

Preventative Programs and School Crime Rates



CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY
FULLERTON

Capstone Research
Advisor: Eun-Hye Grace Yi

Nicole Knapp, MSW



Abstract

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between the presence of preventative strategies and crime rates on public school campuses across the United States. The current study is a secondary data analysis of the 2004 School Survey on Crime and Safety (N=2,772). Data was collected through mailed questionnaires, eliciting responses from public school administrators. Results showed that many preventative strategies lead to higher numbers of violent incidents recorded and higher numbers of incidents reported to the police.

Introduction

High crime rates, including violent and non-violent crimes, continue to plague public school campuses across the United States- this problem affects many. During the 2019 school year, there were 50.8 million students enrolled in public schools across the county. During the 2018 school year, there were 3.1 million teachers employed in public school classrooms. It is important to establish the most effective ways to keep this population safe. To do so, it is worth researching preventative programs and their effectiveness, so the crime pandemic can be fixed before it begins. Gaps in previous research show that further analysis is needed to gather conclusive results about the effectiveness of metal detectors.

Literature Review

Behavior prevention programs, such as the Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) program, and substance abuse prevention programs, such as Lion's Quest, proved to be useful and effective at reducing problematic behaviors (like drug use and dropout) in school-aged children. Previous research concludes that the presence of police officers in schools may be more detrimental than it is helpful. Studies show that police accelerate the school-to-prison pipeline and lead to higher numbers of weapon- and drug-related crimes.

Previous literature showed that assessments of preventative programs in schools were difficult, due to researchers not being able to determine how serious administrators were in their implementation approaches. Furthermore, the literature review determined that more information is needed to gather conclusive results about the effectiveness of metal detectors and drug-sniffing dogs. The presence of prevention programs on school campuses concurs with the social learning theory, which states that students learn behaviors through the observation of others. Furthermore, preventative strategies concur with the situational crime prevention theory, which emphasizes eliminating opportunities for offenders to commit crimes.

Research Question

What is the relationship between prevention strategies in schools and the number of crime-related incidents in public schools across the United States?
Hypothesis: The presence of prevention strategies will lead to a decrease in school crime rates.

Methodology

The sample size of the 2004 School Survey on Crime and Safety included 2,772 public schools across the United States. Questionnaires were mailed to public schools across the United States, and administrators were asked to complete and return the surveys to facilitate data collection.

The current study will include five independent variables: (a) school counseling/social work, (b) sworn law enforcement officers, (c) prevention curriculum, (d) metal detectors, and (e) random dog sniffs for drugs. The current study will include two dependent variables: (a) total number of violent crimes recorded, and (b) total number of incidents reported to the police.

A total of 10 Mann-Whitney *u* tests were used to test the relationship between each dependent variable and each independent variable.

Results

- All results were statistically significant.
- Presence of social workers: Higher number of violent incidents recorded higher number of incidents reported to police
 - The same is true for sworn law enforcement officers, metal detectors, and drug sniffing dogs
- Prevention training/curriculum: Lower number of violent incidents recorded lower number of incidents reported to police
- Mainly consistent with previous research

Table 1.
Difference in Total Number of Violent Incidents Recorded by Preventative Programs

Variables	Mean rank	U	p
School Counseling/Social Work		179069.500	<.001
Yes	1401.73		
No	1150.39		
Sworn Law Enforcement Officer or Security Guard		546598.000	<.001
Yes	1583.87		
No	1046.43		
Prevention Curriculum/Training		539797.000	.046
Yes	1373.42		
No	1456.57		
Students Pass Through Metal Detectors		63641.000	<.001
Yes	1715.03		
No	1378.98		
Practice Random Dog Sniffs for Drugs		742641.500	<.001
Yes	1538.79		
No	1294.77		

Table 2.
Difference in Total Number of Incidents Reported to the Police by Preventative Programs

Variables	Mean rank	U	p
School Counseling/Social Work		182287.000	<.001
Yes	1400.50		
No	1169.54		
Sworn Law Enforcement Officer or Security Guard		182287.000	<.001
Yes	1655.69		
No	1169.54		
Prevention Training/Curriculum		572323.500	<.001
Yes	1359.50		
No	1531.17		
Students Pass Through Metal Detectors		67570.500	.008
Yes	1651.65		
No	1380.43		
Practice Random Drug Sniffs for Drugs		566352.500	<.001
Yes	1707.98		
No	1192.87		

Summary

- There are significantly less violent incidents recorded in schools with prevention training/curriculum
- There are significantly more violent incidents recorded on campuses with sworn law enforcement officers
- There are significantly more incidents reported to the police on campuses with sworn law enforcement officers
- There are significantly more violent incidents recorded in schools where students are required to pass through a metal detector

Strengths

- Representative sample
- Significant results

Limitations

- Self-reported information
- Subjective wording
- Possible outdated information

Implications

Social workers play a key role in advocating for the safety and success of students. Social workers can use the results of the current study to reform previous prevention programs and to create new ones. Furthermore, social workers can collaborate with other professionals to create a prevention curriculum that can be implemented nationwide.

More research needs to be conducted regarding the presence of drug-sniffing dogs.



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