told us clearly that they do not consider “Violence on TV, in videos and in computer and video games” as a leading reason for the lethal violence that can sometimes erupt at schools. In looking at the raw data, it appears that media use and attributes that may be associated with a propensity toward violence – low quality of life, high alienation index, and poorer academic performance.

Means: Hours per week	On the internet	Watching videos	Playing video games	Playing computer games	Visiting chat rooms	Looking at websites
Total	13.73	4.76	2.82	3.91	1.47	6.88
Male	15.63	4.46	4.49	4.91	1.43	8.09
Female	11.73	5.07	1.07	2.86	1.51	5.60
Low quality of life	16.00	5.27	3.35	5.22	2.10	7.82
Medium quality of life	12.92	4.34	2.61	3.55	1.30	7.23
High quality of life	12.26	4.69	2.50	2.95	1.00	5.48
High alienation	15.83	5.16	3.35	4.67	2.02	7.90
Medium alienation	12.75	4.30	2.36	4.14	1.16	5.90
Low alienation	12.70	4.77	2.72	3.10	1.24	6.75
Grades: A's	11.63	3.88	1.94	3.14	1.09	6.31
Grades: B's-C's	14.65	5.05	3.10	4.14	1.58	7.31

Grades: D's-F's	11.24	4.91	3.60	4.44	1.92	4.09
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**Internet use:** Fifteen percent of the students reported spending 25 or more hours a week on the internet. Ten percent spend 10 hours or less; 12 percent spend 11-15 hours a week; 7 percent, 16-20 hours a week and 3 percent, 21-24 hours a week.

- Among those with a low quality of life and among those who are highly alienated, the percentage jumped to 20 percent who are spending 25 hours or more a week using the internet.
- Students with poorer grades are less likely to spend a great deal of time on the internet. Among those who receive mostly D's and F's in school, only 8 percent spend 25 hours or more a week on the internet, compared to 14 percent of those who get mostly A's, and 16 percent of those who get mostly B's and C's. There is a difference, too, in the means of hours spent on the internet.
- The mean for the total sample was 13.73 hours per week on the internet.
- Those with a low quality of life and those with who are highly alienated are spending more than two additional hours above the means each week on the internet.
- Those who get mostly B's and C's are spending more time on the internet (14.65 hours a week) than either those who get mostly A's (11.63 hours) or those who get mostly D's and F's (11.24 hours).

**Watching videos:** Thirty percent of the respondents spend six or more hours a week watching videos. Girls are more likely than boys to spend six or more hours a week watching videos (33 percent cf. 27 percent).

- The means for the total of respondents of the number of hours spent watching videos is 4.76 hours a week.
- Girls spend more time (5.07 hours) watching videos than boys do (4.76 hours). This is the only media category in which the means for girls is higher than the means for boys.
- Those with a low quality of life and those who are highly alienated spend more time each week watching videos than the means.
- Those who get mostly A's in school spend less time watching videos than the means; those who get mostly B's and C's and those who get mostly D's and F's spend more time per week than the means.

**Playing video games:** Twenty-eight percent of the respondents spend more than three hours a week playing video games. Boys are far more likely to spend that much time playing video games than girls are (43 percent cf. 11 percent).

- Younger students are more likely than older students to spend three or more hours a week playing video games (33 percent cf. 21 percent).
- The mean number of hours respondents spent playing video games is 2.82 hours a week.

- The mean for boys is 4.49 hours a week, more than four times that of girls (1.07 hours a week).
- Those who report a low quality of life spend 3.35 hours a week playing video games, compared to 2.50 hours for those with a high quality of life.
- Those who are highly alienated spend more time each week playing video games.
- Those with poorer academic performance spend more time playing video games than those whose academic performance is better.

**Playing computer games:** Among all respondents, 35 percent spend three hours or more a week playing computer games. Boys are much more likely than girls to spend more than three hours a week (39 percent cf. 29 percent).

- Younger students are slightly more likely than older students to spend that amount of time.
- 39 percent of those with a low quality of life spend three or more hours a week on computer games, compared to 30 percent of those with a high quality of life.
- Those with a medium alienation index are slightly more likely to spend three or more hours a week than those with high alienation indices (38 percent cf. 36 percent) and considerably more likely than those with low alienation indices (30 percent).

The overall mean is 3.91 hours a week, with the mean for boys, 4.91 hours a week and for girls, 2.86 hours a week.

