SCHOOL VIOLENCE AND ITS ANTECEDENTS: INTERVIEWS WITH HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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PREFACE

Schools are often criticised for failing to do enough to prevent violence and bullying among students. Preventing violence at schools, however, is no easy task. Studies of self-reported and officially recorded offending consistently show that teenagers and young adults (especially males) are much more prone to violent behaviour, both on and off school grounds, than older age groups. Schools trying to inculcate a culture of intolerance toward violence sometimes find themselves dealing with students whose parents condone violent behaviour. Even if they wanted to, it is impossible to place every student under close and continuous surveillance.

Overseas research nonetheless suggests that schools can make a substantial contribution to violence prevention on school grounds. Research in the United States, for example, has shown that schools with a clear and consistently enforced school discipline policy are less prone to violence than schools without such a policy. Unfortunately there is no way of knowing whether this conclusion applies equally to Australian schools or whether there are other more important school-level factors which influence violence between students. Many studies of school violence are also compromised by methodological weaknesses, such as a failure to control for the characteristics of individual students and their families when looking at the relationship between school characteristics and violent behaviour.

The present study, the largest of its kind ever conducted in Australia, was carried out to improve the evidence base on which to develop school violence prevention policy. The study had two aims. The first was to see whether there are school-level factors that influence violent behaviour among students, after controls have been introduced for characteristics of the student and his or her family that might put them at heightened risk of violent behaviour. The second was to obtain a better qualitative understanding of the nature of violent altercations on school grounds. The results should be of considerable assistance to teachers and school education authorities in fashioning future school violence prevention strategies.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In April 2002, the NSW Government convened a forum on school safety, drawing participants from the education, police, NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR), a variety of other interested organisations and individuals. Following from the forum, the Department of Education and Training (DET), commissioned BOCSAR to conduct a study designed to examine the conditions within the school social environment that foster or inhibit violence between students in secondary schools. This report presents the results of that study.

In order to understand the school-level factors which influence assault and the social contexts in which assaults on school premises occur, we conducted a large-scale quantitative survey of self-reported involvement in assault among students from 60 NSW public secondary schools (the quantitative study). Further, 41 students ('offenders' and 'victims') from eight other schools were interviewed in-depth about a recent incident of school violence (the qualitative study).

The quantitative study was a survey of 2,616 Year 8 and Year 9 students generated by a stratified randomly selected cluster sample. The sampling strategy was designed to sharply contrast levels of violence across schools. For this reason the percentage of students in the present study who report involvement in assault should *not* be taken as indicative of rates of involvement in assault across the general public secondary school population. The survey instrument was an anonymous, self-completion questionnaire covering student demographic characteristics, family background, student perceptions of their school's rules, classroom and school climate and, of course, details of their experience of physical violence at school.

A number of school-related factors were found to be associated with physical violence, even after controlling for student's personal characteristics and family and demographic background. Among this sample, the probability that a student would report physically attacking another student at school (or on the way to/from school) increased if:

- A student felt that he/she spent a lot of time in class copying out of textbooks or off the blackboard.
- A student felt his/her teacher spent more time controlling the class than teaching.
- A student felt that his/her fellow students were racist.
- More than 25 per cent of the student's school teachers had less than five years experience.

The risk of self-reported involvement in violence decreased, however, if:

- A student felt that students making racist comments were reprimanded by teachers for doing so.
- A student felt that the teachers at the student's school stop bullying if they are aware of it.
- The student had found out the school rules formally (through classroom instruction, or in an assembly).

Although schools clearly had a strong influence on violence, individual and family-related factors were also significantly associated with violence perpetrated on school premises. The probability of a student reporting attacking another student was higher for students who:

- Were male.
- Lived in a sole parent family or with neither parent.
- Had experienced a punitive parenting style.
- Often had problems with their family in the past six months.
- Often acted impulsively.
- Had problems with reading and/or writing.

Students were less likely to report attacking another student if:

- Their behaviour/whereabouts was closely monitored by his/her parents.
- Their mother was aged older than 40 years.

The qualitative interviews with students recently involved in an incident of physical violence also revealed a complex interrelationship between the school and students involved in conflict.

The aim of in-depth interviews conducted in the qualitative study was to capture the experiences of students involved in violent incidents. Students' descriptions of recent incidents of physical assault at school were divided into three phases: the pre-fight phase (friction), the incident itself (fight), and the consequences (fallout). Throughout all three phases the school was potentially a very effective agent in minimising conflict. For example, in the friction phase, the school offered a range of strategies such as peer mediation, bullying forms and informing school authorities directly, to help resolve conflict. Among this sample, however, some students had failed to call upon the school's help or felt that the school had not adequately responded to their calls for assistance or the students at all. Some interviewees felt that the lack of adequate resolution had put them in a position where physical violence was a necessary and valid way of bringing between-student friction to an end. This data provided an invaluable insight into where policies and strategies might have failed. However, we recognise that because we have interviewed only students who ended up in fights, these findings may be biased to situations where schools, for one reason or another, were not able to prevent the escalation of tension into violence.

School authorities were consistently reported to be effective in stopping fights once they had started. According to the students interviewed, there was no reluctance on behalf of the teachers and principals, to intervene and stop a fight. Fights still occurred however, even in the presence of teachers in situations where emotions ran high. In terms of the post-incident consequences, students who became involved in fights were often very conscious of, and sensitive to, a school's disciplinary practices, particularly, suspension.

As with the quantitative analysis, despite the potential efficacy of the school in minimising the occurrence of physical violence, students' understandings of violence and its place in resolving conflict were shaped in contexts other than the school. Students often reported experiencing a disjunction between the intolerance of the school towards physical violence and its normalisation and acceptance (under certain circumstances) outside the school contexts. For example, while parents did not explicitly recommend their children attack someone with whom they were having problems, parental reaction sometimes implicitly condoned or normalised violence. Thus the data presented in this report points to a confluence of factors within and beyond the school's control that regulate violent behaviour on school premises.

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

In April 2002, following several highly publicised incidents of violence between school students (Cornford, 2002; Kamper, 2002), the NSW Government convened a forum on school safety, drawing participants from the Department of Education and Training (DET), NSW Police, NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR), the NSW Teachers' Federation, the NSW Parents and Citizens Association and a variety of other interested organisations and individuals. In the wake of the forum, the NSW Government provided funding to establish a Safety and Security Directorate within DET designed to manage and deal with violence on school premises. In order to assist the Directorate in targeting initiatives aimed at managing and dealing effectively with violent incidents, DET commissioned BOCSAR to conduct a study designed to examine the conditions within the school social environment that foster or inhibit violence between students in secondary schools. This report presents the results of that study.

Prevalence of school violence

School violence is a recurring topic of concern in Australia (Trimboli & Bonney 1994) and in many other parts of the world (Akiba et al. 2002). There are, however, no national data available in Australia that could be used to reliably gauge the prevalence of or trends in school violence. NSW police recorded crime data indicate that the number of incidents of violence on school grounds recorded by the NSW Police rose from 883 in 1998 to 1,290 in 2003 (an increase of 46 per cent). They also indicate that the recorded rate of assaults committed by 12-18 year olds remains much higher off school grounds (1,310/100,000) than it is on school grounds (230/100,000). [1] Police data, however, are not a very reliable guide to trends in or the prevalence of school violence. Their utility as a guide to trends in violence is limited by the fact that increases in the recorded number of assaults on school grounds may simply reflect greater willingness on the part of students or school authorities to report violence to police. Their weakness as an indicator of the prevalence of assault, on the other hand, stems from the fact that the vast majority of physical altercations between students are (and should be) dealt with by school authorities rather than the police.

The most reliable way to measure trends in the prevalence of school violence is to conduct a representative sample survey of students and ask them whether they have ever assaulted (or been assaulted) at school (Kingery, Coggeshall & Alford 1998). [2] Such surveys are conducted regularly in the United States (for example, the Youth Risk Behavior Survey) but very few surveys of this sort have ever been published in Australia and only one such study has been conducted in NSW. Baker (1998) asked a representative sample of 10,441 NSW secondary school students: "Have you ever attacked someone to hurt them, apart from when you were playing sport?" Those who answered "yes" to this question were asked how many times this had happened "in your lifetime" and "in the last 12 months". Nearly 40 per cent of the sample reported that they had attacked someone to hurt them in their lifetime and almost 30 per cent reported that they had done so in the previous 12 months. Baker found that the prevalence of assault was appreciably higher for males than for females but rapidly declined for both sexes from Year 9 onwards (Baker 1998, pp. 20-22).

The finding that 30 per cent of secondary school students attacked someone in the past year seems somewhat alarming. High levels of assault, however, have been found in other studies of school violence, both in Australia and overseas. For example, approximately 41 per cent of boys and 20.4 per cent of girls in a survey of 15,916 elementary school students in Israel reported being kicked or punched in the month before the survey (Zeira, Astor, & Benbenishty 2003). Kingery, Coggeshall and Alford (1998), analysed results from four major surveys in the United States and obtained annual prevalence estimates for physical fighting on school property; 29.4 per cent for males in Year 9, and 12.1 per cent for females in the same year. They also found a rapid decline in the prevalence of fighting from Years 9 to 12 (Kingery, Coggeshall & Alford 1998, p. 251). Research on bullying in Australia has also yielded high levels of assault among school-age children. Rigby (1997) found that 33.5 per cent of boys aged 8-13 years, and 27.6 per cent aged 13-18 years in South Australia report at some stage[3] having been hit or kicked, sometimes or often. The corresponding proportions for same-age girls were 22.8 per cent and 11.5 per cent. Similar prevalence estimates can be found in earlier studies of school violence (e.g., Blumstein et al. 1986).

The fact that violent behaviour is common among school students provides no grounds for ignoring it or for diminishing its significance. Violence or the threat of violence can undermine the educational process (Easterbrook 1999). In extreme cases it can cause school students to truant or prompt them to leave school early (Grunbaum et al. 2004; Zeira, Astor, & Benbenishty 2003). The need for effective intervention to prevent school violence is further underscored by the fact that there is a strong correlation between the youth violence and later violence as an adult (Tolan & Gorman-Smith 1998, p. 73). School authorities clearly need to do all they can to reduce the prevalence of violence in schools. It is difficult devising effective strategies to prevent school violence, however, without a solid understanding of the factors that put young people at risk of violence or protect them from it. In the next section of this report we review some of the key findings in this area in order to provide context for the present investigation of school violence.

Correlates of school violence

Youth violence is the subject of a very extensive research literature but most of this literature is focused on the individual, the family or the community rather than the school (Le Blanc & Loeber 1998; Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber 1986). The research that does concentrate on the school context tends not to limit itself to physical violence or fighting but incorporates other behaviours, such as threats of assault, damage to property or school misbehaviour (e.g., Hope & Bierman 1998; Jenkins 1997; Payne, Gottfredson & Gottfredson 2003; Welsh, Greene & Jenkins 1999). Policies on school violence ought ideally to be developed on the basis of research that specifically examines violent behaviour. However because any study of crime and disorder on school grounds is potentially useful in identifying the sorts of factors that must be controlled for in a study of school violence, in what follows we review studies in the general domain of school misconduct and violence.

Individual-level correlates

As indicated in the previous section on prevalence, most studies find assault on school premises to be more prevalent among male students than among female students and that it tends to decline in prevalence for both sexes from Years 9 to 12. In studies from the United States, aggressive and disruptive behaviour has been found to be more prevalent among African-American students than among white students (Battisich &

Hom 1997; Hellman & Beaton 1986; Hope & Bierman 1998; Jenkins 1997; Welsh, Gottfredson & Gottfredson 1999). In Australia, assault has been found to be more prevalent among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) students than among non-ATSI students (Weatherburn, Fitzgerald & Hua, 2003). These findings should not be read as suggesting that there is a congenital propensity toward violence among males, African-Americans and Indigenous Australians. Variation in the frequency of involvement in violence by age, race and gender may simply reflect the effects of different child-rearing patterns and/or the social and economic environment in which children and young people develop.

Age, race and gender are not by any means the only individual characteristics that are strongly associated with violence among young people. In her study of the correlates of school violence, Baker (1998) found a strong correlation between poor school performance and involvement in assault, even after controlling for parental supervision, family structure, Aboriginality, gender and truancy. In a review of the school violence literature, Warner, Weist and Krulak (1999) noted that young people with high levels of impulsivity, low frustration tolerance and attention deficit problems are more likely to be involved in violence. Smith and Thomas (2000) compared violent[4] with non-violent girls and reported that violent girls were more likely to say they felt sad, disliked school more and felt less liked by their peers. Unlike the non-violent girls, their anger also seemed to be generalised rather than attached to specific incidents.

In the more general violence literature, Farrington (1997) cites a number of studies that have found a relationship between propensity to violent behaviour and a constellation of personality factors termed "hyperactivity-impulsivity-attention deficit" (HIA) and violent offending. In fact, impulsivity (as measured by affirmative responses to statements like "I generally do and say things quickly without stopping to think") has been found to be one of the most important correlates of early onset violent behaviour (Tremblay et al. 1994).

Family-level correlates

From the school violence literature, Smith and Thomas (2000) reported that nearly 28 per cent of the violent girls but only six per cent of non-violent girls described their relationship with their family as "not so good". Qualitative analysis revealed that the violent girls often came from families where one or both parents had alcohol problems. They also tended to feel excluded, manipulated and/or unsupported by their parents. Warner, Weist and Krulak (1999), citing Gorski and Pilotto, echoed these findings, concluding that high conflict/low cohesion families, insufficient parental supervision, and erratic, inconsistent and harsh disciplinary practices were more common among the families of violent students than among the families of non-violent students. Jenkins (1997) reported that rates of involvement in school crime were higher among students living with a stepparent but lower among students whose mothers had a college education and among students whose parents had a higher level of involvement with the school. Each of these effects, however, disappeared or was attenuated once controls were introduced for belief in school rules and commitment to the school.

A large number of studies in the general violence literature have shown that juveniles from large or single parent families are more likely to get involved in crime (including violence) than those from small or dual-parent families (Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber 1986). Sole parent family status and large family size have also been found to be specific predictors of conduct problems on school grounds (Jenkins 1997). The available evidence suggests that these factors probably increase the risk of juvenile involvement in crime and violence because they lead to, or are associated with, certain patterns of

child rearing. McCord (1982) found that the prevalence of offending among children reared in sole parent families with affectionate mothers was similar to that among children reared in dual parent families. Fergusson, Horwood and Lynsky (1992) found that parental separation before a child was 10 did not predict self-reported offending independently of parental conflict, which was found to be the more important factor. Other studies also attest to the fact that the kind of parenting a child receives is more important than whether they grow up in a large or a sole parent family. Parental rejection, poor parental supervision, erratic or harsh discipline and/or exposure to high levels of parental conflict, for example, are all much stronger predictors of aggressive and antisocial behaviour than family size and type (Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber 1986).

Community-level correlates

It is sometimes suggested that the violence we observe inside schools is just a reflection of the violence we see outside schools. On this account, violence is imported into the school environment, rather than engendered by it. There is some evidence to support this view but, on the whole, it is very weak. The National Institute of Education's (NIE) Safe School Study, a survey of 642 schools conducted in the United States, found that there was a significant correlation between crime victimisation rates outside the school and victimisation rates inside the school (Gottfredson & Gottfredson 1985). These correlations were moderately large for self-reports of crime victimisation among teachers (correlations ranged between .35 and .56). However they were fairly small for student victimisation in junior high school and very small (or insignificant- correlations ranged between .18 and .21) for student victimisation among senior high school students (Gottfredson & Gottfredson 1985, pp. 73-74).

Subsequent research has found little correlation between levels of violence in a community and levels of violence and misconduct within its schools, once controls have been introduced for various characteristics of the schools themselves. Hellman and Beaton (1986), for example, constructed several school disciplinary suspension indices for the Boston public school system and found a close relationship between each school's score on these indices and the level of violent crime in the surrounding community. This relationship disappeared, however, when controls were introduced for various measures of school climate, such as the student/teacher ratio, student/ teacher stability and academic performance.

Clark and Lab (2000) surveyed more than 11,000 students across over 20 schools to obtain measures of self-reported in-school victimisation for various crimes, including assault. They then examined the correlation between rates of self-reported assault at each school and various community-level characteristics, such as the arrest rate in the school neighbourhood, its unemployment rate and researcher-ratings of local community 'disorder'. The authors found no significant relationship between any of the factors they measured and the percentage of students who reported that they had been assaulted in the previous six months.

In perhaps the most impressive study to date, Welsh, Greene and Jenkins (1999) surveyed 7,583 students in 11 schools in Philadelphia with a view to seeing whether rates of school disorder (as measured by, among other things, suspensions for violent conduct) were linked with various neighbourhood and community characteristics. Among the community characteristics investigated by Welsh et al. were crime rates adjacent to the school ('local crime') and a weighted index of the crime rate in the neighbourhoods where each of the students lived ('imported crime'). They found that

almost all the variation in school disorder rates in their sample could be explained by reference to various school-level factors, such as fairness of school rules, clarity of school rules and attachment to school. The inclusion of 'local crime' and 'imported crime' within the statistical model of school disorder did nothing to improve its explanatory power. Similar results are reported in Welsh, Stokes and Greene (2000).[5]

School-level correlates

A number of studies have examined the school-level correlates of violence or student misconduct. The NIE study mentioned earlier, for example, found strong bivariate correlations between student victimisation and student ratings of the clarity and fairness of school rules, the level of student involvement in the governance of a school and the perceived consistency with which school rules are enforced (Gottfredson & Gottfredson 1985, pp. 103-104). These correlations were strong for both junior high school students and senior high school students. Costenbader and Markson (1998), in a survey of 620 students in two urban and two rural American schools, found that students who obtained low scores on a measure of how much school interested them were more likely to have been suspended for disciplinary problems. Smith and Thomas (2000) surveyed a national sample of 213 girls and found that girls who had been suspended for violent behaviour were more likely (than those not suspended for violence) to dislike school, and to perceive school to be unfair. Using data from a large-scale survey of school students in Philadelphia, Welsh (2000), found a significant inverse relationship between self-reported involvement in school misconduct (including violence) and student perceptions of the fairness of school rules, the clarity of school rules, student influence on school affairs, student faith in the validity of school rules and school rewards (how much students are rewarded for good behaviour). However, none of these studies made a serious attempt to control for individual, family or community-level factors that could account for variations between schools in levels of violence and misconduct.

A small number of studies examining school-level correlates of school violence/ misconduct have adjusted for other potentially confounding factors. The study by Welsh, Green and Jenkins (1999) is particularly notable in this regard because these researchers controlled for both individual and community-level factors when examining the effects of school climate on student misconduct. The results of their analysis revealed that, net of the influence of both individual and community-level variables, student perceptions of the fairness of school rules and their clarity were strongly linked to levels of school misconduct. Jenkins (1997) obtained similar results.

Using data from a nationally representative sample of 254 public schools, Payne, Gottfredson and Gottfredson (2003) found that levels of student victimisation (self-reported assault or theft) were negatively related to the level of attachment to school and school performance, even after controlling for a wide range of exogenous variables (e.g., percentage of African-American students, percentage of male students, levels of neighbourhood poverty). In a survey of 1,434 Year 5 and Year 6 students across 24 schools across the United States, Battistich and Hom (1997) found a strong relationship between student self-reported delinquency and a 38-item scale designed to measure the students' sense of their school as a community. The scale included questions pertaining to whether students and teachers at the school cared about each other, whether students and teachers jointly decided school rules and whether students worked cooperatively in class to solve problems. The extent to which students saw their school as a community was strongly related to self-reported delinquency even after controlling for gender, ethnicity, grade level, and proportion of school receiving subsidised lunches.

The available evidence suggests, then, that what goes on in a school (in terms of violence) is not just a reflection of what goes on in the environment surrounding it. Net of the influence of individual factors predisposing students to violence, factors associated with the management, organisation or culture of a school do seem to make a significant difference to the likelihood of a student becoming involved in violence or school misconduct. We use the word "seem" in this context because, while the evidence supports these generalisations in the United States, we cannot be sure they apply to Australia. There are likely to be substantial differences between Australia and the United States in the management, organisation and culture of schools. Indeed, there seems be evidence of differences between the two countries in behaviour management in particular, with greater reliance in North America on metal detectors, dedicated security staff and closed circuit TV (Fields, 2002). The differences between the United States and Australia in overall levels of violence and weapon use also raise questions of comparability. These considerations suggest an urgent need for more Australian research into the causes, context and correlates of school violence.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Not all of the research on school violence has been concerned with its prevalence or its correlates. Several studies have used more sociological/qualitative approaches to examine the issue. These studies focus the underlying mechanisms that might explain why some young people become involved in physical fights in the school context while others do not. Again, the majority of this work has been conducted in the US and among young people from marginalised backgrounds and/or at the more extreme end of the violent behaviour spectrum.

A number of these studies have described young people's fights in terms of their role in the construction and maintenance of social relations. For example, Adams (1999) found that, among her small sample of girls aged 13 to 15 years, fighting appeared to be a practice engaged in to express opposition to the dominant feminine standard of docility. She maintains that, while teachers viewed fighting by girls as immature, unfeminine and/or the result of growing up in a violent environment, for the girls themselves, fights symbolised resistance to being treated as the passive object of male attention. Thus, according to Adams, fighting and talking about fighting are not signs of immaturity or poor adjustment but, instead, signify the girls' attempt to establish and preserve control over their bodies and their social relations.

Hemmings (2002) observed and interviewed girls and boys in a sample of graduating seniors from two schools located in several highly impoverished neighbourhoods. She also saw fighting as an adaptive behaviour. In her view, a student's position in the social order could either protect them or leave them vulnerable to abuse, academic failure, powerlessness and subordination. Hemmings argued that, in these schools, students' social relations were governed by concerns about money, respectability (both by the standards of school authorities and among peers) racial, ethnic or gender differences. Violence was one means by which the students she observed could gain or lose social status within these realms. Fighting someone who had treated you with disrespect, for example, might risk a loss of respectability with school authorities but it could also give you a positive reputation among one's peers. She argued that the school context itself could also shape the degree to which violence is taken up to achieve status. As Hemmings says: "Fights for reputation were primary venues for them [boys] to earn respect in school sites where adult authorities were passive, weak, or uneven in their disciplinary practices" (Hemmings 2002, p. 302). Thus the school's disciplinary culture could determine the degree to which fighting was taken up in the service of defining social relations.

