



CSPV SCHOOL VIOLENCE FACT SHEET

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Social Contexts and Adolescent Violence

In the inner city, there are four types of violence common during childhood and adolescence: childhood aggression, gang violence, robbery, and dating violence. Each of these types of violence function to meet the adolescents' needs.

Childhood Aggression

- For younger children, the value of aggression, or "rough and tumble" play, is threefold: (1) development of affiliations and selection of friends, (2) development of fighting skills, and (3) the establishment of one's position in a dominance hierarchy.
- When rough and tumble play persists in pursuit of domination, it becomes bullying. Bullying is a precursor to antisocial or aggressive behavior.
- With age, playful behavior becomes more intense, purposeful and consequential. As adolescents become exposed to increased social diversity and competition for status, the meaning, seriousness and social value of rough play changes.
- Rough and tumble play is likely to continue beyond childhood when there are few alternative means of establishing social position (e.g., success in school).

Gang Violence

- The functions of gang violence vary according to situation including struggles for power, territorial battles, initiation and detachment rituals, attaining high status, material gain, expression of grievances, retribution, and self (or gang) defense.
- The status of young males based on toughness and fighting skills is part of gang life.
- Gangs are social groups that value styles of exaggerated display of masculinity, risk taking, and autonomy.
- Violence is often part of the collective identity of a gang and its members.
- The gang is ripe for violence since there is frequent and repeated interaction among individuals, bystanders are readily present, status is valued and restricted, there is low external social control, and violence can help individuals deal with issues of masculinity and status.
- It is normal for personal disputes to become violent among gang members who live in socially isolated neighborhoods.

Robbery

- Robbery offending is concentrated in late adolescence with increasing rates starting at age 14 and peaking at age 19. Rates for 17-19-year-olds exceed rates for any other age category.
- For inner-city youth, robbery provides a way of acquiring status.
- The material gains from robbery contribute to status, and the rewards and dominance provide comfort, self-respect, and confidence.
- During adolescence, abstract reasoning about the consequences of gun use and the capacity to read social cues are incomplete.

Dating Violence

- Dating violence includes the following motives: control, coercion and maintenance of power, and displays of domination or mastery.
- Dating violence varies among different groups, reflecting the values regarding dating and gender relations within different social networks.

Functions of Violence

- Five goals important to adolescents that may result in violence include: (1) achieving and maintaining high status; (2) materialism, status, and social identity; (3) power; (4) rough justice, social control, and self help; and (5) defiance of authority.
- Risk taking can also be a function of violence for adolescence by serving as part of the process of establishing a social identity.
- The functions of violence for girls appear to reflect a rejection of the violence of men toward women and the need for self-protection from men as well as other violent girls.
- Mediators of violence such as alcohol, guns and bystanders, can influence an individual's perception of the risks and rewards of violence, as well as effect the motivation and thought processes.
- Personal disputes that can result in violence contain their own process that affects the outcome, including violence as scripted behavior, street codes, and the influence of popular culture.

The information for this fact sheet was excerpted from the following book chapter. *Violence in American Schools* was developed by CSPV through a grant from the W.T. Grant Foundation:

Fagan, J. & Wilkinson, D.L. (1998). Social Contexts and Functions of Adolescent Violence. In D.S. Elliott, B. Hamburg, & K.R. Williams (Editors), *Violence in American Schools: A New Perspective*, (pp. 55-93). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

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