- Those who report a low quality of life spend 5.22 hours a week playing computer games, while those who report a high quality of life spend 2.95 hours a week on computer games.
- Highly alienated youths spend 4.67 hours a week playing computer games, compared to 3.10 hours a week for those who have low alienation indices.
- Those who receive grades of mostly D's and F's spend an hour a half more a week on computer games than those who receive mostly A's. (4.44 hours cf. 3.14 hours).

**Visiting chat rooms:** Chat rooms appear to be the least-used media among teenagers. Only 15 percent of the respondents spend three or more hours a week in chat rooms, and 66 percent reported they spend no time at all in chat rooms.

- 20 percent of those who are highly alienated, and 19 percent of those with a low quality of life index spend more than three hours a week in chat rooms.
  - Ninth and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students are more likely than younger or older students to visit chat rooms more than three hours a week
  - 20 percent of the black students said they spend three or more hours a week in chat rooms.
  - 18 percent of those who live in unsafe neighborhoods and 19 percent of those who say they are not safe at school are in chat rooms three or more hours a week.
- The mean number of hours per week spent in chat rooms is 1.47.
- Girls are spending slightly more time in chat rooms than boys (1.51 hours a week cf. 1.43 hours.)

- Those with a low quality of life spend twice as much time in chat rooms as those with a high quality of life (2.10 hours a week cf. 1.00 hour a week).
- Highly-alienated students spend 2.02 hours a week in chat rooms, compared those with a low alienation index, who spend 1.24 hours a week.
- Students who get mostly D's and F's in school spend 1.92 hours a week in chat rooms. In comparison, those who get mostly A's spend 1.09 hours a week visiting chat rooms.

**Looking at web sites:** Only 11 percent of the respondents report spending no time in an average week looking at web sites. Forty-three percent said they spend five hours or more each week visiting web sites.

- 47 percent of those who report a low quality of life spend five or more hours a week visiting web sites, while 38 percent of those with a high quality of life said they spend that much time each week on web sites.
- 49 percent of those who are highly alienated spend five or more hours a week on websites, but so do 39 percent of those who have a low alienation index.
- 48 percent of the boys spend five or more hours a week visiting web sites, compared to 38 percent of the girls.
- Younger teens are less likely (33 percent) to spend that much time on websites than older teens (45 and 47 percent).
- Those with poorer grades (mostly D's and F's) are less likely (29 percent) to spend five or more hours a week visiting websites than those who get mostly B's and C's (44 percent) and those who get mostly A's (41 percent).
- The mean number of hours a week spent visiting web sites is 6.88, with boys spend much more time than girls (8.09 hours cf. 5.60 hours a week).
- Those with a low quality of life index spend more than two hours a week visiting web sites than those with a high quality of life (7.82 cf. 5.48 hours a week).
- Highly alienated students spend 2.02 hours a week visiting web sites, compared to 1.24 hours a week for those with low alienation indices.
- Students who get mostly B's and C's spend 7.31 hours a week visiting web sites, compared to 6.31 hours a week for those who get mostly A's and 4.09 hours for those who get mostly D's and F's.

When we looked specifically at the students who might be considered dangerous, we found that they do differ from the other respondents in the number of hours they spend using electronic media.

Activity	Means for Non-Dangerous Students	Means for Dangerous Students
Using internet	13.62 hrs/wk.	17.46 hrs/wk.
Watching videos	4.70 hrs/wk.	6.78 hrs/wk.
Playing video games	2.80 hrs/wk.	3.46 hrs/wk.
Playing computer games	3.86 hrs/wk.	5.63 hrs/wk.
Visiting web pages	6.82 hrs/wk.	8.64 hrs/wk.

While the means look interesting – especially the internet usage – the correlations between these media variables and the “dangerous student composite” are low. The largest correlation was .119 between internet usage and dangerousness.

What is missing from our survey is a measure of how violent the content of the various media might have been, and how long and how frequently respondents were exposed to violent versus innocuous content. Without knowing more about those variables, it is difficult to definitively conclude that high media usage is a cause of lethal violence in the schools.

## Section 4: What schools are unsafe?

We asked students how safe they feel at school and how concerned they are about school shootings.

How safe do you feel at school?	% of responses
Extremely safe	16
Very safe	24
Safe	33
Somewhat safe	24
Not at all safe	3

**More than 25 percent of all respondents said their school is somewhat safe or not at all safe.**

Forty percent said their schools are extremely safe (16 percent) or very safe (24 percent) and another 33 percent said their schools are safe. Twenty-four percent said their schools are somewhat safe and another 3 percent said their schools are not at all safe.