Thus, neither Hemmings (2002) nor Adams (1999) conceives of violence at school as senseless or intelligible solely through a model of individual pathology. Rather, both understand fighting and violence as behaviour that has a social significance and a social impact that has very real consequences for the daily life of young people in the school environment.

A number of researchers have suggested that the structure and practices of the schools themselves may be contributing to violence or hindering its control. Devine (1995) and Hyman and Perone (1998) argued that some common (American) practices designed to control student behaviour, such as metal detectors, security guards, and body searches, may ultimately work against ensuring a safe environment. The basis of their argument is that such practices undermine traditional forms of non-intrusive behavioural control, such as teacher authority and a supportive, nurturing school climate.

Using field notes collected from observers placed on school campuses in seven New York City schools over nine years, Devine (1995) documented pervasive and extreme violence and disorder. The students in his research believed that teachers ignored violent acts, either because they were afraid or lacked the authority to intervene. On the other hand, security staff engaged to take over the role of managing students' behaviour assumed responsibility for only the more extreme incidents. Devine argued that the student body interpreted the resultant vacuum around misconduct as an absence of boundaries, an interpretation which simultaneously licensed student antisocial behaviour and also placed them at risk of becoming victims of such behaviour. Devine describes this as the "privatisation" of protection whereby each student (and school staff member) becomes responsible for their own safety, and survival is managed through the appearance of "toughness". Violence and misbehaviour, by this account, are perpetuated as students try to pre-empt victimization through aggression and hostile posturing.

Hyman and Peron (1998) also argue that the practices of schools can be directly generative of violence but take a slightly different perspective. They cite a range of anecdotal and clinical evidence, and a number of small surveys, which, they say, highlight the potential of psychological/emotional maltreatment, corporal punishment and law enforcement-style behaviour management to propagate resentment, distrust and aggression among affected students. The authors note the particular susceptibility of young people who have suffered abuse in other contexts and/or who already have aggressive tendencies (Hyman and Perone 1998). Hyman and Perone cite the well-established links between psychological and physical abuse and aggressive behaviour in non-schools settings as one reason for avoiding hostile and aggressive disciplinary practices in schools.

Mills (2001), on the other hand, focused his attention on how school pedagogy and opportunities for achievement valorise dominating 'masculine' behaviours, including aggression. The male students he observed in his study of Queensland high schools believed that they were at risk of being bullied or ostracised if they did not assert their masculinity in the school environment. Masculinity in this context could be demonstrated by being large or strong or by being successful in sport or fighting. It could also be demonstrated by avoiding 'emasculating' activities, such as reading, taking school subjects traditionally popular among girls or sharing feelings. He believed the schools he studied inadvertently perpetuated this definition of masculinity through their marginalisation of human relations curricula (e.g., health/ personal development type subjects), their failure to prevent the harassment of boys choosing non-traditional subjects and through practices that reinforced domineering

behaviour or excused it. He further argued that hegemonic masculine behaviours, such as fighting and aggression, could only be de-prioritised if boys at school were provided with viable alternative ways to define themselves as men.

Lockwood (1997) conducted open-ended interviews about incidents of violence with 110 American middle and high school students attending a school for young people who had committed serious breaches of school rules (e.g., breaches involving illegal drugs, weapons possession or fighting). In this way he documented the events that students said provoked the incident (coined "opening moves"), as well as the location, types of violence (e.g., hitting, shoving, use of weapon) and justifications students gave for the violence. The most significant finding was that 84 per cent of those he interviewed believed they were justified in using violence. Their justifications included retaliation, self-defence and resisting their antagonist's demands. Lockwood concludes: "What is perhaps most troubling is the finding that the students' violent behavior did *not* stem from lack of values. Rather, it was grounded in a well-developed set of values that holds such behavior to be a justifiable, commonsense way to achieve certain goals" (Lockwood 1997, p.1, emphasis original). Thus, as with the other studies cited above, physically violent behaviour among young people at school may achieve objectives that do not easily connect with school practices and ideologies in any simple kind of way.

THE PRESENT STUDY

The overall purpose of the present study was to gather information that would assist DET in reducing the incidence of violence in schools in New South Wales (NSW). To that end we sought an understanding of the school-level factors which influence assault and of the sorts of social contexts in which assaults on school premises are typically embedded. The strategy adopted to achieve the first of these aims was to conduct a large-scale quantitative survey of self-reported involvement in assault among students from 60 NSW public secondary schools. The strategy adopted to achieve the second aim was to conduct a series of in-depth interviews with students ('offenders' and 'victims') involved in incidents of school violence. In what follows we describe each of these strategies in greater detail.

QUANTITATIVE STUDY

Although the primary aim of the quantitative survey was to identify school-related factors which increase/reduce the risk of a student committing an assault, those who self-reported at least one assault in the preceding 12 months were also asked a number of other important questions designed to elicit information on:

- The reasons students typically give for assaulting someone.

- The locations at which assaults typically occur.

- The seriousness of the violence that occurs.

- The response of schools to incidents of violence.

- The effect of the school response on the person committing the assault.

The specific questions used to obtain this information can be found in Appendix A, which provides a copy of the survey questionnaire. In what follows we concentrate on the approach taken to identifying school-level factors that influence the risk of involvement in assault.

METHOD

Questionnaire

The key dependent variable in the quantitative analysis is probability of having assaulted another student on school grounds in the preceding 12-month period. This was determined by asking each student participating in the survey:

During the past 12 months, how often have you physically attacked another student to hurt them at school or on your way to/from school?

The response options for this question ranged between "never" and "five times or more".

Our central aim was to establish whether features of the school and/or its environment shape the pattern of response to this question. To do this we need to control for a large range of personal and/or family factors that are known to be associated with the risk of involvement in assault. In light of the research findings discussed earlier, the questionnaire therefore included questions designed to elicit information on:

1. What year the student was in.
2. The student's gender.
3. Their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status.
4. The language they normally speak at home.
5. Their family structure (living with both parents, one parent or neither parent).
6. The number of siblings they have.
7. Their mother's age.
8. Their (self-rated) experience of difficulties reading and writing (four-point scale never to very often).
9. Their (self-rated) level of impulse control.
10. Their experience of problems with their family in the last six months.
11. The quality of their parenting[6].

The key independent variables are those that measure features of the school or its climate. While past research provides some guidance on these features, the limited nature of that research, and its American focus, suggested the need to consult with local practitioners and obtain their views on what features of the school environment may be conducive to or prevent school violence. Close consultations were therefore held with senior DET staff to identify other factors, not discussed in the literature, which might also be important predictors of school violence. These consultations, the companion qualitative study, and our literature review, produced four groups of questions directed at obtaining information on these predictors. The first group tapped *knowledge or awareness of school rules*. The second group tapped the *consistency and perceived fairness with which school rules were enforced*. The third group tapped aspects of *the relationship between teachers and students* (e.g., whether teachers were perceived of as being well-organised and helpful). The fourth group tapped into *problems of racism and bullying*. A fifth group of questions were directed at measuring *aspects of school size and structure (e.g., proportion of the school population that was non-English speaking or Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander)*. Information on this latter group questions was provided either by the school principal or was obtained through DET records.

Sampling

It is important to remind the reader at this juncture that the strategy chosen to sample schools for inclusion in the present study was *not* directed toward obtaining an estimate of the prevalence of violence in NSW public secondary schools, but toward identifying school-level factors that put a student at greater risk of involvement in school violence. The sampling strategy was therefore geared toward maximising variation on the key dependent variable[7] (self-reported assault) rather than toward obtaining a representative sample of NSW Secondary Schools. This is an important point because it means that the percentage of students in the present study who self-report involvement in assault is *not* indicative of rates of involvement in assault across the general public secondary school population.

The sampling of schools was conducted using a four-step procedure. First school districts (n = 40) were stratified by geographical region into Major Urban, Minor Urban, and Rural. Second, school districts within each region were classified in terms of the number of short suspensions for school violence[8] and a random sample of 15 districts was chosen. Third, schools within each chosen district were stratified into "low", "medium" and "high" violence categories,[9] again on the basis of the number of short suspensions for school violence. Schools were then randomly chosen within each of these violence categories subject to two constraints: (a) wherever possible,[10] at least one school from each violence category within a district was included within the sample (b) the number of schools chosen from each geographical region was approximately proportionate to its share of short suspensions for school violence across the State.

Pilot phase

Pilot testing of the questionnaire was carried out in a small number of schools in the term prior to that in which the main survey was conducted. In the first phase of testing, pilot groups in one school joined in a discussion with the principal researcher (AG) of the survey content after completing the survey. Students were asked to comment on whether they understood the questions. They were also asked about the appropriateness of the questions and to consider whether the length of survey was too taxing. These procedures led to a number of improvements in the survey questionnaire.

Following the modification of the survey instrument, the second phase of testing involved two schools going through the entire study procedure. Four classes from the two schools were surveyed and 86 surveys completed. The completed surveys were examined for missing data, indications of non-comprehension and evidence that students were able to follow the skip patterns. Further, the Project Liaison and the teacher administering the survey were asked for feedback on the study procedures. This process indicated that the questionnaire and administration procedures were appropriate and students were able to follow the skip pattern correctly.

Administration of main survey

Before administering the main survey, BOCSAR, in conjunction with the principal of each school participating in the survey, identified a project liaison officer to coordinate the survey at the school. Detailed administration guidelines were sent to the Project Liaison officer to promote a comparable administration procedure across schools (see Appendix B).

Once a suitable class to be surveyed had been identified, students' parents were notified by mail of their child's school's potential involvement in the study and consent for their child to participate in the survey was requested. Consent to participate in the study was deemed to have been given unless the parent(s) explicitly refused permission for their child to participate. The Project Liaison officer noted any parental consent refusals so that the relevant students could be excused from the survey on the day. Questionnaires were administered by the class teacher and were completed in class. Completed surveys were collected by the same teacher and couriered back to BOCSAR.

From 15 school districts throughout NSW, 60 schools were chosen. Nine schools refused to take part in the survey, the principals citing that they had recently participated in one or more other (non-BOCSAR) studies and did not feel it was appropriate to be involved in another, so soon. These schools were replaced using the same sampling procedure as described above. A total of 132 classes were surveyed across 16 different subjects and 12 groups of randomly sampled students.[11]

In order to calculate a response rate, all participating schools were asked to return with their completed surveys a cover sheet, which enumerated:

- The number of parents who had refused permission for their child to take part.

- The number of students who refused to take part.

- Absentees on the day of the survey.

as well as specifying:-

- The class/subject surveyed.

- The name of the administering teacher (for sending thank-you letters).

- Space to note any issues encountered administering the survey.

Four schools failed to return the information requested and are therefore not used in the calculation of the response rates below. Further, one school chose to use *active* rather than *passive* consent (see procedure above) and returned only three surveys. This school was replaced by another school and therefore has been removed from the response calculations as well as all of the statistical analyses in the results section.

Of the 3,251 potential respondents, the parents of 75 students (2.3%) withdrew permission for their child to take part and 50 students (1.5%) refused on their own behalf on the day. A further 510 (15.7%) were absent on the day that the survey took

place. A number of teachers commented on the survey cover sheet that their student population was experiencing waves of 'flu infections', which accounted for the large absentee rates at some schools (around one-third in a class for a couple of schools). As the data was collected in the winter months, this is not surprising. This left a total of 2,616 completed surveys, giving a response rate of 80.5 per cent.

Variables

As mentioned above, the key dependent variable for the analyses was the probability of a student physically attacking another in the past 12 months.

The independent variables were a mixture of binary (or indicator), continuous, ordinal and categorical variables measured at both the individual student level and the school level. Sources of data for these variables included the student questionnaire, a questionnaire that was completed by the school principal, and DET administrative and academic assessment records. A full list of the independent variables included in the analyses described below is given in Appendix C, along with details of their type (indicator, continuous, ordinal, categorical) and their source.

In addition to variables taken directly from the abovementioned sources, three scales reflecting parenting style were generated and used in the analyses. When a large number of questions tap a single theoretical construct (in this case parenting) there is likely to be a high degree of correlation among responses to the questions. In regression analysis this creates a significant methodological problem (viz. multicollinearity). To avoid this problem, factor analysis was used to summarise and synthesise questions relating to parenting style (questions 11a - 11o, page 4 of questionnaire).

Three scales emerged from the data reduction procedure on 15 questions relating to students' perceptions of their caregivers' parenting style: a scale that represented a nurturing and positive parenting style (*Nurture*); a scale that represented a punitive or inconsistent parenting style (*Punitive*); and a scale that indicated the degree to which parents monitored their child's whereabouts and behaviour (*Supervision*). For each scale, raw scores were averaged over the questions constituting each scale such that higher scores indicate greater experience of the parenting style in question. For further details of the factor analytic process followed and the constitutive questions for each scale, see Appendix D.

Analysis

The dependent variable was represented as an indicator variable coded "1" if a student said that they had attacked another student in the past 12 months, and "0" if the student had said this had never happened over the same time period.

The independent variables were divided into three main families:

- Individual background variables (including demographic, parenting style and personal characteristics).

- Individual perceptions of school climate and rules (knowledge and perception of rules, classroom culture, culture and support of school).

- School structure (for example, number of students, teacher experience).

The analytic strategy followed that recommended by Sribney (2001) and proceeded in three stages. First, a series of bivariate logistic regressions were carried out to determine which factors within each family were related to the probability of attacking another student. Second, all predictors within each family were jointly regressed against the outcome variable, using a manual backward sequential approach in order to determine which factors, within each family, were independently related to the probability of attacking another student.[12] Finally, variables found to be significant in the multivariate models for each family were combined together in a multilevel model.[13] A full list of the predictor variables is contained in Appendix C, with those variables tested in the final multilevel model marked by an asterisk.

The major analytic technique used throughout was logistic regression.[14] The two statistical software programs STATA (specifically the "svy" commands) and MLWin were used as they produce statistics that adjust for clustering produced by the study design (i.e., students were clustered into schools). These methods allow for the fact that observations within a cluster (i.e., within a school) are not independent. The software programs make appropriate adjustments to the standard errors and tests of statistical significance.

RESULTS

Presentation of results

Presentation of the results of the analyses just described will be grouped into the three families outlined above. For each family of predictor variables, the bivariate results will show the percentage of students attacking another student for each variable (and its sub-categories where appropriate) along with the significance of the overall effect from bivariate logistic regression of the predictor. Following this, tables detailing multivariate results for each family of predictors will show each variable's effect on the outcome variable in terms of odds ratios. Odds ratios less than one relate to a lowering of the probability of a student attacking another student. Conversely, an odds ratio greater than one is related to an increase in the probability a student has attacked another. For variables with only two categories (indicator variables) the odds ratio reflects the change in the odds of attacking someone compared with the reference category (e.g., the change in odds of male students compared with female students, where male students are the reference category). For variables with several categories (e.g., mother's age), again the odds are given for the category of interest compared with a reference category specified in brackets. For discrete variables where the categories are ordered (e.g., school climate) or questions where the response options indicate increasing agreement with a particular statement, the odds ratio indicates the increase in odds per one unit increment up the frequency scale. For continuous variables, such as school size, the odds ratio also indicates the change in odds per unit increment in the relevant predictor variable.

Descriptive statistics

Schools

A summary of the final sample is displayed in Table 1 on the following page.

Table 1: Number of schools in final sample stratified by region and level of short suspensions for violence

Violence[2]	Region[1]			
	Major urban	Minor urban	Rural	Total
Low	8	4	8	20
Medium	8	3	7	18
High	8	5	9	22
Total	24	12	24	60

1 Schools in major urban regions were in areas with populations greater than 1 million, minor urban between 100,000 to 999,999, and rural less than 100,000 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001).

2 "Low" suspension schools were those that were lower than or equal to 9 short suspensions for violence (lower quartile for all schools for 2001), "medium" was between 9 and 40 suspensions, and "high" was 40 short suspensions or more in 2001 (the upper quartile).

As can be seen from Table 1, within geographical region, the number of schools from each stratum of violence was fairly even. There were a greater number of schools sampled from Major Urban and Rural regions reflecting their proportionate distribution for short suspensions.

Students

A summary of the demographic profile of the total sample is displayed in Table 2.

Table 2: Basic characteristics of survey respondents (n = 2,616)

Variable	No.	%
Year 8	1,350	51.6
Year 9	1,266	48.4
Male	1,321	50.8
Female	1,281	49.2
ATSI	176	6.8
Non-ATSI	2,409	93.2
English spoken at home[1]	2,035	88.1
Language other than English at home	274	11.9
Lives with both parents	1821	70.2
Lives with one parent	711	27.4
Lives with neither parent	62	2.4
Mother is 35 years or younger	348	13.5
Mother is 36-40 years	833	32.3
Mother is over 40 years	1,221	47.4
Didn't know mother's age	76	6.8
Respondent only child at home	258	9.9
One sibling at home	958	37.0
Two siblings at home	76	29.7
Three siblings at home	334	12.9
Four or more siblings at home	270	10.4

1 There were 300 missing values for this variable.

As may be seen by Table 2, the sample was fairly evenly split between male and female students, and between Year 8 and Year 9. The majority of those sampled spoke English at home, and lived with both their parents. Over three-quarters were from homes that had three or fewer children living at home and almost half of the respondents had mothers who were aged 40 or older.

Frequency of attack on school premises

Table 3 shows a breakdown in the frequency of attacks over the last 12 months.[15] A small number of students (n = 83) did not respond to this question. Of those who did respond (n = 2,533), 43.9 per cent (n = 1,112) reported attacking another student at least once in the past 12 months. Of these, the majority had done so only once (53%) in the past 12 months. It is interesting to note at this point that there was little difference in the proportion of students who reported attacking someone across the three violence strata used for sampling the schools (low – 43.1%, medium – 46.5%, high – 42.4%) based on short suspensions for violence. This may seem odd but it is possible that schools differ much more in terms of serious violence (warranting suspension) than they do in terms of the violence tapped by our question on self-reported assault. It is also possible that the rate of suspension for violence is not a good measure of the incidence of violence.

Table 3: Self-reported frequency of attacking another student in last 12 months (n = 2,616)

Frequency in the last 12 months	No.	%
Never	1,421	56.1
Once	593	23.4
Twice	212	8.4
3-4 times	118	4.7
5+ times	189	7.5
Total	**2,533**	**100.1[1]**
Missing	83	

1 Percentages do not add to 100% due to rounding

If a respondent indicated that they had attacked another student on school premises in the past 12 months at least once, they were then questioned about the circumstances and outcomes of about the most recent attack. Details of when, why, where, what happened, and what the consequences were of the last attack are given below.

Most recent attack: When?

Of the 1,112 students who reported attacking another student in the last 12 months, 21.3 per cent reported this occurred in the last week, and over 60 per cent said that it occurred within the last three months (Figure 1). As might be expected, those respondents who more frequently attacked someone were more likely to report attacking someone recently. For example, of those who had attacked only one person in the past 12 months, 13.5 per cent said this happened in the last week and 29.5 per cent said it happened six to 12 months ago. However, for respondents reporting five or more attacks, 51.8 per cent said the most recent attack occurred in the past week, and only 12.9 per cent said the last attack was between six and 12 months ago.

Figure 1: How long ago most recent attack on school premises took place

Percentage
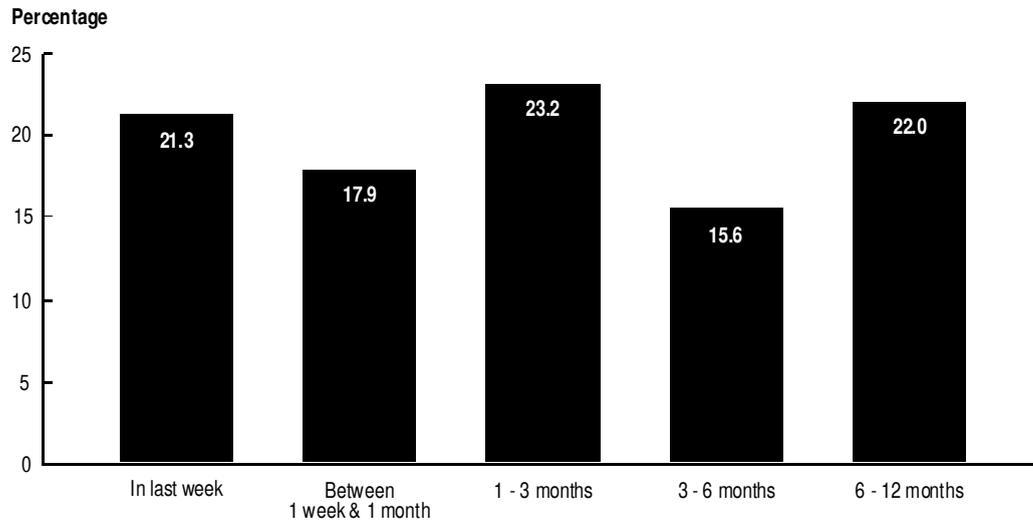
As may be seen from Figure 2, the lunch break was the time when most attacks occurred (27.5%). This was followed by "during class time" (21%), "recess" (13.1%), and "on the way home from school" (10.9%). Fifty-four students marked more than one time period for their most recent attack, which may reflect the multiple skirmishes in close succession that some students have with one person (see qualitative interviews section).

Figure 2: Part of day in which most recent attack took place

Percentage
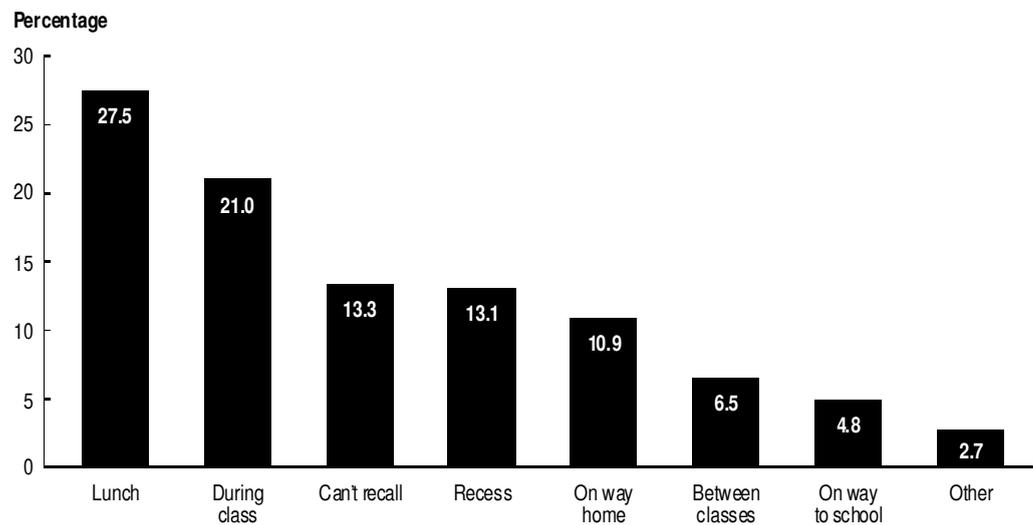
Most recent attack: Why?