- Younger students (grades 7 and 8) were more likely (30 percent) to say they are somewhat safe or not safe at school than those in grades 10 or 11 (25 percent) and those in grades 11 and 12 (26 percent).
- Thirty-seven percent of the students who identified themselves as African-American said they were somewhat safe or not safe at school, compared to 31 percent of minority students, 28 percent of Hispanic students and 25 percent of white, non-Hispanic students.
- Urban students and rural students were most likely to say they were not safe at school. Thirty-one percent of urban students and 29 percent of rural students said they were somewhat safe or not at all safe, compared to 23 percent of suburban students.
- Those who said they get mostly A's in school are less likely to perceive their school as unsafe (18 percent) than those who get mostly B's and C's (29 percent) and those who get mostly D's and F's (35 percent).
- Those who say have a high quality of life index also feel safer. Only 15 percent said their schools are somewhat safe or unsafe, compared to 24 percent of those with a medium quality of life index and 40 percent of those with a low quality of life index.
- The more alienated students feel, the more likely they are to perceive their schools as unsafe. Students with a high alienation index are more than twice as likely as those with a low index to say their schools are not safe.
- Those in neighborhoods with a lot of or some crime are three times more likely to say their schools are unsafe than those in neighborhoods with no crime.

<b>How concerned are you about school shootings happening at your school?</b>	<b>% of responses</b>
Extremely concerned	12
Very concerned	8
Concerned	17
Somewhat concerned	39
Not at all concerned	25

**Only 25 percent of the students say they are not at all concerned about a shooting happening at their school.**

- Boys were less concerned about a shooting at their school than girls (30 percent cf. 19 percent).
- 19 percent of the urban students said they were not concerned about school shootings, while 27 percent of the suburban and rural students said they were not concerned.
- 40 percent of those students who said they did not feel safe at school were extremely concerned or very concerned about a shooting. Even among those who said they felt “extremely safe” or “very safe” at school, 17 percent were extremely concerned or very concerned about the possibility of a school shooting.

Four questions – “There are kids at my school who I think might shoot someone,” “I know kids who could bring a gun to school if they wanted to,” “I have heard another kid talking about shooting someone at school,” and “I heard about someone who has made a plan to shoot someone at school” – tell us students’ perceptions of the likelihood of a shooting at their schools. We assume that students who said they are only somewhat safe or not at all safe at school, and who responded affirmatively to the other four questions, were from schools where deadly violence is more likely to occur than those where students disagree with the statements.

<b>Question</b>	<b>% agreeing</b>
There are kids at my school who I think might shoot someone.	37
I know kids who could bring a gun to school if they wanted to.	61
I have heard another kid talking about shooting somebody at school.	20
I heard about someone who has made a plan to shoot someone at school.	19

In examining the school and community characteristics for those students who appear to come from the more dangerous schools, we looked at geographic location, urbancity and students’ rating of the crime in their neighborhood, comparing the estimated marginal means of their responses.

Based on those comparisons, we found:

- Schools in neighborhoods students perceive as unsafe probably are.

- Schools in small towns/rural areas were generally rated as more dangerous by their students than were urban and suburban schools. Urban schools were rated more dangerous than suburban schools.
- There are differences in ratings of school safety by region of the country, but those ratings also interacted with the urbanicity of the school.
  - For students who live in the East, suburban schools were rated as less dangerous than rural and urban schools.
  - For students who live in the South, the urbanicity of the school made little difference, although rural schools were rated more dangerous than suburban schools, and urban schools were considered the least dangerous .
  - For students in the Midwest, rural and urban schools were rated as more dangerous than suburban schools.
  - For students in the West, rural schools were rated as more dangerous than urban or suburban schools.

How students rate the safety of their schools  
based on means of their responses

Region	Most dangerous	Moderately dangerous	Least dangerous
East	Rural	Urban	Suburban
South	Rural	Suburban	Urban
Midwest	Rural	Urban	Suburban
West	Rural	(tie) Urban/Suburban	(tie) Urban/Suburban

## Section 5: Can we prevent school shootings?

Two questions asked students what they would do if they heard a student talking about shooting someone at school, and a third, open-ended question asked what they thought teachers and other school staff could do to prevent a school shooting.

**If they heard a student talking about shooting someone at school, only about half the students would tell an adult.**

Fifty-four percent of the respondents said they would tell an adult, but there were some variations in the likelihood they would report such an incident:

- Younger students are more significantly more likely to tell someone than older students.
- African-American, Hispanic and other minority students are less likely to tell than white students.
- 61 percent of those who get mostly A's would tell, compared only 42 percent of those who get mostly D's and F's.
- Students with a high quality of life index are more likely to tell an adult than those with a low quality of life index (63 percent cf. 46 percent).
- Media usage seems to have somewhat of an impact; 59 percent of those whose media usage is low would tell, but only 51 percent of those whose media usage is high would.
- 65 percent of those with a low alienation index would report to an adult, compared to only 42 percent of those with a high alienation index.
- Those who perceive their schools to be extremely safe or very safe are far more likely to confide in an adult than those who believe their schools are not safe.

**If they overheard another student talking about shooting someone at school, 80 percent said they are most likely to tell a teacher.**

Rank	Who would you tell?	%
1	Teacher	80
2	Parents	75
3	Principal	62
4	Guidance counselor	58
5	School security guard or police officer	51
6	Some other adult	37
7	Coach	29
8	None of the above	*

\* Negligible response

- Younger students are most likely to tell a teacher; 87 percent of seventh and eighth graders said they would tell a teacher, compared to 75 percent of 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders and 81 percent of 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders.
- African-American students are more likely to tell a teacher than white, Hispanic or minority students.
- Rural and suburban students are more likely to confide in a teacher than urban students.
- Students who spend the least amount of time using media are more likely to tell a teacher.
- Students who have a low alienation index are also more apt (83 percent) to confide in a teacher than those who have a high or medium alienation index.
- Students who perceive their schools as being unsafe are less likely to tell a teacher than those who perceive their schools to be extremely or very safe.

**When asked, “What do you think teachers and other school staff can do to stop school shootings from happening?” nearly a quarter said teachers need to care more about their students.**

Students responded to an open-ended question about how they thought their schools could prevent school violence. The vast majority of responses (85 percent) can be divided among eight major categories. The ninth most popular response (4 percent) was to leave the question blank.

<b>Category</b>	<b>% of responses</b>
Teachers should care more about students.	23
There’s nothing that can be done to stop school shootings.	13
Teachers should intervene, take a more active role in their students’ lives, in the classroom and out.	12
Teachers should listen, pay more attention to students.	12
Take more safety measures; install security devices.	11
Educate students about the issue of school violence.	5
Don’t know how to stop it.	5
Teachers should treat all students equally.	4
No response	4

**The 12 percent of respondents who are most inclined toward violence were twice as likely to say there is nothing that teachers or school staff can do to stop the shootings.**

The students whose responses identified them as having a high propensity toward violence (Section 3, page 10) followed a similar pattern of responses, except that they were more than twice as likely (27 percent cf. 13 percent) as the general population to say that nothing can be done.

- 20 percent of these students responded that teachers should care more, compared to 23 percent of the general population.
- 12 percent thought teachers should listen to their students.

- 9 percent called for more security measures.
- 8 percent suggested that teachers and school staff should intervene if they see problems developing with students.

The 53 students determined to be most dangerous, i.e., they have both means (guns) and an inclination for violence, represent too small a base for their responses to be valid statistically. It is interesting to note, however, that 21 (40 percent) responded that there is nothing schools can do to stop them. Another 15 percent said that teachers should care about them more, and 8 percent felt that teachers should treat everyone equally. The remaining categories had no more than two respondents each from this group of students.

### **What the students told us about how to stop school violence:**

**Care:** The most popular response (23 percent) was that students wanted their teachers to care about them and become emotionally involved in their lives. They want teachers and staff to support them and be positive role models for them in their treatment of other people. They want teachers to be their friends, advisors and confidants.

Examples of responses:

- Just show support, and make sure there is a positive environment for all students in class.
- At least pretend to give a crap about us and where our lives are going instead of, ‘Oh hurry up, we need to get through all this work before the end of the year...’
- Show the students love and care and let them know that they can talk to them whenever they feel the need to.
- Besides acting as a teacher towards students, they could be a friend or mentor and help students that they think are at risk of being violent.
- I think a teacher should not consider themselves souilly (sic) a teacher but also a leader. Even though a student would never admit it, they look up to their teachers as role models. I think that being a nice and caring person as well as a good example setter is a key quality to being a good teacher.

**Nothing:** The second most popular response was that there is nothing schools can do to prevent violence (13 percent). Students cite everything from the determination of the potential shooter to fate as the rationale behind their answers.

Examples of responses:

- Absolutely nothing. Honestly, if a kid wants to shoot someone, their (sic) not going to be stupid enough to warn every one first. They would do it out of surprise.
- Nothing...if we want to shoot someone we will. The human being is a very strong thing when it stands alone and someone with the help of others. If we want to do something bad enough, we will find a way. No matter what.
- Nothing.. I think they should all back off.. Whatever happens – just plain happens. If something horrific happens, then I believe that it is just meant to be, and nothing anybody says can stop that.