Students were asked for the main reason they attacked the other person. The majority of respondents said that they had been provoked into the attack either physically or being bullied and/or teased. More specifically, 26.4 per cent said that the other person had physically attacked the respondent first, while 31.8 per cent said that they had

been bullied or teased by their opponent. A sizeable percentage (21%) indicated that, although they had attacked the other person in order to hurt them, they were "just playing around". Finally, 11.7 per cent cited not liking the other person or no reason at all as their motivation for their most recent attack on another student, while approximately nine per cent said that they attacked the other person because he or she had made racist remarks.

Most recent attack: Where?

Not surprisingly, given the preponderance of attacks that took place during recreational breaks, 42.3 per cent of the fights occurred in the school playground. The next largest location category was the classroom (18%[16]), followed by those who said it occurred while they were on or waiting for transport to/from school (9.8%), those who nominated the hallway/corridor/stairs (8.2%) and those (nearly 7%) who said it happened on the way to/from school. Other locations, such as toilets, lockers, and the canteen, which have been cited by students in other studies as being "risky" areas (Astor, Meyer & Pitner 2001; Pietrzac, Peterson & Speaker 1998), were mentioned infrequently (less than 3%) by this sample.

Figure 3: Location in which most recent attack took place
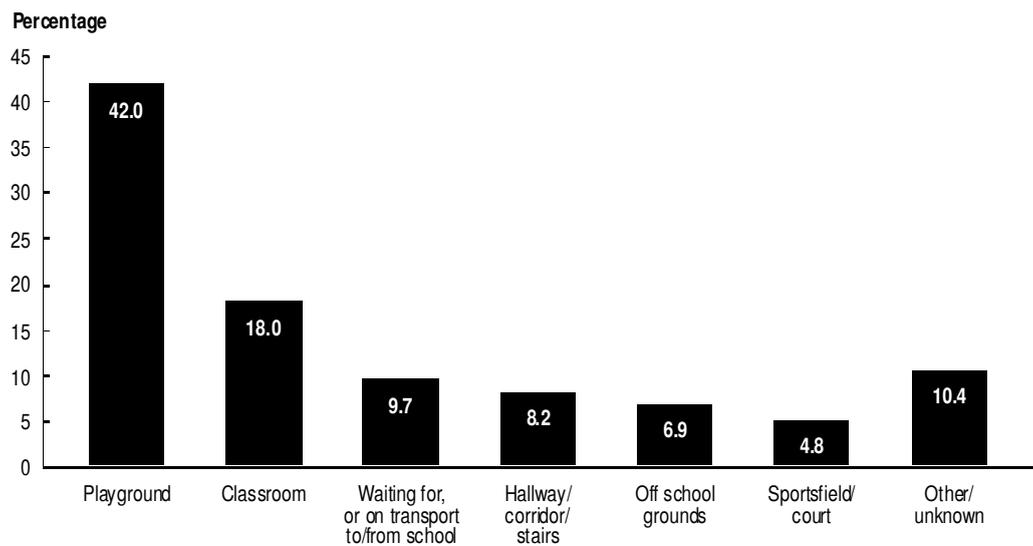
Of those who said that they had attacked another student in class, 15.8 per cent said this had occurred in English, 12.2 per cent in Maths, 16.2 per cent in PDHPE, 10.8 per cent in Science and 5.4 per cent in Geography. A further 14.9 per cent said it had occurred in a classroom but did not specify the subject during which the attack took place. For the remaining classes, each subject accounted for less than five per cent of attacks that occurred in classrooms. This distribution across subjects almost certainly reflects the locations where students spent time (perhaps with the exception of PDHPE) rather than some relationship between the type of class a student was in and the risk of violent behaviour.[17]

Most recent attack: What happened?

Almost 70 per cent of the respondents reported that only one other person was involved in the last physical attack.[18]

Respondents who self-reported assaulting someone were asked to indicate in what way they had attacked the other person as well as how they themselves had been assaulted. The distribution of different types of violent behaviour is shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Type of violence used among respondents and opponents as reported by respondents who attacked another student at least once in last 12 months (n = 1,112)

Type of violence	% respondent[1]	% opponent[1]
Threw something	23.5	32.2
Pushed	62.9	53.5
Grabbed	35.1	33.1
Kicked	22.9	28.9
Bit	8.6	14.5
Hit with fist	56.7	37.1
Used sharp instrument	7.9	14.0
Hit with object (e.g., ruler)	12.4	20.3
Pulled hair	13.5	22.3

1 Percentages do not add to 100% because multiple responses allowable.

Looking at the data displayed in Table 4, it is obvious that, according to respondents, they and their opponents did not engage in the same kind of behaviours. Compared with their opponents, respondents were more likely to push (63% vs 54%) and hit them with a fist (57% vs 37%) but were less likely to throw something, kick their opponent, bite them or hit them with an object. Perhaps more importantly, much of the violence on both sides is relatively minor (e.g., involves pushing or grabbing). Only a minority of incidents involve any kind of object or weapon.

In terms of different types of violent actions across gender, proportionately more male students than female students involved in a fight hit their opponent with their fist (60% vs 40% respectively, $p < .001$). However, significantly more female students kicked their opponent (26.5% vs 18.7%, $p = .003$) and/or pulled their hair (22.7% vs 6.9% respectively, $p < .001$). The remainder of the assault types showed no statistically significant differences by gender.

There was only one statistically significant difference by year: students in Year 9 were more likely to report that they hit their opponent with their fist (62.2%) than Year 8 students (52.6%, $p = .011$).

Most recent attack: Consequences

According to the respondents, only 51 per cent of the physical attacks were witnessed or reported to a school authority later. Of the incidents that were actually seen by a teacher, students reported no intervention in only 7.5 per cent of cases. In the majority of incidents, students were either told to stop (52.3%), pulled apart (27.8%), or the school authority called another teacher or the principal (19.9%), called the police (4.6%) or some combination of these responses. Only four students whose fight was witnessed by a teacher said that the fight stopped of its own accord, and 24 said that the school authority did not intervene.

If the incident came to the notice of the school, in 36.3 per cent of cases the respondent did not receive any punishment. Twenty percent received a suspension, a further

20 per cent received detention and approximately the same proportion was given a warning. Just under 18 per cent experienced some combination of these consequences.

As suspension is the recommended disciplinary action for acts of physical violence on school premises (NSW Department of Education and Training, 1998), a more detailed analysis of this response is warranted here. The rate of suspension among this sample of students following the most recent attack broken down by a small number of variables is given in Table 5.

Table 5: Suspension of respondent by demographic characteristics among those incidents that came to the attention of the school (n = 539)

Variable	*% suspended[1]*	*p-value*
Year 8	20.5	= .700
Year 9	19.3	
Male	19.6	< .715
Female	21.1	
ATSI	28.3	< .086
Non-ATSI	18.9	
English spoken at home	19.9	= .383
Language other than English spoken at home	16.4	
Rural school	70.2	< .613
Minor urban area school	27.4	
Major urban area city school	2.4	
Suspended before	45.8	< .001
Not suspended before	11.5	

1 Self-reported suspension of respondent.

Interestingly, the tendency for school suspension rates to vary across demographic and social groups often found in overseas research (Skiba, Peterson & Williams 1997; Costenbader & Markson 1998)[19] does not seem to exist in this Australian sample of students. As can be seen from Table 5, the awarding of suspensions (as reported by the students) did not differ by age, sex, ATSI status, ethnicity or geographical location of the school. However, 45 per cent of those who had been suspended before the most recent incident were suspended again, whereas only 11.5 per cent of those who had not been suspended before were suspended for this most recent incident.

There was some discrepancy between expectations of disciplinary consequences and the actual action taken by the school following a physical assault. Of those who did not expect to receive any punishment, 27.4 per cent were disciplined in some way (including, but not restricted, to suspension) from the school. Thirty-two percent of students who were expecting disciplinary action from the school did not receive any consequences. For suspension specifically, nearly 15 per cent who did not expect to get suspended were suspended, and 70.3 per cent who expected to be suspended were not. These figures indicate a considerable mismatch between expected and actual consequences following a violent attack. Of those who were suspended, 55.4 per cent thought it was fair, given what happened. There was a strong effect on sense of fairness by whether a suspension was expected or not. Of those who expected the suspension they received, 64.4 per cent thought it was fair. For those who were not expecting a suspension and received one, however, only 25.5 per cent thought it was fair (p < .001). This underlines the need to make clear the consequences of violent behaviours in the school setting.

Approximately 34 per cent of respondents reported that the other main person in the fight was not disciplined, while 14.4 per cent did not know whether the other person received any negative consequences or not. As with respondents, approximately 20.2 per cent of respondents' opponents were suspended (as far as the respondent knew).

Correlates of assault behaviour

In order to identify correlates of student-to-student violence, a number of bivariate and multivariate analyses were carried out. The basic aim of this analytical process was to determine whether any feature of the school environment is associated with the likelihood of a student attacking someone, once individual-related factors associated with this outcome variable have been accounted for.

Bivariate relationships with individual background variables

The results for the significant bivariate analyses of the individual-level background variables are shown in Tables 6, 7 and 8. Note that in these and subsequent tables the reference value of the outcome variable has been placed in brackets.

Table 6: Percentage who reported attacking another student at least once in last 12 months by demographic variables

Variable (reference category)	No.	% reporting an attack	p-value[1]
Male	1,285	55.5	< .001
(Female)	1,239	31.6	
(ATSI)	1,652	56.9	= .005
Non-ATSI	341	42.9	
(Lives with both parents)	1,777	39.7	< .001
Lives with one parent	676	51.7	
Lives with neither parent	62	70.9	
Mother is 35 years or younger	1,197	52.1	< .001
Mother is 36-40 years	337	57.9	
(Mother is over 40 years)	804	44.2	
Didn't know mother's age	167	38.0	
Respondent only child at home	254	48.4	= .002
(One sibling at home)	929	40.7	
Two siblings at home	748	41.9	
Three siblings at home	579	48.9	

1 P-values for omnibus test of effect adjusted for cluster sampling.

Firstly, as can be seen from Table 6, male and ATSI-identifying students are proportionately more likely to report that they have attacked another student physically in the last six months. Further, those students living with neither of their parents or living with one parent reported a higher rate of assault compared with those living with both of their parents. Respondents with mothers younger than 40 years (or who didn't know their mother's age) compared with having a mother aged 40 years or over were also proportionately more likely to report having attacked another student. Finally, there was a U-shaped relationship between number of siblings and being violent: with sole children and those with three or more siblings being more likely to report having attacked another student than students with one sibling.[20] Variables

that did not reach statistical significance in the bivariate analyses were: whether the student was in Year 8 or Year 9 (p = .885) and whether the student was from a non-English speaking background (p = .429).

Table 7: Mean scores on parenting scales for those who attacked, and those who did not attack another student at least once in last 12 months (n = 2,500)

Scale	No.	Mean score - attackers	Mean score - non-attackers	p-value[1]
Nurturing scale (range 1-4)	2,500	2.90	3.17	< .001
Punitive scale (range 1-4)	2,491	2.09	1.91	< .001
Supervision scale (range 1-4)	2,518	2.88	2.99	< .001

1 P-values for omnibus test of effect adjusted for cluster sampling.

Table 7 shows the relationship between parenting style and school violence. Recall that higher scores on these scales indicate greater experiences of the parenting style in question. It is obvious from Table 7 that students who report attacking another student scored lower on the *Nurturing* and *Supervision* scales and higher on the *Punitive* parenting scale than those who did not report attacking another student in the past 12 months. This pattern of results is consistent with evidence reviewed earlier, which suggested that students who are more involved with their parents and experience more consistent and positive parenting styles have a lower likelihood of involvement in assault.

Table 8: Percentage who attacked another student at least once in last 12 months by personal characteristics (n = 2,518)

Variable (reference category)	No.	% reporting an attack	p-value[1]
(Never have difficulties reading/writing)	1,555	39.7	< .001
Sometimes have difficulties reading/writing	853	47.9	
Often/very often have difficulties reading/writing	111	70.3	
Never act impulsively	208	28.9	< .001
Sometimes act impulsively	1,882	40.3	
Often act impulsively	265	62.3	
Very often act impulsively	163	73.0	
No family problems last 6 months	940	36.8	< .001
Occasional family problems last 6 months	1,290	44.3	
Frequent/constant family problems last 6 months	311	61.8	

1 P-values for omnibus test of effect adjusted for cluster sampling.

Table 8 displays the results of the bivariate analyses for personal characteristics and likelihood of attack. Note that there is no reference category for impulsiveness in this table because it was treated as a scale variable. It is clear that students who have difficulty with reading/writing, who act impulsively or who have family problems are significantly more likely to report having attacked someone in the last 12 months than students who have fewer difficulties, act less impulsively or have fewer family problems.

Multivariate relationships with individual background variables

In order to determine which variables from this family of individual background variables should be included in the multilevel modelling, multiple backwards elimination logistic regression was used to test which variables remained significant in the presence of others. Table 9 lists the results for the reduced model. Only those variables that remained significant at the five per cent level in the multivariate model are displayed.

Table 9: Odds ratios (OR) and p-values for reduced multivariate analysis of individual background variables and self-reported assault in the past 12 months (n = 2,371)

Variable (reference category)	OR[1]	p-value[2]
Sex (female students)	2.90	< .001
Parents (lives with both parents)		
Lives with neither parent	2.76*	< .001
Lives with one parent	1.49*	
Mother's age (Mother aged > 40 years)		
Mother aged 35 years or younger	2.22*	< .001
Mother aged 36-40 years	1.38*	
Don't know mother's age	1.14	
Nurturing scale[3]	0.83	= .020
Punitive scale[3]	1.32	= .021
Supervision scale[3]	0.81	= .008
Problems with family	1.24	= .006
Self-reported problems reading/writing	1.31	= .001
Impulsiveness	1.61	< .001

* Comparison with reference category significant at .05.

1 The odds ratios indicate the change in odds of physically attacking another student for a one-point increase in a continuous variables, and the category of interest compared with the reference category for categorical variables.

2 P-value for overall omnibus test of variable adjusted for clustering.

3 Higher scores on these scales indicate a more nurturing, or more punitive parenting style, or greater supervision by parents.

Four individual background variables were eliminated from the multivariate model. These were Year8/Year9 (p = .57), ATSI status (p = .32); English/non-English speaking background (p = .15), and number of siblings (p = .39). Nine variables remained significant. The direction of the effects of these variables did not change from the bivariate analyses. Once again, male students were more likely than female students to report physically attacking another student in the last 12 months, students living with only one parent or neither parent were more likely to report having physically attacked someone than those living with both parents, while students with mothers aged 40 years or younger were more likely to report physically attacking someone than students with mothers aged older than 40 years.

All variables in the sub-group of variables representing personal risk factors were retained in the multivariate model. Thus, even after controlling for a student's gender, family structure and mother's age, students reporting greater problems with their family, more problems with reading and/or writing and greater impulsiveness all had higher odds of having attacked another student physically. So too did students scoring low values on the scale measuring parental nurturance or high scores on the scales measuring parental punitiveness and parental supervision.

Bivariate relationships with school climate variables

The results for the significant bivariate analyses of the individual school climate variables are shown in Tables 10, 11 and 12.

Table 10: Results of bivariate analysis of school rules and self-reported assault in the past 12 months

Variable (reference category)[1]	No.	% reporting an attack	p-value[2]
Q12 (No/doesn't know if school has discipline policy)	583	49.7	= .007
Knows school has discipline policy	1,928	42.2	
Q13 Found out about school rules formally (e.g., at assembly)	1,804	38.6	< .001
(Hasn't found out school rules yet or found out informally (e.g., when got into trouble))	560	56.8	
Q20 No one…has really been told what the rules are			
(Strongly disagree)	425	37.7	< .001
Disagree	1,458	42.6	
Agree	550	48.7	
Strongly agree	82	65.9	
Q21 You get into big trouble if you break the rules…			
(Strongly disagree)	86	62.8	< .001
Disagree	812	42.6	
Agree	1,326	41.5	
Strongly agree	275	54.6	
Q22 If you break the rules you still get to tell your side of the story			
(Strongly disagree)	238	66.8	< .001
Disagree	484	45.0	
Agree	1,471	38.9	
Strongly agree	300	50.3	
Q23 You are always being told… what you shouldn't do, rather than what you should do			
(Strongly disagree)	55	54.6	< .001
Disagree	547	35.3	
Agree	1,364	40.6	
Strongly agree	538	60.6	
Q24 Good behaviour is rewarded at this school			
(Strongly disagree)	179	60.9	< .001
Disagree	552	52.2	
Agree	1,290	38.4	
Strongly agree	484	42.8	

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1 Where the scale variables had non-linear relationships with the outcome variable, they were transformed into a set of indicator variables, one for each response category.

2 P-values adjusted for cluster sampling.

As may be seen by these results, in general, those students reporting a more favourable view of the rules at their school are less likely to report physically attacking another student at school. For example, knowing that the school has a discipline policy, and finding out about the school rules formally (through being given a list or hearing about them in class etc.) rather than informally or not at all, was associated with lower odds of reporting having physically attacked another student. Compared with those who strongly agreed with the statement that "no-one at this school has really been told what the rules are", students who strongly disagreed with this statement were half as likely to have physically attacked another student.

Agreement with the statement "If you break the rules at this school, you still get to tell your side of the story" (question 22) had a more complex relationship with the probability of physically attacking another student. Rates of self-reported assault were found to be highest amongst those who strongly disagreed with the statement that "If you break the rules at this school, you still get to tell your side of the story" *and* among those who strongly *agreed* with this statement. Lower rates of self-reported assault were found in the intermediate categories. This last finding may seem somewhat aberrant. However it may just reflect the fact that students who have attacked someone actually have some experience of the disciplinary system (perhaps through their violent behaviours) and believe that they got a fair hearing.

Table 11: Results of bivariate analysis of class culture and self-reported assault in the past 12 months

Variable (reference category) [1]	No.	% reporting an attack	p-value [2]
Q25 My teachers seem unprepared for the class lessons			
(Never/rarely)	149	34.0	< .001
Sometimes	196	47.7	
Often	1,121	55.6	
Always/almost always	1,049	68.5	
Q26 We spend a lot of time copying from text books			
(Never/rarely)	831	31.6	< .001
Sometimes	847	31.7	
Often	679	43.3	
Always/almost always	57	54.9	
Q27 My teachers greet the students when they walk into the classroom			
(Never/rarely)	879	51.9	< .001
Sometimes	1,036	38.8	
Often	441	40.4	
Always/almost always	159	40.9	
Q28 My teachers' lessons are very organised			
(Never/rarely)	97	71.3	< .001
Sometimes	528	45.8	
Often	376	41.1	
Always/almost always	92	31.7	
Q29 My teachers spend more time controlling the class than teaching			
(Never/rarely)	409	37.6	< .001
Sometimes	653	37.9	
Often	1,150	45.8	
Always/almost always	298	62.6	
Q30 My teachers help me with my work			
(Never/rarely)	307	65.8	< .001
Sometimes	1,130	45.2	
Often	693	36.4	
Always/almost always	385	35.3	

1 Where the scale variables had non-linear relationships with the outcome variable, they were transformed into a set of indicator variables, one for each response category.

2 P-values adjusted for cluster sampling.

Table 11 shows the percentages and p-values for the bivariate analyses of students' opinions regarding the classroom culture at their school and the likelihood of having attacked another student in the previous year. Self-reported involvement in an attack is more prevalent among: students who report that their teachers seem unprepared

for class lessons, students who say they spend a lot of time copying from textbooks, students whose teachers never or rarely greet them when they walk into the classroom, students whose teachers' lessons either never or rarely appear organised, students whose teachers seem to spend more time controlling the class than teaching and students whose teachers rarely or never help them with their work. Again it seems that students who feel more positive about the classroom environment have a lower likelihood of being involved in a physical assault. Some of the effects are very strong. For example, students whose teachers' lessons always or almost always appear very organised are less than half as likely to report having attacked someone than students whose lessons never or rarely appear organised.

Table 12: Results of bivariate analysis of racism and bullying and self-reported assault in the past 12 months

Variable (reference category)	No.	% attacked	p-value[1]
Q31 The students at this school are racist			
(Never/rarely)	190	35.7	< .001
Sometimes	371	43.9	
Often	1,304	50.4	
Always/almost always	614	65.8	
Q32 Kids who make racist remarks get into trouble			
(Never/rarely)	431	61.0	< .001
Sometimes	903	44.5	
Often	686	38.6	
Always/almost always	475	36.0	
Q33 Some kids bully other kids at this school			
(Never/rarely)	704	29.9	< .001
Sometimes	929	35.0	
Often	791	44.0	
Always/almost always	87	55.3	
Q34. The teachers at this school stop bullying if they know about it			
(Never/rarely)	231	62.8	< .001
Sometimes	785	50.1	
Often	788	40.4	
Always/almost always	710	34.7	

1 P-values adjusted for cluster sampling.

Table 12 shows the pattern of responses to the final group of questions relating to school climate. It is evident that the more strongly students felt that there was bullying or racism at their school, the more likely they were to report having physically attacked another student. They are also more likely to report having attacked another student if they thought that teachers at their school never or rarely stop bullying when they know about it. There was a similar effect with racism. Students who say that kids who make racist remarks get into trouble with teachers are less likely to report having attacked someone than students who believe teachers always or almost always reprimand students who make racist remarks.

Multivariate relationships with school climate variables

As with the individual background variables, the school climate variables were tested in combination with each other to determine which remained independently predictive in a multivariate model. The results for those variables that remained significant are displayed in the table below (Table 13).

Table 13: Odds ratios (OR) and p-values for reduced multivariate analysis of individual school climate variables and self-reported assault in the past 12 months (n = 2,226)

Variable (reference category)	OR[1]	p-value[2]
Q13 How found out about school rules (hasn't found them out yet or found out informally)		< .001
Found out by formal mechanism	.56	
Q22 If you break the rules you still get to tell your side of the story… (Strongly disagree)		= .013
Disagree	.69	
Agree	.74	
Strongly agree	1.19	
Q24 Good behaviour is rewarded at this school (strongly disagree)		= .024
Disagree	1.28	
Agree	1.02	
Strongly agree	1.47	
Q25 My teachers seem unprepared for the class lessons	1.20	= .015
Q26 We spend a lot of time copying out work from text books	1.23	< .001
Q29 My teachers spend more time keeping control of the class than teaching	1.18	= .011
Q30 My teachers help me with my work (never/rarely)		= .058[21]
Sometimes	.75	
Often	.61*	
Always/almost always	.59*	= .058[21]
Q31 The students at this school are racist	1.22	= .004
Q32 Kids who make racist remarks get into trouble with the teachers	.89	= .031
Q34. The teachers at this school stop bullying if they know about it	.89	= .029

* Comparison with reference category significant at .05.

1 The odds ratios indicate the change in odds of physically attacking another student for a one point increase in a discrete variable, and the category of interest compared with the (reference category) for categorical variables.

2 P-value for overall omnibus test of variable adjusted for clustering.

Seven variables were not retained in the multivariate model: knowing if the school had a discipline policy (p = .977), question 20 ("No one at this school has really been told what the rules are", p = .721), question 21 ("You get into big trouble if you break the rules", p = .998), question 27 ("My teachers greet the students when they walk into the classroom", p = .981), question 28 ("My teachers' lessons are very organised", p = .840), question 33 ("Some kids bully other kids at this school", p = .062), and question 35 ("I often see the principal in the playground with the students", p = .887).

Ten school climate variables remained significant after being modelled in combination with other variables in this family. The direction of the effects for these variables was consistent with the bivariate analyses. That is, the more positive and supported by the rules and culture of their school the student felt the lower the odds of reporting attacking another student in the past 12 months. For example, the more students agreed that teachers stopped bullying at the school, the lower the odds of them reporting physically attacking another student (OR = .89). However, the more they agreed their teachers were disorganised and spent time managing student behaviour rather than teaching, the greater the odds of physically attacking another student (OR = 1.20 and 1.18 respectively). Two exceptions were questions 22 and 24, where the results showed an inconsistent effect across degrees of agreement. However, as none of the multiple comparisons across the response categories (disagree/agree/strongly agree) compared with the reference category (strongly disagree) were statistically significant it is difficult

to know what to make of these results. One variable (question 30, p = .058) was retained in the multivariate model despite being marginal. For this measure, the greater the degree to which a student felt that his or her teacher helped him or her with their work, the lower the odds of reporting a physical assault.

Bivariate relationships with school structure variables

The group of variables measured at the school level described aspects of the school structure. Recall that this group of variables was measured at the school level and school was the unit of analysis. The results of the significant bivariate analyses are displayed in Table 14[22] and a full list of the variables classified included under this heading is shown in Appendix C.

Table 14: Results of bivariate analysis of school structure variables and self-reported assault in the past 12 months

Variable (reference category)	OR[1]	p-value[2]
Boys high school (girls school or co-educational school)	1.93	= .041
Size of school - number of students enrolled in school	.99	= .001
Greater than 25% teachers with < 5 years experience (< 25%)	1.71	= .006
Peer mediation discipline system (no peer mediation system)	.73	= .047
Proportion of school low or elementary reading ability	1.01	= .029
Proportion of school low or elementary language ability	1.02	= .015

* Comparison with reference category significant at .05.

1 The odds ratios indicate the change in odds of physically attacking another student for a one point increase in a discrete variable, and the category of interest compared with the (reference category) for categorical variables.

2 P-value for overall omnibus test of variable adjusted for clustering.

As may be seen by Table 14, several school structure variables were significant at the .05 level in the bivariate analyses. The strongest effects were those associated with the experience of teachers and the existence of a peer mediation system. The odds of a student having been involved in an attack were 71 per cent higher if they attended a school where more than 25 per cent of the teachers had less than five years experience. They were 27 per cent lower in schools with peer mediation disciplinary system (compared to schools with no peer mediation system). With respect to other significant bivariate effects, there was an increase in the likelihood of a student reporting that they had attacked as the proportion of students at their school with low reading or language ability increased. The odds of physical attack were lowered, however, as the size of the student body increased.

Multivariate relationships with school structure variables

In the multivariate analysis of school-level variables the variables that were not retained included: selective high school (p = .29), proportion ATSI (p = .17), proportion NESB (p = .20), school reading performance (p = .60), school language performance (p = .34), school writing performance (p = .08), school numeracy performance (p = .06), proportion of head teachers with less than three years experience (p = .44), school receives priority funding (p = .25), school in rural or minor urban area (p = .51), peer mediation system (p = .65), time since discipline policy was last reviewed (p = .09), level system of discipline (p = .99), number of short suspensions in 2001 (p = .63), number of feeder primary schools (.079)[23].

Only two variables describing school structure remained significant in the multivariate model. Details of this analysis are shown in Table 15.

Table 15: Results of multivariate analysis of school structure variables and self-reported assault in the past 12 months

Variable (reference category)	OR[1]	p-value
Boys high school (girls school or co-educational school)	2.21	= .009
Greater than 25% teachers with < 5 years experience (< 25%)	1.19	= .001

1 The odds ratios indicate the change in odds of physically attacking another student for a one point increase in a discrete variable, and the category of interest compared with the (reference category) for categorical variables.

The direction of the effects of the school structure variables did not change from the bivariate variable analysis to the multivariate analysis. That is, boys' high schools and schools with more than 25 per cent of its teachers having less than five years experience were both associated with higher odds of students reporting attacking another student.

Multilevel Model

A subset of 21 predictor variables from the three families of variables described above (individual-background, individual level school climate, and school structure) was fitted in a multilevel logistic regression model. The outcome variable, as per all analyses, was whether a student physically attacked another student in the past 12 months, coded "1" for yes and "0" for no. There were 60 level two units (schools) and an average of 43 level one units (students) per level two unit. As noted earlier, the predictors were tested in the multilevel model in a backwards elimination approach. School-level school structure variables were tested first, demographic characteristics were entered second, followed by individual students' perceptions of the school rules and school climate, and finally individual background demographic variables. All variables tested in the final model are marked by an 'asterisk' in the full list of tested predictors in Appendix C. Those remaining in the model after statistical testing are shown in Table 16 on the following page.

Table 16: **Results of multivariate analysis of experience of physically attacking another student on school premises in the last 12 months and school level variables[#]**

FIXED EFFECTS - Variable (reference category)	OR[1]	p-value[2]
Level 1 variables		
Intercept	.35	
Individual background variables		
Sex (female students)	2.78	< .001
Parents (lives with both parents)		< .001
Lives with neither parent	2.96**	
Lives with one parent	1.48**	
Mother's age (Mother aged > 40 years)		= .002
Mother aged 35 years or younger	1.77**	
Mother aged 36-40 years	1.28*	
Don't know mother's age	.93	
Punitive scale[3]	1.24	= .04
Supervision scale[3]	.80	= .01
Problems with family	1.35	< .001
Self-reported problems reading/writing	1.19	= .05
Impulsiveness	1.48	< .001
School climate		
Q22 If you break the rules you still get to tell your side of the story (Strongly disagree)		= .01
Disagree	.70	
Agree	.75	
Strongly agree	1.17	
Q26 We spend a lot of time copying out work from text books	1.24	= .001
Q29 My teachers spend more time keeping control of the class than teaching	1.19	= .005
School culture and support		
Q31 The students at this school are racist	1.17	= .02
Q32 Kids who make racist remarks get into trouble with the teachers	.85	= .005
Q34 The teachers at this school stop bullying if they know about it	.89	= .06
Knowledge of rules		
Found out about school rules formally (found out informally or not at all)	.69	= .002
Level 2 variables		
Greater than 25% teachers with < 5 years experience (< 25%)	1.56	= .02
RANDOM EFFECTS		
Intercept (Uoj)	.214	= .001

[#] n = 2,141 for individual level variables; n = 60 for school level variable.

* Comparison with reference category significant at .05, ** significant at .01.

1 The odds ratios indicate the change in odds of physically attacking another student for a one point increase in a discrete variable, and the category of interest compared with the (reference category) for categorical variables.

2 P-value for overall omnibus test of variable adjusted for clustering.

3 Higher scores on these scales indicate a more puntive parenting style or greater supervision by a parent.

The final multilevel model displayed in Table 16 included correlates of physically attacking another student that related to the individual student's background as well as their relationship with their school. Firstly, with respect to demographic and family background characteristics, as with the bivariate and multivariate analyses, male students (p < .001), students living with one (< .001) or neither of their parents (p = .003), students with a mother aged younger than 40 years (.002) had greater odds of reporting attacking another student on school grounds in the past 12 months. Two of the three parenting style scales that were tested (*Punitive* and *Supervision*) remained significant. With increasing supervision by parents, there were decreasing odds of the student reporting physically attacking another student (OR = .80). However,

the more punitive the student reported their parents were, the greater the odds were of the student reporting physical attack of another student (OR = 1.24). The *Nurture* scale was eliminated from the multilevel model (p = .09).

Students reporting more frequent problems with their family, and/or with reading and writing also had increased odds of attacking another student. For example, holding all other factors equal, compared with students who say they never have problems reading or writing, those students who say they constantly have problems have almost two and a half [24] times the odds of reporting having attacked another student. Finally, students who judged themselves to be impulsive also had increased odds of saying they had physically attacked another student in the past 12 months (p <.001).

Eight measures relating to the school remained significant in the model after adjusting for the individual background characteristics of the individual, although only one was measured at the school level (whether there was greater than 25% of teachers with less than 5 years experience). Specifically, students attending a school where more than a quarter of the teachers have less than five years experience had nearly 60 per cent greater odds of reporting physically attacking another student. The only other school structure variable tested in the multilevel model (whether the school was a single sex boys school) was eliminated (p = .10).

Student assessment of their school's climate emerged as an important group of correlates of perpetration of student-to-student violence. The odds of reporting attacking another student increased for students who felt that they spent a lot of class time copying from textbooks or the blackboard, that their teachers spent more time in behaviour management than educating the class or that their fellow students were racist. The odds of having attacked someone were lower when students felt that teachers disciplined students who make racist remarks and/or stop bullying at school. For example, all other factors held constant, compared with a student who felt that teachers never reprimand students who make racist comments, those students who say that teachers often do this have .72 the odds of attacking another student. Students indicating their teachers did this always or almost always had .61 the odds of saying they had physically attacked another student. Thus with greater control of inflammatory behaviour by teachers there is a diminution in probability of physical attack.

Another school climate variable that was significant in the multilevel model was that which measured whether the respondent felt that the school allowed students to tell their side of the story when they got into trouble. Although none of the multiple comparisons between the reference category (strongly disagree) and the other answer options (disagree, agree, strongly agree) were significant, the direction and relative size of the effects of each response category reflect the trend observed in the bivariate analyses shown in Table 10. In other words, the odds of a student attacking another student were generally lower where students believed they got to tell 'their side' of the story. They were however slightly higher where students strongly agreed with the statement. As noted earlier the last result probably reflects greater familiarity with school disciplinary processes among students who have attacked someone.

Finally, one school climate measure that measured perceived control of bullying by teachers was marginal (p = .06). This variable was retained in the final model given it was only just over the .05 level of significance and measures an important relationship between school climate and student-to-student violence. If a student believes that teachers always or almost always stop bullying if they know about it, they have .70 the odds of reporting they attacked another student than someone who feels teachers never do this.

Three school climate measures were removed from the model: whether students felt their teachers helped them with their work (p = .12); the degree to which students felt good behaviour was rewarded at their school (p =.06), and whether they felt their teachers were prepared for class were eliminated (p = .08).

The final school-related variable in the model indicated how students found out about the school rules. Students were less likely to report attacking another student if they also reported having *first* found out about the school rules formally (i.e., by being given a written list, or being present when the principal or teacher discussed school rules at an assembly or class meeting) than if they hadn't found out the school rules or found out through informal means (i.e., heard about the rules by chance, or when they had got into trouble or a list was sent to their parents rather than the student directly) (OR = .69, p = .002).

Summary of quantitative findings

Overall, the quantitative analyses showed a considerable number of individual and school-related factors were significantly associated with the probability that a student had physically attacked another student in the past 12 months. In the bivariate analyses, male students, ATSI students, students living with neither or one parent, only children or those with more than three siblings, students with mothers younger than 40 years, parental style (nurturing, punitive, and level of parental supervision), and student reporting problems with their family, students with difficulties reading and writing, and highly impulsive students were significantly associated with the outcome variable.

There were also a large number of significant bivariate relationships between the probability of attacking another student and aspects of the school environment. The significant variables included students' knowledge of whether there was a school discipline policy, how they found out about the school rules (formally or informally) and student attitudes regarding school rules, classroom culture, and racism and bullying in the school. The likelihood of attacking another student was higher among students who felt that students were uninformed about school rules, spent a lot of class time copying out of textbooks or the blackboard, or felt that good behaviour was not rewarded in the school. A lower likelihood of attacking another student was found among students who felt that their teachers were prepared for class lessons, who felt that they always got help with their schoolwork, and who felt that their teachers curtailed racism and bullying.

In terms of factors that reflected the structure of the school, significant bivariate relationships analyses were found between probability of attacking another student and whether the school was a boys high school (increased odds of attack), the number of students attending the school (students in larger schools have lower odds), the proportion of teachers with less than five years experience (greater than 25% associated with higher odds), the use of a peer mediation system for discipline (lower odds if present), and the proportion of the school with low or elementary reading ability, and/or low/elementary language ability (the higher the proportion, the higher the odds of attacking another student).

The multivariate analysis revealed that some variables were not independently predictive of students' involvement in physical violence. Among the individual background variables, these included: the grade level, ATSI status, NESB status, and the number of siblings a student had. Among the family of school climate variables, these included: knowing whether the school had a discipline policy, and variables measuring whether

students were informed about school rules, whether their lessons were being organised, whether the teachers greeted students as they came into class, whether the principal was seen in the playground among the students and whether there was bullying at their school. Note, however, that whether students felt that the teachers stopped bullying remained significant in the multivariate model.

Only two variables describing the school structure remained statistically significant in the school-level multivariate model. These were: whether the school was a boys high school or not and whether the proportion of teachers with less than five years experience was greater than 25 per cent. The number of students enrolled at the school, the use of a peer mediation system, the proportion of the school with low or elementary reading ability, and the proportion with low/elementary language ability were no longer significant predictors.

Once all those variables significant in the multivariate analyses were entered into a multilevel model to allow for simultaneous testing of individual and school-level effects, only a small number of predictors became non-significant. The variable measuring nurturing parenting styles dropped out of the model but the variable measuring parental supervision and punitive parenting style remained significant.

All except three of the school climate variables and the variable indicating how the student had first found out about the school rules remained significantly related to the outcome variable. Students' perceptions of their teachers' preparedness for class lessons (p = .07), whether they felt their teachers helped them with their work (p = .12) and whether good behaviour was rewarded at school (p = .06) were removed from the model. Among the school structure family of variables, whether the school had greater than 25 per cent of the teachers with less than five years experience remained in the full multilevel model, while whether the school was a boys high school (or not) was eliminated (p = .07).

A detailed discussion of these results will be deferred until after the presentation of qualitative results so that the discussion may be framed by a dynamic view of the interplay between students in conflict and the school context. Before leaving this section of the report, however, it is worth highlighting the significance of the school and individual-level variables as predictors of school violence by converting the odds ratios given in Table 16 into measures of the probability of involvement in school violence. The first comparison we present is based on the assumption that we are dealing with a 'typical' student (i.e., one who is living with both parents whose mother is aged between 36 and 40 years, who has average scores on the parenting scales, is sometimes impulsive, has occasional problems with their family, has no difficulties with reading and writing and has modal values on all the other school-related variables[25]).

The estimated probability of such a student having assaulted another student in the previous 12 months is about 0.46 for a male student and about 0.23 for a female student. If we hold all the individual-level risk factors for assault constant but assume that the student is one of those who feels that they spend a lot of class time copying out of textbooks and says that the teacher spends more time managing student behaviour than teaching, the probabilities of involvement in assault jump to 0.59 (for males) and 0.34 (for females). If, in addition to this, the student feels that his or her fellow students are racist and that racist comments and bullying always pass unchecked by teachers, the probability of having assaulted someone in the previous 12 months rises to 0.75 (for males) and 0.52 (for females). Finally, if in addition to these problems the school is one of those where more than 25 per cent of teachers have less than five years experience, the probabilities increase once again, this time to 0.82 (for males) and 0.62 (for females).

We can illustrate the influence of the individual-level variables in a similar way. Recall that the probability of our 'typical' student assaulting someone in the previous 12 months is about 0.46 for a male student and about 0.23 for a female student. If we hold all the school-level factors constant but assume this 'typical' student is very often impulsive, the estimated probabilities of involvement in assault jump to 0.65 for males and 0.39 for females. If, in addition to this, the student's parents score at the maximum level on our punitive parenting scale, the probabilities of involvement in assault rise again: to 0.74 (for males) and 0.50 (for females). Finally, if in addition to all the aforementioned characteristics, the student's parents score at the lowest level in terms of parental supervision, the probabilities of involvement in assault peak at 0.81 (for males) and 0.61 (for females).

QUALITATIVE STUDY

The aim of qualitative arm of the study was, firstly, to describe the process of the escalation from conflict to physical violence and, secondly, to examine the role of the school in that process. By documenting the experiences of students who had actually been involved in a recent violent incident on school premises, we hoped to gain insight into the interplay between conflict, violence and the schools' support and disciplinary practices.

METHOD

Population and sampling

As stated above, the qualitative study was designed to capture the experiences of students involved in violent incidents on school premises using semi-structured interviews. The study included the viewpoints of both "perpetrators" and "victims" (for further discussion on the distinction between perpetrators and victims see section *Data interpretation* below). High school students attending government schools in NSW were the target population. The students interviewed were drawn from a small number of schools that had agreed to notify BOCSAR as incidents of physical violence occurred at the school. Further details of the recruitment of schools and students within schools follow.

Sample of schools

Sampling for this arm of the study was purposive rather than representative of all schools. The selection process aimed to cover a range of schools differing in their level of violence and social environment. One school district from the top quartile for *both* long and short suspensions for violence in Term 1 2002 was selected[26] from each of three geographical regions (rural, non-capital city urban, and capital city). Schools within selected districts were sorted into high, medium and low number of suspensions for violence.[27] One school with a high number of suspensions and one with a medium number of suspensions were chosen from each district, yielding six schools. Schools with low rates of suspension for violence were not included in this arm of the project because it would have taken too long to generate a sample of interviewees from schools where violent incidents only occur infrequently.

The final sample of schools were chosen partly on the basis of their accessibility by public transport (for the interviewers) and partly so as to ensure variation in the size of the school from which interviewees were chosen, the rate of first time suspensions (versus repeat suspensions), and the population mix (in terms of ethnicity). An additional single sex, girls' school was included in the sample, as there was some concern that mixed sex schools may generate too few female participants (males outnumber females in suspensions for violence in these districts by approximately 4.5:1). A small number of interviews from the two schools used in the pilot phase were also included in the analysis. The final sample included interviews from eight schools.

Sample of students

Once the schools had been selected and appropriate permissions secured, schools nominated a person to act as Project Liaison. Four schools put forward the deputy principal as the Liaison. In two schools, the contact was the principal, in one school,

the contact was a head teacher while in the final school, the contact person was a community liaison officer.

The Project Liaison at the schools notified BOCSAR whenever alleged incidents of physical assault on school premises occurred throughout the study period. If the incident was determined to be suitable (i.e., physical violence between students had actually occurred) the Project Liaison contacted the parents of the students involved by phone. If their agreement was obtained, an Information and Consent Form (see Appendix F) was sent home with the student so parent and child could discuss participation in the study. If all were agreeable, a time was arranged for the interviewers to come to the school and interview the student(s).

Of the 67 students known to have been approached by their school, 11 students (or their parents on their behalf) refused to participate, four students had already been expelled or had not returned to school within the study period, two students involved in a violent incident could not be identified, and one student's parents could not be contacted. Four students did not show up for their interview despite consenting (one of whom was away ill), thus giving a 67 per cent response rate.[28] A total of 45 interviews were conducted, 24 of which were "paired" interviews (i.e., two different students recounted the same incident).

BOCSAR had originally planned to conduct approximately 60 interviews (30 incidents with two participants each). However, recruitment into the study was somewhat slower than might have been expected from the suspension statistics. As a consequence, sampling continued beyond the original data collection cut-off point (mid-Term 2, 2003) to the end of Term 3, 2003. Two extra schools were recruited at the beginning of Term 3 but, despite having numerous violence-related suspensions in 2001, no interviews came from these extra schools. There are many reasons for the lower than expected number of interviews (e.g., fewer incidents than expected, delays at the approval stage, misunderstandings concerning study procedure, school staff with heavy workloads), however, the size of the interview sample is not in and of itself a concern with qualitative research. What matters is whether the emerging analytical themes become "saturated", that is, further interviews no longer add new information to the analysis (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Fortunately sufficient numbers of interviews were conducted to achieve this outcome.

Pilot phase

Pilot interviews (n = 5) were conducted in Term 4 of 2002. This helped refine study procedures and gauge the level of disclosure that might be expected from students. Schools for the pilot study were informally selected through already established relationships (e.g., from school principals who attended a focus group session discussing the project[29]). Principals (who were the Project Liaisons) and interviewees participating in the pilot were asked to give feedback on the study process and the interview schedule but their interviews were also included in the final sample.

The interviews

The interviews were face-to-face, one-on-one and in-depth. The time between incident and interview was dependent on the particular circumstances surrounding each incident and the timing of holidays and exams. All except four interviews took place within six weeks of the precipitating incident.[30] To ensure minimal disruption to students' schedules, all interviews took place on school premises and were usually between 45 minutes and an hour. One interview was conducted in two parts, a week apart, as school concluded before the end of the interview.

Although essentially unstructured, the interviews were guided by a list of themes covering a number of key issues (Appendix G). In brief, the interviews sought to elicit a detailed account of the incident, its antecedents and its consequences, from the interviewee's point of view. This included the interviewee's prior relationship with the other person, the incident/reason they believe started any conflict, a detailed description of the violent incident itself and events immediately leading up to it, their interactions with the school throughout the course of their conflict, the role of friends and family, and the consequences of the incident. Students were encouraged to include as much detail as possible, not only about the course of events but also about how those events affected them and what they thought of their own and others' motivations (e.g., their opponent, teachers, parents).