- There isn't a lot they could do since they can't even stop someone from wearing a hat when they aren't supposed to.
- Personally, I don't think there is a lot anyone can do. The person who commits such crimes are (sic) the people who are mentally unstable. Teachers cannot help that...

**Intervention:** Twelve percent of respondents said that they wanted teachers and staff to take a more active part in their lives, and not just in the classroom. They are requesting intervention, whether it takes the form of reporting potential problems to the proper authorities (school officials, police, etc.) or stopping kids from bullying and teasing other students.

If a student said "Teachers should stop bullies" as his or her primary solution to school shootings, then the response was included in the intervention category, but we counted a number of students – 190 (9 percent) – who included putting a halt to bullying as part of their response, although they may have listed something else first.

Examples of responses:

- Talk to the kid's parents, or talk to the police. And then have them take it from there.
- Stop kids from harassing other kids. I mean, actually do something about it, besides just saying, 'Don't do it anymore'.
- Help the kid make friends. Talk to the kids and actually listen, and not just here (sic) what they want to.
- I think the main reason people shoot up schools is because they are picked on, and bullied a lot. Therefore, I think the best way would be more enforcement of people picking on people.
- Wake up and take action. Bullying goes on right there in the classroom, but teachers always have favorites. They always like the athletes and the really preppy girls. That's just the way high school is. The jocks and the preps are the ones who do most of the teasing. They do it to me and my friends because we don't dress like them and we're not as cool as they are. They look at us like trash. If teachers would stop taking sides it would be better. If they would stop the bullying when they see it. And believe me, they see it. I one got detention because I called someone a dumb jock (in sixth grade). The boy had just called me fat, ugly and a nerd. When I hit him back with an insult, I heard, 'I think you have detention on Wednesday, Michelle!' from my teacher. She ignored what all the popular athlete had done and only punished me. It was completely unfair. And that was just one example.

**Listen:** Many students (12 percent) were very adamant about teachers paying more attention to them. They think that teachers don't have to go to great lengths to find the potential problems – they just need to be more in tune with their classes. Teachers don't need to befriend their students, just be aware of them.

Examples of responses:

- Pay attention to kids' behavior and what they say to other kids.
- Learn to read the kids reactions to incidences (sic) at school, and observe their overall view of life.

- Open their eyes, it's not like it's a thing out of no where. It may not be TOTALY easy or anything, but if they tried they would realize that kids are disturbed, having a bad day, etc...
- Listen to what the students are saying. Not just by hearing, but by actions, and written things.

**Security:** Safety precautions are another popular student suggestion, with 11 percent listing increased security measures as their main concern. Many believed that metal detectors or other checks as students enter the building would help decrease school shootings. Responses ranged in severity from instituting lock downs to simply having an evacuation plan.

Examples of responses:

- Be more on the lookout and install safety equipment in classrooms and/or entrances to schools. Police and guards would help too. Make it like a medium security prison.
- Install metal detectors in schools and close off some of the entrances that are being used regularly
- Have different drills and just be totally prepared for whatever could happen

**Education:** Another suggestion was to address the issue of school violence in schools more openly (5 percent). Students believe that being better informed about gun safety and the consequences of violence (both legally and emotionally) will help prevent school violence.

Examples of responses:

- Talk about the shootings that have happened and what happened to the shooters afterward.
- Teachers and school staff could organize more speakers to come to the school and inform kids how serious these shootings and the consequences are. I don't think kids my age really know the real consequences of some of their actions.
- Teach the kids more about gun control and more about learning to take their tempers out on other things like punching a pillow or something that has nothing to do with hurting another person.

**Don't Know:** Five percent of the students say they don't know what to do.

Examples of responses:

- If I knew I would have told someone.
- I really don't know. I wish I did. I also hope that by the time I become a teacher, I will know something to do that may stop school shootings.
- I'm not sure what to say because I love my privacy and don't want metal detectors or anything in my school.

**Equality:** Respondents also felt that all students are not treated equally at school (4%). They cite many different reasons for this treatment, including race, athletic ability, popularity, social cliques, academic performance and socio-economic status. Students

believe that if teachers stop favoring one group or another there will be less cause for resentment among students, which translates to fewer instances of violence.

Examples of responses:

- Make sure that all of their pupils are equally given attention. I know some teachers that value other students more because they are their 'pets' no matter what I do. I tend to feel frustrated and left out too.
- Stop favoring kids who are athletic and smart and pretty, but favor all kids.
- Teachers can stop being bias, racist, prejudice and judgemental (sic). They can encourage creativity and differences rather than discouraging them.