The author and a trained, experienced interviewer conducted all interviews and most proceeded without incident. A few students even remarked that it felt good to talk about the incident. Only one student terminated her interview early because she was upset. In this case, the interviewer ensured that the student returned safely to her class and made arrangements for the Project Liaison officer to contact her. According to the Project Liaison, the student did not subsequently feel negative about the interview, and had, in fact, encouraged a couple of other friends who were due to be interviewed to do so. The only other negative comments received were from a small number of students who said that the interviews were boring.

All interviews were tape-recorded (with the knowledge and permission of the interviewees) and transcribed for analysis purposes.[31]

RESULTS

Description of qualitative sample

Schools

Table 17 displays the basic characteristics of the eight schools from which the qualitative study interviewees were drawn. As the table shows, three of schools were classified as "high" for violence (55 short or more suspensions for violence in 2001), four were classified as medium (between 18 and 55 short suspensions), and one pilot school was in the "low" category (17 or fewer). All were mixed sex schools except one: a large capital city girls school (School 4). All except the two rural schools (Schools 1 and 2) carried students from Year 7 to Year 12.

Table 17: Table of basic characteristics of schools included in qualitative interview study

School	Region	School size	Interviews	Violence	Notes
1	Rural	775	1	High	Senior school, years 10-12
2	Rural	600	12	Medium	Junior school, years 7-9
3	Capital city	952	9	High	
4	Capital city	1,023	4[2]	Medium	Girls school
5	Capital city	706	2[1]	Low	Pilot school
6	Urban	805	4	Medium	
7	Capital city	926	3	Medium	Pilot school
8	Urban	784	10[1]	High	

1 Including one interview completely erased

2 Including two interviews completely erased

In terms of recruitment, approximately one quarter of the interviews came from a junior school in a rural region (School 2) and one quarter came from a school in an urban (but not capital city) area (School 8). This is not because these schools had a particularly high level of violence. Other factors, such as student availability, willingness to participate and the amount of time the Project Liaison could spare to follow-up cases, also affected how many students were drawn from each school.

Students

As mentioned above, 45 students took part in the interviews, although recordings of four of these interviews were lost due to technical error (see Footnote 30 for further details). Details of the demographic profile of the group are displayed in Table 18 below. Note that some data are missing because the information was contained in parts of the interview that were erased.

Table 18: Demographic profile of qualitative interview sample (n = 41)

Variable	Category	No.	Proportion[1]
Gender	Female	22	54
	Male	19	46
Background	Australian	24	71
	ATSI	6	15
	Middle Eastern	2	5
	Unknown	4	10
Age	11	3	7
	12	11	27
	13	9	22
	14	10	24
	15	3	7
	Unknown	5	12
Year at school	7	20	49
	8	13	32
	9	6	15
	10	1	2
	Unknown	1	2
Children at home (including Interviewee)	1	3	7
	2	10	24
	3	12	29
	4	10	24
	5+	5	12
	Unknown	1	2
Birth order	Youngest	15	37
	Middle	17	42
	Oldest	5	12
	Unknown	4	10
Parents	Two parents	20	49
	One + stepparent	7	17
	One parent only	10	24
	Other relative	3	7
	Unknown	1	2

1 Proportions may not sum exactly to 100% due to rounding.

The sample of students interviewed was, on average, younger than expected when planning the study. BOCSAR data on violent incidents on school premises reported to police had pointed to a modal age group for this type of behaviour as 14 to15 year-olds (Weatherburn 2002). Among the students interviewed for this study, however, over half were aged 13 years or younger (Table 18). The difference between the police data and the current sample may, in part, be due to the fact that more serious fights occurring among older students are more likely to be reported to police.

As may be seen from Table 18, a sizeable proportion of the sample came from larger families (four or more children, 34%) but the majority (approximately 66%) came from homes with two adults (either natural or stepparents). Almost half the sample was in Year 7, against expectations more female (54%) than males (46%) were interviewed.

A profile of the interviewees' description of the violent incidents they were involved in is displayed in Table 19. Note that the term "opponent" has been used as shorthand for "the other person in the violent incident", irrespective of whether he or she was an active or an unwitting participant.

Table 19: Basic characteristics of violent incidents as recounted by interviewees (n = 41)[1]

Variable	Category	No.	Proportion
Relationship with opponent[1]	Stranger	3	9
	Acquaintance	4	36
	Former friend	12	21
	Current friend	7	24
	Friend's opponent	8	12
Number of violent episodes with opponent[1]	1	19	47
	2	13	38
	3	3	6
	4+	3	6
	Unknown	1	3
Experience with violence at school	First incident ever	11	27
	Has had other, but not this year	16	39
	Has had other this year	7	17
	Unknown	7	17
Sought help	No	19	46
	From parents	4	10
	From school	5	12
	Parents & school	9	22
	Unknown	4	10
Suspension[1]	One participant	19	56
	Both participants	11	33
	Neither participant	2	6
	Unknown	2	6
Experience of suspension	First suspension	12	29
	Yes, not this year	6	15
	Yes, this year	11	27
	Never suspended	8	20
	Unknown	4	10

1 Proportions have been adjusted for paired interviews: only one observation is recorded per incident for paired interviews.

It may be seen from Table 19 that many of those interviewed had fought with someone with whom they had formerly been friends, or were friends with at the time of the

incident (44%). Just over a third fought with someone they knew but who was not a friend. Some opponents were in the interviewee's class or year at school and had not at any time been within the interviewee's circle of friends. Less than 10 per cent involved an incident with someone with whom they were not acquainted at all. Although it is not evident in Table 19, nearly all of the fights had been one-on-one, with the majority (85%) of antagonists having just one or two altercations with that person. In by far the majority of cases (approximately 89%) at least one person had been suspended by the school. Nearly half had not sought help from their parents or the school in relation to the conflict that led up to the violent incident.

Data analysis

The taped interviews were transcribed into electronic format and read into a qualitative software analysis program (NVIVO). This program assists in the organisation, storage, and retrieval of qualitative data. It does not, however, impose any kind of pre-existing system of interpretation.

The analysis was conducted in two stages: In the first instance, segments of text were "tagged" for their relevance to issues such as sources of friction, attitudes to violence, help-seeking and details of the fight itself. In the second stage, the tagged segments were reviewed using the retrieval mechanisms of the NVIVO program, and reanalysed for themes that recurred around interviewees' decision-making processes and understandings of their own and others' behaviour. This was an iterative process in which possible commonalities and systematic relationships were identified and then tested against the remainder of the data. Field notes and prior research helped inform this process.

Data interpretation

There is no doubt that schools expect and are expected to prevent, prohibit and respond to fighting within, and sometimes beyond their boundaries (Haynes 1996). Yet they have minimal control over the make-up of students, especially their propensity for fractious behaviour. They must contend with the gamut of predisposing factors their student body brings to the school, as well with as the social tensions that inevitably arise when a large number of young people with wide-ranging abilities and diverse backgrounds are brought together in one place over an extended period of time. Occasional friction between school students is inevitable. The central problem facing school authorities is not how to eliminate friction between students but how to prevent any friction that occurs from escalating into violent behaviour. Violence prevention policy would clearly be better informed if we had an understanding of the conditions that spark, foster or inhibit violent behaviour.

Unfortunately, as noted in the literature review earlier, there has been little qualitative research into the school conditions (e.g., learning environment, social relations between students or between students and teachers, disciplinary processes) that might precipitate or inhibit violence between students on school premises. The aim of this analysis was firstly to better understand the genesis, maintenance, and resolution (if any) of physical conflicts within the school environment. Secondly, we sought to understand in what ways school rules, practices and personnel influenced these conflicts.

We recognise that, because we have only interviewed students who ended up in fights, the qualitative component of this study is inevitably biased toward situations where schools, for one reason or another, were not able to prevent tension escalating into violence. That does not diminish the value of the interviews described below. It is often only through an analysing of why policies and systems fail that we gain an understanding of what might be done to strengthen them.

Throughout the discussion that follows we use the terms "fight", "perpetrator", "victim", and "opponent" to describe violent incidents at school and their participants. The use of these terms is not meant to imply that all participants were mutually aggressive and/or easily characterised as victims and perpetrators. Indeed, it soon became clear once we started interviewing that labelling participants as "victim" and "perpetrator" was problematic, especially when some who initiated attacks had done so after long periods of bullying or where students were attacked but were not in any way violent in return. The use of these terms is motivated more by a concern for ease of expression rather than by any desire to ascribe responsibility for violence. Before each interview we asked the Project Liaison to indicate which young person they thought was the victim and who was the perpetrator. Their attributions have been adopted in the quotes below. They help indicate how the school saw the relative positions of the participants. However, it should be noted that even the Project Liaisons thought the distinction between victim and perpetrator was more easily made in some cases than in others.

For the purposes of describing the data, fight trajectories could be characterised as having three phases: friction, fight, and fallout (i.e., the initial behaviour(s) that create antagonism between the actors, followed by the actual physical violence, and finally the consequences). Students' narratives showed that they may loop through these phases several times with the same person (as demonstrated by the number of "repeat" clashes reported in Table 19) although a small number started with physical violence.

Phase 1: Friction – Characteristics

The friction phase of the incidents of violence described in the interviews refers to events that predisposed the antagonists to conflict and provided a backdrop to escalating tension. What follows is a description of the sources of friction as given by the interviewees.

The violent incidents described by the current sample involved a mixture of former or current friends, acquaintances and strangers. With few exceptions, fights erupted after a prolonged history of conflict. The tension typically extended over weeks, months, and sometimes years – persisting through the transition between primary and secondary school and sometimes through changes in relationships. The initial falling out was often sparked by an identifiable event. Depending on the type of relationship they had with their opponent, students' conflicts had their genesis in such things as perceived betrayals, teasing, minor disagreements, and what could only be described as social clumsiness.

For conflicts taking place within friendship networks, interviewees often described a pivotal moment in which they were rejected, betrayed, or felt that a shift of allegiance had occurred in the relationship. This led to resentment and retaliation for perceived harm. However this was neither simple nor necessarily agreed upon - it was not unusual for both parties to feel that the other had undermined the relationship first. For example, these two girls are describing the origins of the same fight (note pseudonyms are used throughout this report in all quotes):

INTERVIEWER: DID YOU FEEL YOU COULD TALK TO HER?

Melanie: Yeah, until she said like, told everyone what I was saying to her. That's what made the fight actually start.

Female, 14 years, rural, perpetrator, current friend, year 9

Lisa: And um, and then I came back and um, she'd spread a whole lot of rumours about me around the school saying that I'd got with nine guys and that I called everyone a slut and everything.

Female, 14 years, rural, victim, current friend, year 9

In some cases, the discord seemed to relate to a violation of implicit rules about who are appropriate friends for whom.

> **INTERVIEWER:** AND WAS THERE SOME KIND OF FALLING OUT?
>
> **Hugh:** …I made another friend who's someone who really didn't have very many friends, so that's how it started.
>
> **Male, 13 years, non-capital city urban, victim, former friend, year 8**

A small number of conflicts were fought on behalf of a friend rather than between friends themselves as the following quote exemplifies:

> **Sean:** She was all right when she first came to the school but then after she started hitting some of my friends I just got sick of her.
>
> **Male, 14 years, urban non-capital city, victim, acquaintance, year 7**

Another major trigger for violence was teasing. Students were teased about a range of things, but the most common were appearance and family.

> **INTERVIEWER:** WHAT WOULD HE SAY?
>
> **Mitch:** Oh about my glasses and stuff like when he was angry at me.
>
> **Male, 14 years, urban non-capital city, perpetrator, former friend, year 8**

> **INTERVIEWER:** TEASING, WHAT, IN WHAT WAY?
>
> **Joshua:** Calling your mum fat.
>
> **Male, 12 years, urban non-capital city, victim, acquaintance, year 7**

It should be mentioned here that insults to students' mothers (as opposed to other family members) were very potent in eliciting an angry response. Many of the students believed this was an unforgivable insult. Typical comments were:

> **Kerry:** Well it does sometimes, because I get teased a lot, but that time, like I didn't like no one teasing me about my family. And like when he teased my Mum, then he went too far.
>
> **Female, 12 years, urban capital city, perpetrator, current friend, year 8**

> **Blake:** If they like say something to me, like say something like, to my mum, like about my mum or something. They go like, "You're mum's a 'ho or something", I would definitely hit them. I love my mum and stuff.
>
> **Male, 13 years, urban non-capital city, perpetrator, friend's opponent, year 8**

A small number of fights started with an apparently insignificant challenge, such as an unremarkable disagreement or misunderstanding. The following quote demonstrates the trivial beginnings of what turned out to be a very emotionally charged fracas:

> **Marissa:** OK like this little tiny little problem that was nothing. Anyways um, OK he was calling out the Roll and we [have] 'cause it's like alphabetical and so um, he was calling out the Roll and he goes, "Susan". And he didn't say their last name and then Susan goes, "Here" like Susan Little. And then um, Tania goes, "No she's not here". And they go, "Yes she is um, Susan Peel's after Susan Little", 'cause Susan Peel wasn't there that day. So um, I go "Yeah she is here because um, Susan Little gets called out before Susan Peel". She goes, "Oh OK then," and Kirra goes, "Why how would you know?" And I go, "'cause it's alphabetical." And then I'm like, and then I'm like, "Well it's logical 'cause it's alphabetical so she's before". And then she's said "whatever". And I'm like OK [inaudible] like something little, not much fighting for and anyways yeah. And anyway we were in the playground and I, I walked past her and then she called me a bitch or something and so I called her a bitch back.
>
> **Female, 12 years, capital city, perpetrator, acquaintance, year 8**

Other fights seem to be founded in contests for social position, that is, where one person's behaviour signals a challenge to the social order among the students. Such challenges may not be explicitly stated as such by the students but their existence may be inferred from the language used by the interviewees in narrating their story.

> *Warren:* Just a fight… punching.

INTERVIEWER: WHAT CAUSED THAT?

> *Warren:* I don't know. He wanted to get cheeky.

And later:

INTERVIEWER: I STILL DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY HE IS PICKING ON YOU. THERE MUST BE A REASON…

> *Warren:* Yeah, he's not picking on me. He just gets cheeky all the time.

INTERVIEWER: WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY "GETTING CHEEKY"?

> *Warren:* Like, he bags all my friends out while I'm not there, but when he's there and I'm there he never does it.

> **Male, 15 years, rural, perpetrator, acquaintance, year 10**

In the quote above, the interviewee tries to make it clear the relative social positions of himself and his opponent. He appears to be correcting the interviewer's conceptualisation of relations implied by the term "picking on" because it positions him as the victim. By describing his opponent's provocative behaviour as "being cheeky" he implies that his opponent is inferior, as cheek is by definition something that flows from subordinate to superior.

Finally, there were three cases where a violent incident emerged immediately out of a dispute. Simon's story typifies this less usual situation where there is rapid escalation from disagreement to physical violence:

> *Simon:* When, when we were at the Swimming Carnival, me and this boy and Joel were playing discs and, and I said, 'If heads we play keeps, if tails we go on using it'. Landed on heads, keeps, and I won and um, at the end of the day, he wanted his disc back and I said, "No, I won it fair and square" and then I ran away from them then and my bottle came out and one of his friends who I had a fight with took my bottle and wouldn't he give it back so… he said, "I'll give you the bottle if you give me my drink, if you give me the disc". I said, "No" and then I tripped him, punched him in the arm a couple of times and tripped him over.

> **Male, 12 years, capital city, perpetrator, stranger, year 7**

However, most students, as we have observed, had a lead-in time after an initial breakdown in relations before events became violent. During this time, ill feeling was often perpetuated through the intermittent exchange of insults or the undermining of social relations via rumours. In some cases, there were reconciliations or, occasionally, extended remissions in overt manifestations of the conflict. Peta's story was one notable exception to this pattern. Despite the popular stereotype of school violence as involving groups of students terrorising their peers, hers was the only case of this nature we encountered:

> *Peta:* Um, mostly the first thing about Tracey um, it was the school social and I was dancing and that and um, like Nicole, Tracey, Justine, Sharna. Think that's about it, started to circle me. Then I realise, "Oh, oh"

INTERVIEWER: WHY WOULD THEY DO THAT?

> *Peta:* 'Cause well when they went in the circle, Nicole was in. She goes, "What have you been saying about me?" And I go, "nothing". She goes, "No what have you been

> *saying about me?" I go, "nothing". And then she goes like that, sort of circle around me and then I realise, "Oh, oh they're going to do something". So I ran and someone got me here [indicates where she was hit], I don't know who it was, I think it was Tracey and I started to run. Everyone said I was so fast. Um, Tracey grabbed my shirt, tried to get me but she couldn't catch up and I just jumped over the counter and I was OK 'cause there was a teacher and that's when I started to know her.*
>
> **Female, age unknown, rural, victim, acquaintance, year 8**

Students varied in the impact ongoing friction had on them. Some interviewees reported not being too disturbed by the ongoing tension, but others were considerably distressed, some to the point where they didn't want to come to school. One student was so troubled he said he had been deliberately trying to get suspended so he wouldn't have to come to school.

> **Stuart:** *I mean, a, a couple of weeks, a week before that, I was trying as hard as I could to get red cards, so that I could get suspended. 'Cause I was just sick of it.*
>
> **Male, 13 years, capital city, perpetrator, acquaintance, year 7**

Many interviewees described informal tactics that they used to diffuse anger or resolve the conflict, such as: walking away from a confrontation, taking deep breaths, confronting a person they believed to be spreading rumours, talking to friends, isolating themselves at home, playing sport. Many students who were bullied or teased said they ignored, or tried to ignore, the behaviour. For example:

> **Joshua:** *Um half the time I don't even, I can't even remember half of them 'cause I don't realise, I just totally ignore him.*
>
> **Male, 12 years, urban non-capital city, victim, acquaintance, year 7**

> **Wendy:** *… so everyone goes like that [demonstrates pretend slapping] to me all the time and, like I just ignored them and walked away.*
>
> **Female, 12 years, rural, victim, former friend, year 7**

Friends offered help, in some cases, by discouraging the person from fighting or attempted to get the antagonists to make peace. In other cases they offered to fight on their friend's behalf, joined in giving "dirty looks" or were unfriendly with the opponent. In general, most of the interviewees felt supported by their friends and this meant a great deal to male and female students alike.

> **Marty:** *'Cause like some of my friends they don't see me in my fights reckon that I'm tough and that and then, yeah but.*
>
> **INTERVIEWER:** HOW DOES THAT MAKE YOU FEEL WHEN PEOPLE SAY THAT?
>
> **Marty:** *Oh it's a bit more support from my friends. [YEAH] They're saying, "Oh you got, you're, you're all weak" and stuff like that it's just a bit more support from my friends and then that just makes me feel better*
>
> **Male, 13 years, rural, perpetrator, acquaintance, year 8**

> **Kerry:** *Um Better. It's better. Um I feel better. I feel [inaudible] fear. My friends feel more happier because I'm happier. And just yeah, they're very supportive.*
>
> **Female, 12 years, urban capital city, perpetrator, current friend, year 8**

As we noted in connection with Table 19, just over one third of the sample said that they had sought help with their conflict from their parents. However it often appeared that parents only found out about the situation once the friction had escalated to the point where it came to the attention of the school. In some cases talking to parents was preferred to talking to anyone at the school.

> **Wendy:** *Oh, yeah I talk to my Mum but I don't talk to anyone in school like.*
>
> **Female, 12 years, rural, victim, former friend, year 7**

The advice offered by parents according to the interviewees included:

- Encouraging the child to ignore the other person

- Encouraging their child, if teased/bullied again, to let the parent know so that they could approach the school

- Urging the child to inform the school themselves

- Approaching either their child's opponent or the opponent's parents.

Most interviewees seemed to feel supported by their parents, although some mentioned that they found it difficult to follow advice to ignore or stay away from their opponent.

> **Bec:** *She told like, she didn't know it was going to end up in a fight. She just said, "try and keep away from her." So I did. But then people, like that's what I'd done, I took mum's advice, like try to keep away from her but then people kept on coming up to me saying, "Holly's going to bash you," and everything.*
>
> **Female, 11 years, urban non-capital city, perpetrator, current friend, year 7**

Not telling parents was sometimes a matter of not feeling it was important enough, as the friction was not that bad. As one interviewee said:

> **Stuart:** *I don't know. I guess it just wasn't all that bad, and I thought that I could handle it, but then it got out of control.*
>
> **Male, 13 years, capital city, perpetrator, acquaintance, year 7**

So what was the role of the school in this pre-fight phase of the conflict trajectory?

Phase 1: Friction – Interaction with school

Despite the stress caused by the conflicts, only half of the interviewees in this sample reported seeking outside help of any kind before the violence occurred, and only one-third approached the school. As noted in the previous section, while there may be situations where the escalation from dispute to fight was almost immediate, the majority of fights were preceded by a lengthy period of conflict, thus providing ample opportunity for a student in need to inform the school. There are many places within schools and many methods by which students can access assistance in resolving conflict. Student handbooks make a point of encouraging students to approach their year advisors, counsellors or the head teacher (welfare). There are also other options, such as bullying report forms and peer mediation. Thus, although there are a number of resources that students may access when they are in conflict, many clearly do not do so.

Explanations as to why help was not sought from the school included: fear that informing the school would escalate the tension; a lack of faith that it would change the situation; a belief that previous appeals for help had been unsatisfactory; and failure to consider the option of telling the school. One interviewee indicated that his reluctance to seek help stemmed from feeling that his situation was not yet serious enough to report.

> **Hugh:** *Like some people would tell the teacher, some people would fight them [inaudible]. If it gets bad I'll tell the teacher, but it hasn't really.*
>
> **INTERVIEWER:** … WHAT WOULD THEY HAVE TO DO, TO…
>
> **Hugh:** *Hit me or something...*
>
> **Male, 13 years, non-capital city urban, victim, former friend, year 8**

Clearly it is undesirable for students to be waiting until they are victims of physical violence before they report their concerns to the school.

A couple of students did not seek help from the school for quite different reasons.

> **Lucy:** *Like if it's like, I didn't have the fight and like, I had threats like that, I don't think I would go up there 'cause like I feel like I'm dobbing on them*

> **INTERVIEWER:** WHY DOES IT MATTER IF YOU'RE DOBBING ON SOMEONE?