**Other noteworthy responses:**

- I go to Heritage High in Conyers GA which had a shooting about 2 yrs ago... I don't think there is anything physically that a teacher or faculty member could do to prevent those things from happening because if a kid really wanted to do something like shoot up a school they'd find a way to do it and you couldn't stop them. I think the best way to prevent such things from happening is to teach principles and values - stress the importance of life and the worthlessness of violence.
- There's nothing you can do. And they need to stop targeting the 'trenchcoats' 'freaks' 'goths' whatever. I AM ONE! and they think that if anyone is going to it's us. They are SOOO far from the truth it's not even funny. If it's anyone it'll be the kids that are ostracized, picked on, and constantly made fun of. Oh and by the way EVERYONE has a plan to shoot up the entire school, it's what we do when we're bored. It doesn't mean we're going to do it, it just means we have no school spirit (usually because our school doesn't like us) and are bored.
- Care. Not listen to the foolish stereotypes about video games, media, or bullies inducing violence. It is hate, and wanting to get back at those who hurt you. I was almost like the infamous Clebold and Harris (Columbine), except I am much, much smarter. I had in my possession all the tools needed to refine and deploy a new chemical, directly related to that of serin gas. NO one suspected a thing, they all thought I was just quiet, or that maybe I would shoot someone. Guns are for the foolish, and indeed are a most dishonorable weapon. I, however, recovered from that dip of insanity I had. However, I had quite good reason to get back at those who had hurt me...and I still do. When you feel like you do, wanting to harm a school, it is because it is a massive, large place full of people. When you hate out of need for vengeance, you slowly begin to hate the entire human race. IT doesn't matter where, but a school is the most convenient...The stereotypes are royal BS. You need to care, notice, and understand. Clebold and Harris, and many others, ranging from angry businessman to even some bombers, kill because of seething hatred for all human beings...Understanding is the key...
- Nothing. It's up to the parents to prevent school shootings from happening. It's up to the parents to teach their children about right and wrong, about morals, about ethics. It's up to the parents to make sure that the child cannot have access to a weapon. The school staff and teachers can't do anything to prevent it. They only see the children,

what? 7-8 hours a day? That's not enough time, so it's up to the parents to prevent their children from becoming mentally deranged in my opinion.

- Pretty much everything my school system is doing now is all show. they fail to recognize that if our school system/society were screwed up enough to produce some one who wants to shoot up a school, we have bigger problems than a few dead kids every few months in the entire US so i say they need to confront the ass-backwards lifestyle of the majority instead the minority of people who just creep others out.

## CONCLUSION

Students show a remarkable level of agreement with professionals and social commentators who have opined about this serious national issue. They agree about the revenge motive. Bullying and mistreatment create a simmering situation in those victimized. In some cases, the hurt, shame, and anger of this victimization boils over into the taking of lives. A sense of aloneness, alienation, and powerlessness set the stage for dramatic repercussions. The interpersonal climates of our schools themselves contribute to the tragedies they fear so much. We, as a society, need to be aware that we cannot just slough off the verbal, physical, and emotional hostility that students visit upon each other as “just being kids.” Some of those kids, on the contrary, will come to a point where they see their only course as behaving like the worst of adults, with murderous violence.

And speaking of abuse, the emergence of witnessing and being the target of domestic violence as a cause endorsed by 54 and 61% of students respectively should place even more importance on this already identified destructive disease in our society. We already know that victims and witnesses of domestic violence are at risk of becoming perpetrators themselves as adults. The students in this survey are telling us there are some who do not wait. There are some who have learned that violence toward others is a way to solve problems. When a student like this needs a solution badly, they will hurt others as they have been hurt.

But our students also think that this is much more likely when the means for lethal violence are readily available. Ease of obtaining a gun was endorsed by 56% of respondents as a factor in school shootings. Just as many students endorsed the availability of firearms as “mental problems” as a causal factor. Without that easy road to serious violence, these risky students may exhibit aggressive, defiant, or other oppositional behavior, of course. They may hurt others in non-lethal ways. But at least these behaviors would bring them to the attention of adults in the schools as in need of intervention before tragedy occurs.

While we can be content in the knowledge that schools are essentially safe, we must worry at what seems to be a recurring phenomenon, all the more for its unpredictability. We can assuage ourselves that “it won’t happen here.” But we really do not know where the next “here” will be. As long as students are abused by their peers, witness or are themselves abused at home, think there is nowhere to turn, and can easily get a gun, more tragedies will occur. That’s what our children are telling us.