> **Lucy:** *Because like just to know that they hate me. Like they, they'd really hate me if I like told on them or something like that.*
> **Female, 14 years, capital city, perpetrator, acquaintance, year 9**

> **INTERVIEWER:** WHAT IS IT THAT YOU DON'T LIKE ABOUT TELLING A TEACHER OR TELLING...

> **Ryan:** *Nothing. It's just not what I do.*
> **Male, age unknown, rural, victim, opponent of friend, year 7**

Here, (for quite different reasons) the two students do not wish to inform an authority because of the implications it has for their sense of self. Lucy fears being rejected. Ryan fights when challenged, so he has no need for assistance. As he says later:

> **INTERVIEWER:** IS THERE A TEACHER AT SCHOOL YOU LIKE, THAT YOU WOULD TELL?

> **Ryan:** *I wouldn't tell no one. I'd just like, I just say, you want to settle this after school and then, if he says "yeah", I'd just say "rightio". If he said "no", I'd just "oh rightio then".*
> **Male, age unknown, rural, victim, opponent of friend, year 7**

Some students who sought help through mediation, bullying reports, or by directly informing a teacher or other school authority (either in relation to the main incident they narrated or a similar situation in the past) said they found these avenues helpful. However, there were also interviewees who felt that the school's response to their appeal for help did not lead to a resolution of tension. In the next section we discuss what some of the students saw as inadequacies in the school's response to an appeal for help.

Informing school authority directly

A number of interviewees said that telling a teacher or other staff member did not help them with an ongoing conflict because their opponent did not respond to warnings, as Bec recounts:

> **Bec:** *Yeah I went and told her and she said she would try and sort it out, that out, and she come out in the playground and talked to Holly, but Holly didn't really seem to care.*
> **Female, 11 years, urban non-capital city, perpetrator, current friend, year 7**

However, other interviewees attributed the problem to what they saw as inadequate action on the part of the school.

> **Carlos:** *And I went to school next day and they started chucking apples so I went and told Mrs Miller [deputy principal]. Mrs Miller told them to stop and then they keep going.*
> **Male, 12, urban non-capital city, victim, former friend, year 7**

> **Ingrid:** *I told the deputy principals and that and they never done nothing about it… I got one of my friends, my new friends to go up and ask her [Ingrid's opponent] if she'd seen a deputy principal, she said "no".*
> **Female, 14 years, non-capital city urban, perpetrator, former friend, year 8**

One student said that he got into trouble when he approached a school authority about a conflict he was having.

> **Marty:** *I'm the one coming up here with a problem and he's the one going off at me for something that I didn't do. Saying, "You must have done something. You done this", and they go away and do nothing and I get in trouble for it.*
> **Male, 13 years, rural, perpetrator, acquaintance, year 8**

Other students said that they were advised to ignore their antagonist(s), but did not find this a satisfactory course of action. For example:

> ***Marina:*** *Like if we just um everyone says just ignore it, that's what someone says, but I just can't. It's hard to do that.*
>
> ***Female, 15 years, urban capital city, perpetrator, acquaintance, year 9***

> ***Pia:*** *And then she come up to um my cousin the other day and said, "Oh yeah well I'll have a go a bit, I'll have a go at you up on top oval this afternoon". And we come in here and said, like we told Miss Shipley [Deputy Principal] … and Miss Shipley said, "oh just ignore it".*
>
> **INTERVIEWER:** …WHAT DID YOU WANT [WELL I…] MISS SHIPLEY TO DO?
>
> ***Pia:*** *Just tell her, like she like, she thinks that we can stalk her and everything at school and we don't. And we said to Miss Shipley, "just her tell her not to come up to us and that anymore".*
>
> ***Female, 13 years, rural, former friend, victim, year 8***

It is obvious from these quotes that some students find it hard if not impossible to ignore teasing or challenges to fight. Further, as mentioned previously, many students had already tried ignoring the behaviour of the other person of their own accord and yet were still in conflict.

In these next two quotes, the student is advised to ignore being teased in terms that could be interpreted as normalising and/or trivialising such behaviour:

> ***Marissa:*** *Once I did tell them but it did nothing.*
>
> **INTERVIEWER:** YOU DID TELL HIM [THE DEPUTY PRINCIPAL] ABOUT IT?
>
> ***Marissa:*** *I told him like [inaudible] when I came back from my suspension I said that everyone was teasing me and stuff like that. And then he goes, "oh don't worry about it that always happens".*
>
> ***Female, 12 years, capital city, perpetrator, acquaintance, year 8***

> ***Kerry:*** *…and then I'd go down to Mr Vick [Deputy Principal], and he goes, "oh, some of that stuff is just petty stuff anyway". So, oh well.*
>
> ***Female, 12 years, urban capital city, perpetrator, current friend, year 8***

Thus, for a number of different reasons, some interviewees felt dissatisfied with the advice they had been given when they had approached a teacher. In some cases this meant that they were discouraged from seeking help again.

> ***Mitch:*** *…but, when I went and told the teachers like, they'd go, "oh just don't, stay away from him," and stuff and once I hit back, they told me off 'cause I didn't come tell them about what they were calling me names and stuff. So really wouldn't be bothered telling the teachers any more.*
>
> ***Male, 14 years, urban non-capital city, perpetrator, former friend, year 8***

> ***Marty:*** *Well why should I bother telling the teacher first when I know that I'll get suspended for telling the teacher.*
>
> ***Male, 13 years, rural, perpetrator, acquaintance, year 8***

Bullying forms

A small number of students made adverse comments about bullying forms. Three out of the four people using this option expressed dissatisfaction with the outcome (or recall).

> ***Stuart:*** *The purple forms I felt did nothing.*
>
> ***Male, 13 years, capital city, perpetrator, acquaintance, year 7***

INTERVIEWER: DO YOU KNOW WHETHER THEY GOT PUNISHED OR NOT FOR THAT, OR DID THE SCHOOL REACT I SHOULD SAY?

Peta: *Nothing happened I swear. I think Tracey just got warned.*

Female, age unknown, rural, victim, acquaintance, year 8

Lisa: *This is really nasty to say about the teachers but um, they don't really do anything like, they make you fill out a bullying report but that's it. And then, and then, and then they'll go, they'll go, "Oh yeah we'll look it up". But until something else happens, they don't do anything.*

Female, 14 years, rural, victim, current friend, year 9

As with complaints made directly to teachers and school authorities, in lodging a bullying form, students had an expectation of seeing a change in their situation and were disappointed when this did not happen. Of course, it is not possible to know whether the school actually did not respond or whether the interviewee was just not aware of the outcome.

Mediation

A small number of interviewees took part in mediation meetings. A couple of students found these experiences helpful because it gave them a chance to air grievances as well as hear the other person's point of view. As one student described it:

Heather: *And she'd say something and I'd say something which were, like, she'd say well we were in a situation here, and I'd say it as well and it sound so different. So she, we'd actually try and actually make the truth and that we like, we'd sort of mix it*

Female, 14 years, capital city, victim, acquaintance, year 8

Other participants in mediation were dissatisfied because: they felt their opponent did not engage in the process in good faith; had concerns about the potential risk through disclosures made in the session; and/or felt the process was not impartial. To illustrate:

Kerry: *Yeah, have a meeting. And we, we did, but it didn't work.*

INTERVIEWER: WHY NOT?

Kerry: *Because, like everything was coming back and like, Carina got really upset because it was between us three again. And Carina got really upset, and I got really upset because Carina was really upset. And Molly [opponent] was just being a cow to me and her so.*

Female, 14 years, rural, victim, current friend, year 9

Lisa: *…so my cousin and her friend were part of it. So I didn't really want to say half the stuff that I had to say because I didn't want my cousin to know 'cause I knew that she would have gone home and told my auntie who would have told my mum.*

Female, 14 years, rural, victim, current friend, year 9

Marissa: *When I came back from suspension, I got a thing called "peer mediate". Two year 10 students come up um counsel you basically. And it's like really stupid because… I knew that they were on Kristy's side.*

Female, 12 years, capital city, perpetrator, acquaintance, year 8

Thus based on what the interviewees said, mediation had the potential to prevent the escalation of conflict if conducted well, but there was danger of it failing if the process did not adequately address confidentiality, impartiality, or failure of participants to commit to the mediation process.

A couple of students described situations where the act of enlisting the school's help was just another stage upon which the tension in the relationship was played out. That is, students would use the school's disciplinary and support structures as a weapon in the perpetuation of tension rather than as a means of reducing it. For example:

> **Marina:** *… then she started just being mean, like saying stuff to us and if we'd say anything back, she'd just go dob and we'd get busted for it.*
>
> **Female, 15 years, urban capital city, perpetrator, acquaintance, year 9**

In summary, for many of the students in this sample, the strategies available did not bring their conflict to an end.[32] Indeed, some students clearly lacked faith in the capacity of school authorities to help. Whether these concerns are well-founded or not, one worrying consequence was that, in the opinion of some interviewees, the apparent failure of appeals for help licensed them to resort to physical violence.

> **Mitch:** *I learnt stuff off the counsellor and that and they just told me don't worry about it, just stay out of trouble. If they tease you, tell the teachers which I did but I just got sick of it. 'Cause they wouldn't do nothing about it.*
>
> **Male, 14 years, urban non-capital city, former friend, year 8**

> **Marty:** *That's the way I feel is if I tell the teacher I'm going to get suspended for it but if I hit him, I'm going to get suspended for it, at least I'd done something about it.*
>
> **Male, 13 years, rural, perpetrator, acquaintance, year 8**

Phase 2: Fight – Characteristics

The fights themselves were, in the majority of cases, brief and one-off events. Almost half of those interviewed had only the one physical altercation with their opponent (Table 19). While the fight was in progress, the interviewees often said they were not aware of much else:

> **Lucy:** *Like I was, I was feeling nothing. I just like, I couldn't stop.*
>
> **Female, 14 years, capital city, perpetrator, acquaintance, year 9**

> **Carlos:** *Oh he punched me really hard, but I just didn't feel anything, 'cause I was just, I was too schizzed up and everything.*
>
> **Male, 12, urban non-capital city, victim, former friend, year 7**

For some students, this lack of awareness extended to not being concerned about injury either to themselves or their opponent.

> **Ingrid:** *She could have broken her neck, could be in a wheelchair. But I never thought, I just thought it would be funny for her to fall down those stairs and me laugh at her and then she gets the same treatment that she gave me.*
>
> **Female, 14 years, non-capital city urban, perpetrator, former friend, year 8**

Fortunately, the fights described by the interviewees, for the most part, did not cause significant physical injury but were confined to scratches or red marks that soon disappeared. Occasionally, however, the interviewees reported more serious outcomes, such as bleeding noses, swollen eyes, and severe bruising. A sample of the interviewees' responses when asked whether they were concerned if they had hurt the other person is given below:

> *Just think "sucked in" because you started it so if you got hurt, you got hurt.*

> *I didn't care what happened with her but I. She was laughing at me. She deserves everything she gets*

> *I do sometimes worry but 'cause I don't, I don't like being people's, I don't like seeing people in pain.*

> *I wasn't worried about hurting her. She'd hurt me so many times before.*

The majority of those who described how they felt about hurting the other person were unconcerned, or even felt his or her opponent deserved to be hurt. Whether this reflects the degree of animosity they felt or a lack of empathy (or both) is difficult to say. Whatever the basis, the majority of those interviewed who had hit the other person felt that they were justified in doing so, although some thought (or at least said they thought) that it was not ideal behaviour.

So what were the trigger points for these students to convert conflict into physical violence? The threshold for violent behaviour will now be described, firstly from the point of view of the person who struck first, and then from the perspective of those who retaliated. The situations in which the person did not retaliate will then be described. In this way we can gain a sense of where the threshold for violence is, what conditions call out a violent reaction, and/or what holds violent reactions in check.

Initiation of physical violence

Although pre-arranged fights were referred to in general discussion, the particular incidents described by those we interviewed more often occurred at the moment when tension peaked.

> **Ingrid:** *…and that's when my adrenalin just went phoosh in the air and I just punched her.*
>
> **Female, 14 years, non-capital city urban, perpetrator, former friend, year 8**

> **INTERVIEWER:** HOW DID YOU FEEL WHEN HE WAS SAYING THAT STUFF TO YOU?
>
> **Max:** *Angry so I punched him.*
>
> **Male, 13 years, rural, victim, former friend, year 8**

A few students did say, however that they recognised that they may be prone to a fight because of rising tension.

> **Melanie:** *Cause I had time to think about what I was going to do. If, whether I was going to do anything about it. So I just..*
>
> **INTERVIEWER:** SO YOU CAME TO SCHOOL LOOKING FOR A FIGHT?
>
> **Melanie:** *Not exactly looking for a fight, but I wasn't, if she did say anything to me then I was probably just going to turn around and punch her one.*
>
> **Female, 14 years, rural, perpetrator, current friend, year 9**

> **Ingrid:** *Because I was thinking that all day, "I'm gonna punch her if she walks past me. If she gives me another death stare".*
>
> **Female, 14 years, non-capital city urban, perpetrator, former friend, year 8**

If other students or friends were present, there seemed to be as much discouragement to fight, as there was encouragement in this group of incidents.

> **INTERVIEWER:** WHEN YOU KEEP SAYING PEER PRESSURE, CAN YOU EXPLAIN A LITTLE BIT..
>
> **Blake:** *It's just people who just go, "Oh yeah, have a fight, have a fight you girl" and they start pushing you then you just, just do it.*
>
> **Male, 13 years, urban non-capital city, perpetrator, opponent, year 8**

> **Rita:** *I was going to go up to her and then she, my friend just goes to me, "Oh just leave it", and I go, "No she said something".*
>
> **Female, 14 years, capital city, acquaintance, perpetrator, year 9**

Interestingly, the students involved in the three situations where there was a pre-arranged fight described themselves as being reluctant to go through with it. For example,

> **Andreas:** *Just because it was like a week ago like two, it was a while ago, so just didn't care that much.*
>
> **Male, 14 years, capital city, perpetrator, opponent of friend, year 8**

In summary, for the majority of the incidents, although the lead-up time was prolonged (as described in Phase 1), there was often rapid escalation on the day of the incident. A few students did recognise that they were on the brink of physical violence and

would be susceptible to starting a fight should they feel their opponent had provoked them. Pre-arranged fights, in this sample, were the exception rather than the rule. The participants we interviewed who were involved in what might reasonably be called pre-arranged fights generally seemed reluctant to go through with the arrangement.

Many of the behaviours that trigger violence looked from the outside to be no different to the teasing and arguments that characterised the lead up phase. The following quotes typify the breaking points described by the interviewees:

> *Joshua:* *Yeah and then um, he called her [interviewee's mother] a "prostitute", said she was a prostitute and I just went off.*
>
> **INTERVIEWER:** IF HE HADN'T CALLED HER PROSTITUTE, WOULD YOU HAVE GONE OFF?
>
> *Joshua:* *Probably not. That was bad.*
>
> **Male, 12 years, urban non-capital city, victim, acquaintance, year 7**

> *Sasha:* *And then at lunch, um everyone's telling me that she wants to smash me. And I went to go confront her about it, and she said, "yeah, I want to smash you". And then um I go "alright then" and one of her friends I think pushed her into me, or she done it herself, and then we just started fighting over there.*
>
> **Female, 13 years, capital city, victim, acquaintance, year 7**

> *Stuart:* *It was like whenever the teasing started again… It could be two in a row, I don't know, but like, it'd just be when like when it got to the certain point that you'd had enough, and then you just like go for it.*
>
> **Male, 13 years, capital city, perpetrator, acquaintance, year 7**

Among a small number of students, there was a suggestion that the threshold for violence was lowered by the generalised frustration and/or anger they were feeling at the time. Some interviewees attributed this anger to general frustration. Others attributed it to specific external sources. For example,

> *Marissa:* *I wasn't angry for the fact that she pushed me, I was angry 'cause everyone in my class teases me.*
>
> **Female, 12 years, capital city, perpetrator, acquaintance, year 8**

> *Ingrid:* *I was like, I don't like it when people, I was just one of my bad days and I just, just went smack.*
>
> **Female, 14 years, non-capital city urban, perpetrator, former friend, year 8**

> **INTERVIEWER:** SO WHY DID YOU GET IN A FIGHT THAT DAY WITH MAX?
>
> *Francis:* *I don't know, because I was just angry that day, had a bad day.*
>
> **INTERVIEWER:** WHY DID YOU HAVE A BAD DAY?
>
> *Francis:* *… I just didn't it was just was frustrating, I couldn't get anything right, something like that.*
>
> **Male, age unknown, rural, perpetrator, former friend, year 7**

Thus the first move in an incident of physical violence (and interestingly in the paired interviews there was no disagreement about who initiated the violence) was mostly the result of someone finally breaching a threshold of tolerance either through persistent or especially serious provocation.

Retaliation

Most of the students interviewed saw violence as an acceptable way of responding to violence. If one is attacked, the right to reply in kind was almost universally seen as a given.

> **Ryan:** *And I'm like, walked over and then he pushed me again so, I punched him in the face*
>
> **Male, age unknown, rural, victim, opponent of friend, year 7**

> **Francis:** *I'd still do it anyway because they hit me first so, I'm not just going to let them stand there and keep hitting me all the time.*
>
> **Male, age unknown, rural, perpetrator, former friend, year 7**

One exception was Peta, who saw retaliation as a little more problematic:

> **Peta:** *…if I don't want it happening to me, I shouldn't do it back to them, sort of thing 'cause it's sort of being like a hypocrite if you know what I mean.*
>
> **Female, age unknown, rural, victim, acquaintance, year 8**

Non-retaliation

While most students considered retaliation to be both normal and reasonable, a few students who were hit first did not retaliate. Some of these students did not get an opportunity to hit back but others chose not to. Some typical reasons for this decision were:

> *I didn't want to get suspended again, 'cause I felt heaps bad… 'Cause like my mum was disappointed.*

> *'Cause if I would have hit him, I would have got suspended as well.*

> *Well they're probably a lot stronger, so if I hit them they'll probably hit me back, so.*

> *Like, 'cause, I'm not game enough to get in a fight, 'cause she's a really good fighter.*

> *'Cause um, I know how to control my anger and everything now.*

It is worth noting that these examples of the reasons given for non-retaliation do not betray any objection to violence in and of itself, but instead concern issues such as fear of getting hurt, fear of suspension, or a desire to keep the impulse to be violent in check.

In summary, then, despite long periods of non-physical conflict, fights may escalate when one person feels like events have gone too far. During the fight, many of the participants describe being highly emotional and minimally aware of potential consequences. While significant physical harm was the exception rather than the rule, the fights described by the interviewees sometimes resulted in injuries severe enough to warrant days off school. Almost without exception, the interviewees felt their violence was justified either because of ongoing provocation, or because the other person hit them first. This is in keeping with research conducted by Lockwood (1997). Of his sample of 198 incidents among middle school students, 84 per cent felt they were justified. The remainder judged the act was "wrong" but denied responsibility for their actions. Among the current sample, those interviewed saw violence as an unproblematic and even requisite reaction when faced with conflict.

Phase 2: Fight – Interaction with school

While there were many fights which nominally occurred in supervised time (such as during class or recognised break time), the timing and location of the fights described by the interviewees, while not deliberately orchestrated, often meant that there were few or no teachers close by. Sometimes this was because the fight occurred before or after school, or during class time but out of the classroom. In other cases, it was because the teacher on duty was otherwise occupied, or at a distance from where the fight took place. However, the students were not, with a few of exceptions, critical of the general level of monitoring in their schools.

According to interviewees, where teachers or other school personnel witnessed a fight, they were always willing to intervene and were effective in stopping the violence.

Approximately one-third of the fights were stopped because a teacher intervened. A number of the interviewees were convinced that the fight in which they were involved would have continued had a teacher not interceded. None of the interviewees reported an instance where a teacher was present but did not intercede. This finding stands in contrast to that of Devine (1995) in the United States, who as we noted earlier, found very considerable reluctance on the part of teachers in the schools he studied to become involved in preventing school violence. A number of interviewees in the current sample described the teachers, male and female, literally getting in the middle of the antagonists in order to separate them.

Although clearly all of the interviewees in the current sample were involved in a physical fight at some point, numerous instances were described in which conflict (in the opinion of the interviewee) was about to escalate to violence but was averted because a teacher was nearby. Interestingly however, the presence of a teacher was not always sufficient to stop a fight from starting. Indeed two of the fights described by the interviewees, occurred right outside the school office. For example:

> **INTERVIEWER:** GIVEN THAT YOU WERE AT THE OFFICE AND YOU KNOW, IT'S WHERE THE DEPUTY PRINCIPAL IS AND THE PRINCIPAL IS [LAUGHTER], DID YOU, DID YOU WORRY ABOUT GETTING CAUGHT, OR YOU WEREN'T THINKING ABOUT THAT?

> ***Marina:*** *I didn't think about it I just so, so angry at her*

> **Female, 15 years, urban capital city, perpetrator, acquaintance, year 9**

> ***Marina:*** *I wasn't thinking about the suspension or anything. I was just going to try and hit her in the face.*

> **Female, 14 years, capital city, perpetrator, opponent of friend/former friend, year 9**

Thus although school personnel are effective in ending a fight, merely being in the vicinity may not always stop fights getting started. It would seem that for some students, the demands of the conflict outweighed the potential disciplinary consequences.

Phase 3: Fallout – Characteristics

As mentioned in the discussion of Phase 2 above, few students regretted hitting their opponent. A large number, however, did have regrets about getting involved in a fight once they were confronted with its fall out. Interviewees' descriptions of the consequences from the fight could be divided into four broad categories: subsequent peer relations (including opponent); the reaction of parents/family; the interviewee's sense of themselves, and those centring on the response of the school (discussed in the next section, Phase 3: Fallout – Interaction with school).

Peer relations

Some interviewees expressed the view that the fight in which they were involved had resolved tensions between themselves and their opponent. These interviewees saw the fight as a positive experience, as the following quote exemplifies:

> **Sasha:** *I wasn't, I wasn't sorry for um having the fight. Because um well I was kind of, but then um then I wasn't because we had got it over and done with, I guess.*

> **Female, 13 years, capital city, victim, acquaintance, year 7**

For many of these interviewees, the episode of violence did bring hostilities to an end. Fighting seemed to achieve peace for some interviewees because it re-established social order. For example,

> **INTERVIEWER:** SO AND WHEN YOU CAME BACK [FROM SUSPENSION] DID YOU, WERE YOU FRIENDS OR...?
>
> **Rita:** *Sort of like, we went, we went back to the, "Hi", "bye" and "how are you", stuff like that.*
>
> **Female, 14 years, urban capital city, perpetrator, acquaintance, year 9**

In other cases the antagonists continued to harbour hostile attitudes towards each other. For many, this manifested itself as a cold war.

> **Lucy:** *It's like I know she's there but I just keep walking.*
>
> **Female, 14 years, capital city, perpetrator, acquaintance, year 9**

> **Sean:** *Oh she stops hitting me, I stop calling her names.*
>
> **Male, 14 years, urban non-capital city, victim, acquaintance, year 7**

However, given that just over 40 per cent of the sample had two or more violent clashes, these feelings evidently had considerable force.

> **Ingrid:** *I thought that if I go back to school I'm going to hit her again or I'm going to do something but then I felt bad about doing it and I was trying to tell myself that I wouldn't do it again. But when I come back to school it just happened again. I tripped her down the stairs then.*
>
> **Female, 14 years, non-capital city urban, perpetrator, former friend, year 8**

In terms of peer relations other than with their opponent, some of the interviewees reported strengthened relations with their friends.

> **Marty:** *It's just that if I end up in a fight I know that my friends are still supporting me if, if I win or I don't.*
>
> **Male, 13 years, rural, perpetrator, acquaintance, year 8**

For other students, the fight had a negative effect on peer relations.

> **Lucy:** *…'cause like, like she is a nice girl. Heaps of people like her. She's real good to be along with and I used to know that. I did that and now I've lost a good friend. That's like, just hurts yeah.*
>
> **Female, 14 years, capital city, perpetrator, acquaintance, year 9**

> **Sean:** *…and plus all my friends, like all these other kids were calling me a "little wus", "you're getting bashed by a girl" and that.*
>
> **Male, 14 years, urban non-capital city, victim, acquaintance, year 7**

Participation in a fight thus had repercussions, not only for the main combatants, but also for their wider peer group. Just as the friction between students found its genesis in their social relationships, so the fallout from any conflict had its principal impact in this wider arena.

Parental/family reactions

Parental/family response to the interviewees' involvement in a fight varied from positive, through indifferent, to condemnation. Sometimes this was a reaction to the violence, and at others to the consequences (suspension). There was little doubt that some of the students were strongly affected by their parents' reactions.[33]

> **Johanna:** *No, I wouldn't hit her again.*

> **INTERVIEWER:** WHY NOT?

> **Johanna:** *No 'cause um, Nana wasn't happy with me the first time. I don't want to get her any more upset.*
>
> **Female, 14 years, capital city, perpetrator, opponent of friend/ former friend, year 8**

> **Ingrid:** …he was at work and then he come home and I was upset. I was crying because I got suspended. And he goes, "what's the matter?" I said, "I just got suspended." And he yelled at me and I went for a walk, a very long walk, never got back 'til half past 11 that night.,
>
> **Female, 14 years, non-capital city urban, perpetrator, former friend, year 8**

How parents/family reacted could influence how the student viewed the fight.

> **Lucy:** Like 'cause like it's my Nan, I have to live with her. Like I love her to death and like just her saying, "I'm disappointed", I knew like I did the wrong thing straightaway. Like I was thinking, "Oh my God".
>
> **Female, 14 years, capital city, perpetrator, acquaintance, year 9**

Thus, parent's reactions were sometimes very influential in shaping students' views about the acceptability of violence. As the following quote from Sasha nicely shows, a young person may actively seek authoritative and consistent confirmation that what they have done is wrong.

> **INTERVIEWER:** WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE LIKED HER [SASHA'S MOTHER] TO DO, HAVE DONE?
>
> **Sasha:** I would have liked her to um maybe be a little more like her like yell, 'cause she usually yells.
>
> **INTERVIEWER:** OH YOU WANTED HER TO ACTUALLY BE ANGRY WITH YOU?
>
> **Sasha:** Yeah because that would make me feel bad because what I was doing was wrong and I want somebody to yell at me for it. Like none of the teachers yelled at me and well my Mum's only there to put me into place [sic] at home.
>
> **Female, 13 years, capital city, victim, acquaintance, year 7**

Parents, like peers, are key figures in the lives of these young people and parental responses (or even imagined responses) to their behaviour exert a powerful influence on how they come to view it.

Self concept

Another area where the fight had an impact was on the self-concept of the interviewee. This impact could flow from the violence itself, or from the consequences of the violent incident. The following quotes illustrate some of the circumstances in which a student's identity can be affirmed by the action they took in relation to violence:

> **INTERVIEWER:** DO YOU FEEL GOOD WHEN YOU'RE FIGHTING?
>
> **Warren:** No, I just feel normal.
>
> **Male, 15 years, rural, perpetrator, acquaintance, year 10**

> **INTERVIEWER:** BUT YOU NEVER ACTUALLY HIT OUT AT THERESA OR?
>
> **Bree:** Once.
>
> **INTERVIEWER:** ONCE.
>
> **Bree:** I was like, I wasn't a fighting person.

> **INTERVIEWER:** SO, DO YOU WANT TO CHANGE YOUR BEHAVIOUR?
>
> **Melanie:** Oh, not really. But, I don't know. I feel more myself if I'm not like, I'm not backing out of things and or acting all weak and stuff like that.
>
> **Female, 14 years, rural, perpetrator, current friend, year 9**

In other cases, the violent incident appeared to challenge or alter the interviewee's self-concept.

> **Marina:** *You just like, 'cause like that's pretty bad like trouble to be in, if you're like suspended that's like real bad. …'cause that's not really me kind of thing. I never pictured myself doing that.*
>
> **Female, 15 years, urban non-capital city, perpetrator, acquaintance, year 9**

> **Sasha:** *I kind of felt, oh yeah, I won. Kind of make me feel good about myself 'cause I had never been in a fight.*
>
> **Female, 13 years, capital city, victim, acquaintance, year 7**

Thus while being involved in a fight for some students signifies a transgression of the bounds of acceptable behaviour, for others it may demonstrates that they can look after themselves when threatened.

In summary, what follows a fight at school helps shape how it is rendered in the mind of the young school student. The appraisal conveyed by friends, fellow students, parents, and a person's current sense of themselves as capable or otherwise of violence, influences how students understand a violent incident. A parent condoning their child's retaliation lends weight to an interpretation of violence as one way to right an injustice. By the same token, a parent's condemnation flags the behaviour as unacceptable.

Aggression and violence are also strongly implicated in peer relationships. A student may move from being a regular friend to a threat because of their involvement in a fight but fights can also serve to shore up valued friendships. In the next section we examine how those we interviewed were affected by school's response to their violence.

Phase 3: Fallout – Interaction with school

One of the points of particular interest with this group was the disciplinary response of the school. Whether disciplinary processes commenced immediately after the fight depended on whether the fight was witnessed by a school authority, whether it was reported later, what time of the day the fight occurred, and whether there were any injuries that needed attending to.

The NSW Department of Education's "Procedures for the Suspension and Expulsion of School Students" policy (NSW Department of Education and Training 1998) clearly states that any student who intentionally causes injury against another student or teacher is to be suspended immediately. It is therefore not surprising that in 91 per cent of the fights described by this sample, at least one participant was suspended. The suspensions were generally of short duration (four days or less), although a couple of girls who had been suspended previously received long suspensions (up to 20 days). Of those incidents where neither participant had been suspended, one pair of boys both received a "red card" each (which is part of a tiered system of discipline) and another pair of boys had to pick up papers. This discussion will focus on suspension as it was the main disciplinary instrument used by the schools in this sample.

According to the interviewees, in most cases, the school tried to involve parents in the suspension process, although there were a few occasions where this seemed to break down. For example, one student's mother was angry because (according to the interviewee) the school had relied on her child to let her know that he was suspended, rather than directly contacting her.

> **Patrick:** *No, no and that's why my mum goes and like, they didn't even ring. My mum was getting angry because they didn't even ring her like, Miss Hoban didn't even ring my mum to tell, to tell her that I was suspended. Like, I could have just been hanging around the shops for four days.*
>
> **Male, 12 years, capital city, perpetrator, current friend, year 7**

In some cases out-of-school suspension[34] was difficult because the family's work commitments made it impossible to supervise the child at home. This sometimes led

to perceived inequities in the school's disciplinary processes, as the following quote illustrates:

> **Kim:** *…the girl I was fighting with, her Dad came down the next day, and then she was allowed to go back to school the day after, and I was suspended for the rest of the four days because my mum was working, so she couldn't come down and see the Principal… Well, I was pretty upset 'cause she could come back to school and I wasn't.*
>
> **Female, 13 years, perpetrator, urban capital city, year 7**

Schools seem to be trying to counter such difficulties by conducting telephone interviews for some parents whose child receives a suspension.

In terms of the impact of suspension on the students interviewed, some "victims" felt that suspension relieved some of the tension for them.

> **INTERVIEWER:** DID IT HELP WHEN SHE WAS UM NOT HERE FOR THE FIVE DAYS FOR YOU?
>
> **Lisa:** *Yeah it did, it, it was, it was good actually because all, all my other friends came up to me and like were friendly again and oh yeah, it was good.*
>
> **Female, 14 years, rural, victim, current friend, year 9**

> **Peta:** *I've had fun without them.*
>
> **Female, age unknown, rural, victim, acquaintance, year 8**

A small number of students actually felt that their opponent had been unfairly treated in receiving a suspension.

> **INTERVIEWER:** DID YOU THINK IT WAS FAIR? WHAT HE GOT?
>
> **Hugh:** *Well, I think that, not a suspension but maybe detention or something. Not as big as a suspension.*
>
> **Male, 13 years, urban non-capital city, victim, former friend, year 8**

> **INTERVIEWER:** DID YOU THINK IT WAS FAIR [NO] FOR WHAT SHE DID? YOU THINK IT WAS TOO HARD?
>
> **Robyn:** *Yeah because like, she couldn't, she should have got a detention or something.*
>
> **Female, 12 years, capital city, victim, acquaintance, year 7**

Most students who were suspended were aware of the rules about fighting at school, and that suspension was a potential consequence. The following comments were typical:

> **INTERVIEWER:** SO WERE YOU SURPRISED THAT YOU WERE SUSPENDED?
>
> **Bec:** *Um, no not necessarily 'cause like, I know that it was the wrong things, so was going to have to get some discipline from the school [RIGHT] 'cause it was on the school grounds.*
>
> **Female, 11 years, urban non-capital city, perpetrator, current friend, year 7**

> **Ingrid:** *The second time, I knew that I did wrong and I wasn't surprised that I got suspended. I knew that I was going to get suspended for doing it.*
>
> **Female, 14 years, non-capital city urban, perpetrator, former friend, year 8**

A few students did feel, however, that the rule in their case had been incorrectly applied because they said they fought only in retaliation. For example:

> **Marty:** *And then I got suspended this time and I done nothing wrong [YEAH]. So it sort of like, who cares if you done nothing wrong or you'd done something wrong. That, this is the way I picture it, that they, who cares if you do something wrong or you don't, we're still going to suspend you anyway 'cause you were involved in a fight.*
>
> **Male, 13 years, rural, perpetrator, acquaintance, year 8**

Others perceived unfairness when one person in the incident received a suspension but the other did not.

> **Bec:** *Well, it was like, what's the word for it, I er deserved to get suspended 'cause of what I had done but I think it was unfair because Holly didn't get in trouble as far as I know. I know, I know she didn't get suspended but just because she has a disability, she still done it. She hit me. It was her decision.*
>
> **Female, 11 years, urban non-capital city, perpetrator, current friend, year 7**

> **Carly:** *Yeah, it wasn't, I go to, I go to Mr Vale, I go to Mr Vale um, "it's not fair, you know". Like it's not, I go, I go to him, "it's not fair, like she got suspended and I didn't". And he's like, "why do you want to get suspended?" Um I go to him, "oh you know, I punched her". He goes, "I didn't see it".*
>
> **Female, 14 years, capital city, victim, current friend, year 8**

Almost all of the students who received a suspension recalled being given work to do at home. This usually consisted of a booklet that contained a combination of academic tasks (arithmetic, science questions etc.) and exercises specifically designed to prompt students to reflect on their behaviour and how it might be altered. Interviewees differed in terms of how many of these tasks they completed. Many expressed the view that they were not too concerned about completing the tasks, and the work they performed was rarely checked once they returned to school.

The majority of the students who were suspended expressed a desire not to be suspended again. Suspension was disliked by the students because it:

- Isolated them from their friends
- Left them bored
- Caused them to miss out on school work
- Caused them to get in trouble with their parents
- Gave them a "bad record" (infrequently cited)

The negative effects of suspension were sufficient to stop many students getting into fights.

> **Mitch:** *Yeah I'm being more careful now 'cause I don't really want to get suspended again 'cause it's a big warning getting suspended.*
>
> **Male, 14 years, urban non-capital city, perpetrator, former friend, year 8**

> **INTERVIEWER:** WHY DIDN'T YOU PUNCH HIM?
>
> **Melanie:** *'Cause I would of got suspended… the school said if I um, did anything like that again then it'd be automatic suspension and it'd be for longer, so.*

> **INTERVIEWER:** DID THAT BOTHER YOU? [YEAH] IT DID?
>
> **Melanie:** *Yeah 'cause I don't like being home, oh like, doing nothing.*
>
> **Female, 14 years, rural, perpetrator, current friend, year 9**

Not only was the possibility of isolation and missing out on school an incentive to not fight, suspension also provided leverage for not responding to teasing or bullying.

> **INTERVIEWER:** LIKE YOU SAID IF SOMEONE IS UM SAYING SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR MUM [NOW…] AND IT'S A BIT HARD [TO HANDLE]..
>
> **Heather:** *..now, it is, but now because I've actually been through the suspension thing you know, I think I'd rather you know just hear them say it and not get suspended.*
>
> **Female, 14 years, capital city, victim, acquaintance, year 8**

> **Marina:** *she was just, it [an email] said all this stuff and but she's saying all this bad stuff about people. Like that I hate my group and stuff and I dobbed 'cause I was like, 'cause I couldn't do anything to her and so I dobbed. And she got suspended again.*
>
> **Female, 15 years, urban non-capital city, perpetrator, acquaintance, year 9**

For some interviewees, the deterrent effect of suspension appeared to derive not from the nature of the sanction itself but from the fact that it underlined the gravity of their behaviour:

INTERVIEWER: YOU, YOU CAN'T TELL ME WHY IT'S BAD [TO BE SUSPENDED].

Teresa: I did something bad to get suspended, that's why.

Female, age unknown, rural, perpetrator, former friend, year 7

Marina: You just like, 'cause like that's pretty bad like trouble to be in, if you're like suspended that's like real bad.

Female, 15 years, urban non-capital city, perpetrator, acquaintance, year 9

Carly: Yeah, they like they didn't care, like, I go to them, "oh Jill's suspended" like. "Yeah so, everyone gets suspended". I go, "not everyone gets suspended". Only the people that, you know, are being bad or they jigged and that.

Female, 14 years, urban capital city, victim, current friend, year 8

By the same token, a less severe disciplinary action signalled that the incident was not considered serious.

INTERVIEWER: WHY DO YOU THINK YOU WEREN'T SUSPENDED?

Stuart: I don't know really. I guess it wasn't that bad an incident. I did get a red card though.

Male, 13 years, capital city, perpetrator, acquaintance, year 7

Across the eight schools sampled for the qualitative study, the rate of repeat short suspensions in 2001 (over all categories, not just violence) ranged between approximately 1.5 per cent and 26 per cent (of all suspensions). Among this group of interviewees, approximately half had been suspended before for fighting, the majority previously in the same year as the interview. Thus, although students are not keen not to get suspended, clearly, there are times when their resolve breaks down and/or the demands of conflict are prioritised over potential consequences.

INTERVIEWER: SO, DO YOU WANT TO CHANGE YOUR BEHAVIOUR?

Melanie: Oh, not really. But, I don't know. I feel more myself if I'm not like, I'll not backing out of things and or acting all weak and stuff like that.

Female, 14 years, rural, perpetrator, current friend, year 9

There was also an important articulation between the school's disciplinary measures and the family. In the case of suspension, how parents structured that consequence very much determined how it was experienced. Following are some descriptions by the interviewees of how they found suspension.

… then they're like, "is it fun?" And I'm going, "No" because like it's not fun like, it will be fun but mum cares about my education. But it would be fun like, 'cause I wasn't allowed to phone nobody, I wasn't allowed to watch no TV like, I had to earn it all sort of thing

It was boring. I had to clean up and everything, the house and stuff like that.

… it's not really a punishment if you ask me…'cause people go home. They can go shopping, go swimming pools, anything like that. So really they're just giving people what they want.

AND DID YOU LIKE BEING SUSPENDED?

Not, not really like, you get yelled at, at home by my dad and my mum.

…so every time I get suspended I get in trouble when I get home. So I don't like getting suspended.

Well like some, some of it was like, pretty good. 'Cause was like I had the time to clean up and help my Nan out with that. It was just like a holiday like just a rest.

It was fun. I got to go to L [large suburban centre] everyday, got to eat Maccas.

Not only did the way parents organised the suspension determine whether students enjoyed it or not, but also it added to the interpretation of the violent incident.

INTERVIEWER: CAN YOU REMEMBER WHAT YOU DID AT HOME?

Simon: *Um I had to help my mum, when I went to mum and dad's, I help my Nan.*

INTERVIEWER: SO YOU WEREN'T ALLOWED OUT?

Simon: *I was allowed out 'cause I wasn't in, needed helping because um I was just protecting myself and take and getting my property.*

INTERVIEWER: AND GETTING YOUR PROPERTY, AND WHO TOLD YOU THAT?

Simon: *My dad*

Male, 12 years, capital city, perpetrator, stranger, year 7

Hence although suspension and other disciplinary responses were not an unimportant part of the conflicts described above, it is clear that the relationship between conflict, physical violence and the school's disciplinary action is not a straightforward one. From the students' point of view, suspension or the prospect of it, is just one of several important considerations bearing on how they should conduct themselves in the school environment. Further, the deterrent and/or disciplinary impact of suspension may be modified by how parents structure that suspension.

A number of studies have looked at the efficacy of suspension as a deterrent strategy. Costenbader and Markson (1998) questioned the capacity of suspension to bring about behaviour change. In their sample of suspended middle school students, nearly one-third stated that their suspension had not helped with the problem that led to their suspension (two-thirds were suspended for physical aggression) and felt it was likely they would be suspended again. Atkins et al. (2002) argued that within the population of students who receive suspensions, there are subgroups for whom this disciplinary action is either non or counter-productive in terms of reducing disruptive behaviour. Further, among their disadvantaged group of respondents, they found those who were suspended more often differed from others in terms of ratings on antisocial behaviour by peers and teachers, and academic performance. Atkins et al. (2002) suggest that perhaps for this group of students, the discipline received in fact rewards rather than punishes the student. However, these analyses are de-contextualised and see the influence of these factors with conflict and the disciplinary action of the school as unidirectional. Further, given the importance of the family discussed above, their analysis fails to take into account the influence that parents have on how suspension is viewed:

Joshua: *Oh because there's, some parents they just don't care if they get suspended, they just, they don't come home then they sit down and play the, watch TV or play Nintendo or that. They're not strict or anything, they don't care. Mm, that's half of the, of reasons, but my parents they're really strict and they care and that and I respect that because I've learnt off it.*

INTERVIEWER: SO YOU'VE LEARNT QUITE A BIT FROM YOUR PARENTS?

Joshua: *Yeah when I've been punished and that, I've just put up with it so it stopped.*

Male, 12 years, urban non-capital city, victim, acquaintance, year 7

DISCUSSION

As we noted in the introduction to the report, the overall purpose of the present study was to gather information that would assist DET in reducing the incidence of violence in schools in NSW. To that end we conducted two studies. The first sought to establish whether factors associated with the school climate, culture and structure predict involvement in assault, after controls have been introduced for the individual-level factors which are known to increase the risk of violent and aggressive behaviour. The second sought to describe the social contexts in which assaults on school premises are embedded.

The quantitative analysis demonstrated that a very large number of school-related factors are strongly associated with a higher risk of physical attacks by school students on other students.

At the bivariate level:

1. Not knowing whether the school has a discipline policy
2. Not receiving any formal notice of the school rules
3. Not believing that "you get into big trouble" for breaking the rules
4. Not believing that you get to tell your side of the story if you break the rules
5. Always being told what you shouldn't do rather than what you should do; and
6. Not believing that good behaviour is rewarded at school,

are all associated with a higher risk of involvement in assault. The risk of assault is also increased:

7. Where a student reports that he/she spends a lot of time copying from textbooks or the blackboard
8. Where his/her teachers often seem unprepared for class
9. Where his/her teachers rarely if ever greet students
10. Where his/her teachers seem disorganised
11. Where his/her teachers seem to spend more time controlling the class than teaching; or
12. Where his/her teachers rarely if ever help a student with his or her work.

Furthermore, the bivariate analysis revealed that a student is more likely to have attacked someone where they believe that:

13. Students at their school are racist,
14. Kids who make racist remarks at their school do not get into trouble,
15. Some students bully other students at their school; or
16. Teachers at their school fail to stop bullying when they know about it.

Finally, assault was also found to be more prevalent in:

17. Boys schools
18. Smaller schools
19. Schools where more than 25 per cent of teachers have less than five years experience
20. Schools with no peer mediation system
21. Schools with a high proportion of students with poor reading or poor language ability.

Of course many of the school-climate and school structure variables dropped out in the multivariate analyses involving these two families of variables. Since many of these variables are probably interrelated this is hardly surprising. The more important question from the standpoint of intervention policy, is whether any of the school climate and school structure variables remained significant once controls have been introduced for the individual background factors that put young people at risk of violence. In fact several did. Although a large number of individual background factors (most notably those associated with poor impulse control, problems with their family and poor parenting) were strongly associated with violent student behaviour, the conditions referred to at (2) (4), (7), (11), (13), (14), and (19) all remained significant predictors of student-to-student violence, and (16) was marginal.