## SOME RECOMMENDATIONS

If we want to address this agonizing problem, perhaps we should pay some attention to what the children are telling us. We need “kinder, gentler” schools. We cannot continue to allow bullying and abuse as normal milestones of child development. We need to communicate the value of caring, and demonstrate that care. We need to provide alternatives to violence for problem-solving, to encourage more frequent, open, and genuine communication between students and the adults who care for them, at home, at school, in the community.

We also need to do more to break the vicious cycle of domestic abuse. As more and more problems are shown to emerge from this dysfunction, it behooves policymakers to face these facts and expend resources to prevent tragedies in the future. And very importantly, we need to send our children down other avenues to solve problems and feel empowered. We need to remove the easy path to killing for those who feel so overwhelmed. Of essential preventive importance here is a recommitting of this society and a redoubling of its efforts to keep guns out of the hands of children.

**TEEN VIOLENCE  
REPORT ON METHODOLOGY**

*Conducted For:*

**ALFRED UNIVERSITY**

*Fieldwork: June 27, 2001 to July 5, 2001*

*Project Directors:*

**Dana Markow, Senior Research Manager  
Sarah Fauth, Senior Research Associate**

**HARRIS INTERACTIVE INC.  
111 FIFTH AVENUE  
NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10003  
212-539-9600  
[www.harrisinteractive.com](http://www.harrisinteractive.com)**

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## **METHODOLOGY**

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Harris Interactive Inc. conducted *Teen Violence* on behalf of Alfred University. This study investigates seventh through twelfth grade public school students' experiences with and attitudes regarding lethal teen violence.

Topics in this survey include general school life and feelings of safety, concern about school shootings, and attitudes about the causes of school shootings. The survey questionnaire, including the total responses to each question, appears in Appendix A.

### **Sample**

The survey questionnaire was self-administered online by means of the Internet to 2017 public school students entering the seventh through twelfth grade in the coming year, 12 - 17 years old who have access to the Internet. Interviews averaged 10 minutes in length and were conducted between June 27, 2001 and July 5, 2001.

Sample was drawn from the Harris Poll Online database of more than 7 million members who are registered as participants. Currently, there are nearly 500,000 million HPOL members under the age of 18. Invitations were emailed to a sample of the database identified as being U.S. residents, 12 to 17 years old.

### **Sample Selection**

Email addresses for households in the database are obtained from participation in the following sources: Harris Poll Online registration, the Harris/Excite Poll, Harris Poll Online banner advertisements, Excite and Netscape product registrations, Harris telephone research, media recruitment, and sweepstakes sponsored by Matchlogic and its subsidiaries (e.g., DeliverE, Preferences.com, etc.).

### **Online Interviewing Procedures**

Interviews were conducted using a self-administered, online questionnaire, via Harris's proprietary, web-assisted interviewing software. The Harris Online interviewing system permits online data entry of interviews by the respondents. Questionnaires are programmed into the system with the following checks:

1. Question and response series

2. Skip patterns
3. Question rotation
4. Range checks
5. Mathematical checks
6. Consistency checks
7. Special edit procedures

For questions with pre-coded responses, the system only permits answers within a specified range; for example, if a question has three possible answer choices (e.g., "Agree", "Disagree", "Not sure"), the system will only accept coded responses corresponding to these choices. All data is tabulated, checked for internal consistency and processed by computer. A series of computer-generated tables is then produced for each sample group showing the results of each survey question, both by the total number of respondents and by important subgroups.

To maintain the reliability and integrity in the sample, the following procedures are used:

1. Password protection: Each invitation contains a password that is uniquely assigned to that e-mail address. A respondent is required to enter the password at the beginning of the survey to gain access into the survey. Password protection ensures that a respondent completes the survey only one time.
2. Reminder invitations: To increase the number of respondents in the survey and to improve overall response rates, up to two additional reminder invitations are typically mailed at 2-4 day intervals to those respondents who have not yet participated in the survey.
3. Summary of the survey findings: To increase the number of respondents in the survey and to improve overall response rates, respondents are often provided with a summary of some of the survey responses. This too is done via the Internet. Respondents are sent an email that provides them access to a web site that will contain the survey findings. As with the survey itself, this is a password-protected site that is accessible for a limited period (1-2 weeks).

The data processing staff performs machine edits and additional cleaning for the entire data set. Our edit programs act as a verification of the skip instructions and other data checks that are written into the online program. The edit programs list any errors by case number, question number and type. These were then resolved by senior EDP personnel, who inspected the original file and made appropriate corrections. Complete records were kept of all such procedures.

### **Weighting of Data**

Data were weighted for key demographic variables (gender, age, race/ethnicity, parent education, region and size of place of school) to reflect the national population.

### **Reliability of Survey Percentages**

The results from any survey sample are subject to sampling variation. The magnitude of this variation is measurable and is affected both by the number of interviews involved and by the level of the percentages expressed in the results.

Exhibit 1 shows the range of sampling variation that applies to percentage results for this type of survey. The chances are 95 in 100 that the survey results do not vary, plus or minus, by more than the indicated number of percentage points from the results that would have been obtained had interviews been conducted with all persons in the universe represented by the sample.

For example, if the response for a sample size of 300 is 30%, then in 95 out of 100 cases the response of the total population would be between 25% and 35%. Note that survey results based on subgroups of a small size can be subject to large sampling error.

Exhibit 1  
Approximate Sampling Tolerances (at 95% Confidence) to  
Use in Evaluating Percentage Results

Number of People Asked Question on Which Survey Result Is Based	Survey Percentage Result at 10% or 90%	Survey Percentage Result at 20% or 80%	Survey Percentage Result at 30% or 70%	Survey Percentage Result at 40% or 60%	Survey Percentage Result at 50%
2,000	1	2	2	2	2
1,500	2	2	2	2	3
1,000	2	2	3	3	3
900	2	3	3	3	3
800	2	3	3	3	3
700	2	3	3	4	4
600	2	3	4	4	4
500	3	4	4	4	4
400	3	4	4	5	5
300	3	5	5	6	6
200	4	6	6	7	7
100	6	8	9	10	10
50	8	11	13	14	14

Sampling tolerances also are involved in the comparison of results from different parts of the sample (subgroup analysis) or from different surveys. Exhibit 2 shows the percentage difference that must be obtained before a difference can be considered statistically significant. These figures too represent the 95% confidence interval.

For example, suppose one group of 1,000 has a response of 34% “yes” to a question, and an independent group of 500 has a response of 28% “yes” to the same question, for an observed difference of 6 percentage points. According to the Exhibit, this difference is subject to a potential sampling error of 5 percentage points. Since the observed difference is greater than the sampling error, the observed difference is considered statistically significant.

Exhibit 2  
 Approximate Sampling Tolerances (at 95% Confidence) to Use  
 in Evaluating Differences Between Two  
 Percentage Results

Approximate Sample Size of Two Groups Asked Question on Which Survey Result Is Based	Survey Percentage Result at 10% or 90%	Survey Percentage Result at 20% or 80%	Survey Percentage Result at 30% or 70%	Survey Percentage Result at 40% or 60%	Survey Percentage Result at 50%
5,000 vs. 2,000	2	2	2	3	3
1,000	2	3	3	3	3
500	3	4	4	5	5
300	3	5	5	6	6
200	4	6	6	7	7
100	6	8	9	10	10
50	8	11	13	14	14
2,000 vs. 2,000	2	2	3	3	3
1,000	2	3	3	4	4
500	3	4	4	5	5
200	4	6	7	7	7
100	6	8	9	10	10
50	8	11	13	14	14
1,000 vs. 1,000	3	4	4	4	4
500	3	4	5	5	5
200	5	6	7	7	8
100	6	8	9	10	10
50	9	11	13	14	14
500 vs. 500	4	5	6	6	6
200	5	7	8	8	8
100	6	9	10	11	11
50	9	12	13	14	15
200 vs. 200	6	8	9	10	10
100	7	10	11	12	12
50	9	12	14	15	15
100 vs. 100	8	11	13	14	14
50	10	14	16	17	17
50 vs. 50	12	16	18	19	20

### **Non-Sampling Error**

Sampling error is only one way in which survey findings may vary from the findings that would result from interviewing every member of the relevant population. Survey research is susceptible to human and mechanical errors as well, such as interviewer recording and data handling errors. However, the procedures used by the Harris firm, including the CAI systems described earlier, keep these types of errors to a minimum.

### **Project Responsibility and Acknowledgments**

The Harris team responsible for the design and analysis of the survey included John Geraci, Vice President, Dana Markow, Ph.D., Senior Research Manager and Sarah Fauth, Senior Research Associate. Harris Interactive Inc. is responsible for final determination of the topics, question wording, collection of data, analysis and interpretation in the report.

### **Public Release of Survey Findings**

All Harris Interactive Inc. surveys are designed to comply with the code and standards of the Council of American Survey Research Organizations (CASRO) and the code of the National Council of Public Polls (NCPP). Because data from the survey may be released to the public, release must stipulate that the complete report is also available.