Before commenting on these findings two caveats are in order. Firstly, it needs to be borne in mind, although we have employed sophisticated analytic techniques in a bid to identify independent predictors of school violence, cross-sectional research is never an ideal vehicle through which to identify causal relationships. Since all variables were measured at the same time, we cannot be sure that our significant independent variables all 'cause' an increase in the risk of violence. In fact in some cases the causal relationship may actually run the other way. Antisocial behaviour, for example, may make it harder to teach students and result in less then optimal teaching methods. It may also invite negative teacher-pupil interactions and cause less time to be spent on instructional interactions, thereby further compromising academic success (Wehby, Symons & Canale 1998). The finding in the present study with respect to increased odds of violent behaviour with self-reported reading/writing problems may reflect a mutually influential relationship of this kind. McEvoy and Welker (2000) make essentially this same point when they argue that:

> ….*academic failure and antisocial behavior exist in a reciprocal relationship [that] is context specific. Conditions in the home and conditions in the school can help to predict this relationship.* Antisocial behavior and academic failure reinforce one another within the context of ineffective school practices and ineffective parenting strategies. *"Ineffective schooling, for example, can be both a cause and an effect of violent or other antisocial conduct".* (McEvoy & Welker 2000, pp. 131-132, emphasis original).

The fact that this is a cross-sectional study also carries with it another important limitation. The regression techniques we have employed are effective in identifying which factors are statistically associated with school violence, once other potential influences have been held constant. It ought not to be assumed, however, that factors which fall out of the multivariate analysis (i.e., cease to be statistically significant) are, for this reason, unimportant. Many of our measures may be tapping the same underlying construct. When this occurs the most salient measure of that construct will tend to mask the effects of the others. It is possible, for example, that schools where students get to tell their side of the story (after a fight) also tend to be schools where students are formally told what the rules are and/or are rewarded for complying with them. In this instance, being able to tell your side of the story could be just a good marker for several other conditions that are almost as important in preventing school violence.

These caveats aside, the present study confirms a large body overseas research in suggesting that the climate, culture and (to a lesser extent) structure of a school do play an important role in shaping the level of violence that occurs between students. Having explicit rules and an equitable discipline policy does appear to help prevent school violence. The strong effect associated with receiving formal notice of school rules as opposed to finding out through indirect means, or when the rules had already been breached particularly underscores the importance of clarity and effective communication of rules in the minimisation of violent misconduct.

The findings in relation to teaching style and classroom disorder confirm the widespread view among educational experts (e.g., Haynes 1996; McEvoy & Welker 2000; Ward 1998;) that school violence is less likely when teaching programs are highly structured, include positive rewards, are ability-appropriate and are perceived by students as stimulating. Our findings are well supported by other more direct evidence as well. When Costenbader and Markson (1998) asked a sample of 250 students who had been suspended which of seven possible interventions[35] might "help you solve your problem [viz. violent behaviour] better than suspension does", over half of the sample said that they wished to take classes that were more interesting and useful or more vocationally applicable.

The finding that students are less likely to become involved in violence if they feel that teachers intercede to stop bullying and/or teasing resonates with the findings from the qualitative analysis. Some of the students interviewed as part of the qualitative study responded violently to provocative treatment by their peers at least partly because they believed school authorities had not or could not provide any satisfactory remedy to the problems they were facing. Another study by Stephenson and Smith, cited by Farrington (1993), found a similar effect: teachers in schools with low rates of bullying attached greater importance to the control and prevention of bullying than teachers in schools with high rates of bullying. This sort of dynamic was noted in our review of Devine's (1995) research in the introduction to this report. Devine, it will be recalled, found that disruptive and hostile behaviour flourished where there was a belief among students that school authorities had abdicated their role in disciplining students. Fighting also brought a very real end to tension for some of the students in the current study, and as such, whether the behaviour is acceptable or not, the position of fighting as an *effective* resolution was reified.

The finding that violence is more likely among students from schools whose teachers have limited experience is also important. Only one other study in the published literature has investigated the relationship between teacher experience and school violence. Gottfredson and Gottfredson (1985), in their analysis of the National Institute of Health's Safe School Study, correlated the average years of teacher experience in a school with student victimisation. They also found an inverse relationship (i.e., greater experience less victimisation) although the correlation felt short of statistical significance. It is difficult to know exactly the mechanisms by which teacher experience exerts its influence, given the attention already paid to capturing the effects of school/classroom climate. It seems likely, however, that more experienced teachers have simply had more opportunity to observe the conditions that facilitate or discourage violence.

The qualitative interviews also underlined the capacity of schools to prevent violence. They revealed that students who get involved in fights are often very conscious of, and sensitive to, a school's disciplinary practices, particularly, suspension. Far from being indifferent to this sanction, many view it as an appropriate and reasonable response to violent behaviour. While some students undoubtedly obtained a certain amount of pleasure from the fact that they were temporarily relieved of the obligation to attend school, many more enjoy the social stimulation and educational opportunities provided by school and accordingly fear the loss of these things that suspension brings. Even students disciplined for school violence recognise the need to complete sufficient education to obtain "a good job" and express a concern not to put their future employment prospects in jeopardy through continued involvement in antisocial behaviour. The threat of suspension also provides some students with a means by which to resist retaliation and/or ignore provocation without as a consequence losing face.

The violence-prevention capacity of schools is further manifest in the fact that, where school violence does erupt, it is often after long periods of tension in which students may seek help from school authorities but receive what they see as inadequate attention or advice. Some students we spoke to became violent after being advised to ignore their antagonist and felt they had already tried this strategy to no avail. Some became violent after what they regarded as serious provocation had been treated dismissively. In some circumstances it appeared peer mediation or bullying reports were not appropriately deployed or used. In others students seemed to have received inadequate feedback on what action, if any, had been taken against their alleged opponent and treated this as licensing their use of physical violence. These sorts of management problems may be uncommon. At the same time, they do underline the potential influence schools can bring to bear on the risk of violence on school grounds.

Influence is one thing, control quite another. Schools are not the only important source of leverage over violence. The formal policies of the schools from which these interviewees were drawn clearly state that violence (threats and harassment) will not be tolerated and can attract suspension (or in some cases a suspension warning for minor incidents). The student and staff handbooks, codes of conduct and welfare policies emphasise the need for peaceful resolution of conflict, and the fact that students and teachers have a right to a safe school environment. Many students, however, struggled to resolve school policies on violence with their other understandings of what is appropriate and reasonable. As one interviewee said:

> **Marty**: It's like out in the street, you, you get hit and so you hit them back and then, and then it's like, you, the Law says that you can defend yourself, but in schools it's a different law, you can't defend yourself. That's what they're trying to say. Like, they're not saying that you can't defend yourself. They're just trying to make that out by saying, "If they hit you, don't do nothing back, just walk away".
>
> **Male, 13 years, rural, perpetrator, acquaintance, year 8**

The quantitative analysis revealed that children who have not learned how to control their impulses, who are poorly supervised or who come from families were the discipline is punitive, are far more likely to assault another student at school than are students who do not experience these conditions. This is true, regardless of the characteristics of the school that a student attends. The qualitative interviews provide a vivid demonstration of the importance of families in violence prevention because they reveal the disturbing disjunction that exists in many of the families of violent students, between their parents' attitudes to violence and the attitudes that schools are trying to inculcate. There were numerous examples of this during the course of our interviews. For example:

> **INTERVIEWER:** ARE YOU THE ONLY ONE IN THE FAMILY THAT GETS PHYSICAL OR?
>
> **Patrick**: My dad hit when he was younger and still now. I heared [sic] him said if someone broke in he'd break all their fingers so that they can't break in again.
>
> **Male, 12 years, capital city, perpetrator, current friend, year 7**
>
> **Bec**: So then I kicked her back because I, that's how I've been brought up. Like, if somebody hits you, you hit them back.
>
> **Female, 11 years, urban non-capital city, perpetrator, current friend, year 7**
>
> **Catherine**: She said, "why", she said "why did you hit him?" I said, "'cause he was swearing at me." And she said, "well, he shouldn't have been swearing at you." That's why she really doesn't care.
>
> **Female, 11 years, urban non-capital city, perpetrator, acquaintance, year 7**
>
> **Kerry**: She was like saying she like I was a chicken and stuff like that, but now she knows. She won't, she won't do it again. As my Mum said, she goes, "you only got to hit one person and they would all leave you alone".
>
> **Female, 12 years, urban capital city, perpetrator, current friend, year 8**

> **Marina** : *They said she deserved it, but not, I shouldn't have hit her more than once, I should have only hit her once and that um they were just heaps disappointed and they thought I'd never do something like that.*
>
> **Female, 15 years, urban capital city, perpetrator, acquaintance, year 9**

> **Warren** : *No, they just said, "Don't do it again at school". I can do it out of school, but not in school.*
>
> **Male, 15 years, rural, perpetrator, acquaintance, year 10**

Perhaps the most poignant comment, however, was this one:

> **Ian** : *I'm not, I'm not going get suspended again 'cause he's [Ian's father] going to boot my arse but I got suspended again. And I told Mr Oakley [Deputy principal] to ring my dad 'cause he was going to boot my arse.*
>
> **Male, age unknown, urban non-capital city, perpetrator, acquaintance, year 7**

In circumstances such as these schools will always find themselves struggling to get their position on violence accepted in preference to other powerful "truths" about violence transmitted within the family and society in general. Schools may have a great deal to contribute to school violence prevention but their progress will always be determined by the extent to which violence is sanctioned within the family and the wider community.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: QUANTITATIVE SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Office use only

Study Questionnaire

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this survey. In it you will be asked a range of questions on how you feel about your school, your teachers, your family, and also about your experience (if any) of physical attacks on school grounds. Your school is one of a large number of schools throughout New South Wales taking part in the survey. The purpose of the survey is to find out about young people's experience of school and school violence. This information is important, so please answer all questions as honestly as you can.

To ensure that your answers remain anonymous, please do not put your name or class on this questionnaire. The survey is NOT compulsory, so if there are any questions you do not feel comfortable answering, just leave them blank. The answers you give will be kept confidential and no one at your school will know what you have written. The only people who will see your answers are the researchers, who will not know which questionnaire belongs to which person. The school counsellor has also been informed that this survey is taking place, so if you feel you need to speak to a counsellor, he or she will be available to speak to you.

SECTION A

Please tick ☑ the boxes next to your answer.

1. What year are you in at school?

☐ *Year 8*
1

☐ *Year 9*
2

2. What sex are you?

☐ *Female*
1

☐ *Male*
2

3. Are you an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander?

☐ *Yes*
1

☐ *No*
2

4. What language do you speak at home?

(Please specify)...

5. Who do you live with at home?

☐ *Both parents*
1

☐ *One of my parents*
2

☐ *Neither parent*
3

6. How many children, apart from you, live at your house?

☐ *None*
0

☐ *One*
1

☐ *Two*
2

☐ *Three*
3

☐ *Four or more*
4

7. How old is your mother?

☐ *35 or younger*
1

☐ *36-40*
2

☐ *Over 40*
3

☐ *Don't know*
4

8. Do you have difficulties reading and writing?

☐ *Never*
1

☐ *Sometimes*
2

☐ *Often*
3

☐ *Very often*
4

9. Do you do things without giving them enough thought?

☐ *Never*
1

☐ *Sometimes*
2

☐ *Often*
3

☐ *Very often*
4

3

SECTION B

10. During the LAST SIX MONTHS, how well have you got on with the family?

☐ *No problems*
1

☐ *Occasional problems*
2

☐ *Fairly frequent problems*
3

☐ *Constant problems*
4

11. Please read the following statements and tick the box under the answer that best describes the way your parents (or stepparents or foster parents) in general acted toward you over the last SIX MONTHS. *(please tick ☑ one per question which best fits the way you feel your parents acted)*

My parents (or stepparents or foster parents):	Never	Sometimes	Often	Very often
Smile at me	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4
Want to know exactly where I am and what I am doing	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4
Soon forget a rule they have made	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4
Praise me	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4
Let me go out any evening I want	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4
Do tell me when to be home when I go out	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4
Nag me about little things	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4
Only keep rules when it suits them	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4
Make sure I know I am appreciated	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4
Threaten punishment more often than they use it	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4
Speak of the good things I do	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4
Do find out about my misbehaviour	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4
Enforce a rule or do not enforce a rule depending upon their mood	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4
Hit me or threaten to do so	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4
Seem proud of the things I do	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4

4

SECTION C

12. Does your school have a discipline policy/code of conduct?

☐ Yes   ☐ No   ☐ Don't know
1   2   3

13. How did you first find out what the SCHOOL RULES/code of conduct were at this school?
(please tick ☑ __ONLY ONE__ that indicates how you __FIRST__ found out)

☐ *I haven't found out what the school's rules are (Please go to **Q.20 on page 6**)*
1

☐ *A written list was given to me*
2

☐ *The principal or the teacher talked about them at assembly/roll call/year meeting*
3

☐ *Teacher talked about SCHOOL RULES/code of conduct in class*
4

☐ *A list of rules was sent home to my parents*
5

☐ *Heard about them by chance*
6

☐ *Heard about them when I got into trouble*
7

14. Were the school rules about acceptable behaviour taught to you in one of your classes this year?

☐ Yes   ☐ No   ☐ Don't know
1   2   3

In this section, we will ask you how you feel about the school rules. There are no right or wrong answers, just your opinion. Please tick ☑ the box next to how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

15. There are too many rules at this school

☐ *Strongly disagree*   ☐ *Disagree*   ☐ *Agree*   ☐ *Strongly agree*
1   2   3   4

16. The rules about behaviour at this school are unclear

☐ *Strongly disagree*   ☐ *Disagree*   ☐ *Agree*   ☐ *Strongly agree*
1   2   3   4

17. If you break a rule at this school, you always know what to expect

☐ *Strongly disagree*   ☐ *Disagree*   ☐ *Agree*   ☐ *Strongly agree*
1   2   3   4

18. The rules about behaviour at this school are too strict

☐ *Strongly disagree*   ☐ *Disagree*   ☐ *Agree*   ☐ *Strongly agree*
1   2   3   4

19. Everybody at my school gets treated the same way if they break the rules

☐ *Strongly disagree*   ☐ *Disagree*   ☐ *Agree*   ☐ *Strongly agree*
1   2   3   4

5

SECTION D

In this section, we will ask you what you think about the rules about behaviour at your school. There are no right or wrong answers, just your opinion. Please tick ☑ the box next to how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

20. It seems like no-one at this school has really been told what the rules are

☐ *Strongly disagree* ☐ *Disagree* ☐ *Agree* ☐ *Strongly agree*
1   2   3   4

21. You get into big trouble if you break the rules at this school

☐ *Strongly disagree* ☐ *Disagree* ☐ *Agree* ☐ *Strongly agree*
1   2   3   4

22. If you break the rules at this school, you still get to tell your side of the story

☐ *Strongly disagree* ☐ *Disagree* ☐ *Agree* ☐ *Strongly agree*
1   2   3   4

23. You are always being told at this school what you SHOULDN'T do, rather than what you SHOULD do

☐ *Strongly disagree* ☐ *Disagree* ☐ *Agree* ☐ *Strongly agree*
1   2   3   4

24. Good behaviour is rewarded at this school

☐ *Strongly disagree* ☐ *Disagree* ☐ *Agree* ☐ *Strongly agree*
1   2   3   4

SECTION E

The following are questions about your experiences in the classroom. Please tick ☑ the box next to the answer that best fits the way you feel about your classroom experience.

25. My teachers seem unprepared for the class lessons

☐ *Never or rarely* ☐ *Sometimes* ☐ *Often* ☐ *Always/almost always*
1   2   3   4

26. We spend a lot of time in class copying out work from text books or the blackboard

☐ *Never or rarely* ☐ *Sometimes* ☐ *Often* ☐ *Always/almost always*
1   2   3   4

27. My teachers greet the students when they walk into the classroom

☐ *Never or rarely* ☐ *Sometimes* ☐ *Often* ☐ *Always/almost always*
1   2   3   4

28. My teachers' lessons are very organised

☐ *Never or rarely* ☐ *Sometimes* ☐ *Often* ☐ *Always/almost always*
1   2   3   4

29. My teachers spend more time keeping control of the class than teaching

☐ *Never or rarely* ☐ *Sometimes* ☐ *Often* ☐ *Always/almost always*
1   2   3   4

30. My teachers help me with my work

☐ *Never or rarely* ☐ *Sometimes* ☐ *Often* ☐ *Always/almost always*
1   2   3   4

6

SECTION F

The following questions are about the school more generally. There are no right or wrong answers, just your opinion. Please tick ☑ the box next to how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

31. The students at this school are racist

☐ *Never or rarely* ☐ *Sometimes* ☐ *Often* ☐ *Always/almost always*
 1   2   3   4

32. Kids who make racist remarks get into trouble with the teachers

☐ *Never or rarely* ☐ *Sometimes* ☐ *Often* ☐ *Always/almost always*
 1   2   3   4

33. Some kids bully other kids at this school

☐ *Never or rarely* ☐ *Sometimes* ☐ *Often* ☐ *Always/almost always*
 1   2   3   4

34. The teachers at this school stop bullying if they know about it

☐ *Never or rarely* ☐ *Sometimes* ☐ *Often* ☐ *Always/almost always*
 1   2   3   4

35. I see the principal in the playground with the students

☐ *Never or rarely* ☐ *Sometimes* ☐ *Often* ☐ *Always/almost always*
 1   2   3   4

SECTION G

This section is about whether you have been involved in any physical attacks on other students. Please answer all questions as honestly as possible.

36. During the PAST 12 MONTHS, how often have you PHYSICALLY attacked another student to hurt them AT SCHOOL or on your way TO/FROM SCHOOL?

☐ *Never (Please go to Q.60 on page 11)*   ☐ *Three to four times*
 0   3

☐ *Once*   ☐ *Five times or more*
 1   4

☐ *Twice*
 2

37. Thinking of the LAST time this happened, what was the MAIN reason you physically attacked the other person? (please tick ☑ only ONE)

☐ *No particular reason*
 1

☐ *He/she PHYSICALLY attacked ME first*
 2

☐ *He/she was bullying/teasing me or one of my friends/family*
 3

☐ *He/she had made racist remarks about me or my friends/family*
 4

☐ *I don't like him/her*
 5

☐ *I was just playing around*
 6

38. Thinking of the LAST time this happened, how long ago did it occur?

☐
1 *In the last week*

☐
2 *More than a week but less than a month ago*

☐
3 *Between 1 - 3 months ago*

☐
4 *Between 3 - 6 months ago*

☐
5 *Between 6 - 12 months ago*

39. Did the LAST incident happen during class time or break, or on the way to or from school?

☐
1 *On the way to school*

☐
2 *During class*

☐
3 *During recess*

☐
4 *While moving between classes*

☐
5 *Other (please specify)* ....

☐
6 *During lunch*

☐
7 *On the way home from school*

☐
8 *I don't recall*

40. Where did the incident actually take place?

☐
1 *Classroom (Please go to Q.41 below)*

☐
2 *Hallway/corridor or stairs*

☐
3 *Canteen*

☐
4 *In the playground*

☐
5 *On the bus/train on the way to or from school*

☐
6 *At lockers*

☐
7 *School toilets*

☐
8 *At sports field/school gym*

☐
9 *Waiting for bus/train for school*

☐
10 *Other (please specify)* ....

(Please go to Q.42 on page 9)

41. If the incident happened during class time, during what subject did it occur?

☐ *Please specify subject* ....

42. Which of the following acts happened during the most recent attack? *(Please tick ☑ ALL that apply)*

	Things I did	*Things the other person did*
Threw something	a ☐	j ☐
Pushed	b ☐	k ☐
Grabbed	c ☐	l ☐
Kicked	d ☐	`m ☐
Bit	e ☐	n ☐
Hit with fist	f ☐	`o ☐
Used a sharp instrument	g ☐	p ☐
Hit with an object (e.g., ruler)	h ☐	q ☐
Pulled hair	i ☐	r ☐

43. How many people, INCLUDING YOU, were involved in the actual fight? *(Please write number)*

☐ *Number*   ☐ *Don't recall*
                      99

44. Did a teacher or other school authority find out about this most recent incident? *(Please tick ☑ ONE only)*

☐ *Yes, teacher/school authority saw it*
1

☐ *Yes, teacher/school authority found out later (Please go to **Q.46 below**)*
2

☐ *No (Please go to **Q.55 on page 11**)*
3

45. What did he/she do? *(Please tick ☑ ALL that apply)*

a ☐ *Told us to stop*   d ☐ *Went and got another teacher or the principal*

b ☐ *·Physically pulled us apart*   e ☐ *Called the police*

c ☐ *Other (please specify)* ....

46. What punishment, if any, did YOU receive that last time? *(Please tick ☑ ALL that apply)*

a ☐ *I did not get any punishment*   f ☐ *The school told my parents*

b ☐ *Detention*   g ☐ *Given a warning*

c ☐ *Suspension for a number of days*   h ☐ *Sent to principal*

d ☐ *Excluded from activity (such as sport/excursion)*

e ☐ *Other (please specify)* ....

47. Did you think that was fair for what happened?

☐ *Yes*   ☐ *No*   ☐ *Not applicable*
1   2   3

9

48. What punishment, if any, were you EXPECTING to get? *(Please tick ☑ ALL that apply)*

a ☐ *I was not expecting to get punished*

b ☐ *Detention*

c ☐ *Suspension for a number of days*

d ☐ *Excluded from activity (such as sport/excursion)*

e ☐ *Other (please specify)* ....

f ☐ *The school to tell my parents*

g ☐ *Get a warning*

h ☐ *Get sent to principal*

49. What punishment, if any, did the OTHER person in the fight receive? *(Please tick ☑ ALL that apply)*
(If more than one other person in the fight, pick the __MAIN__ person you had the fight with)

a ☐ *He/she did not get any punishment*

b ☐ *Don't know if he/she was punished or not*

c ☐ *Detention*

d ☐ *Excluded from activity (such as sport/excursion)*

e ☐ *Other (please specify)* ....

f ☐ *Suspension for a number of days*

g ☐ *The school told his/her parents*

h ☐ *Given a warning*

i ☐ *Sent to principal*

50. Did you think that was fair for what happened?

☐ *Yes*
1

☐ *No*
2

☐ *Not applicable*
3

51. What punishment did you EXPECT him/her to get? *(Please tick ☑ ALL that apply)*

a ☐ *I did not expect him/her to be punished*

b ☐ *Detention*

c ☐ *Excluded from activity (such as sport/excursion)*

d ☐ *Sent to principal*

e ☐ *Other (please specify)* ....

f ☐ *Suspension for a number of days*

g ☐ *The school to tell his/her parents*

h ☐ *Given a warning*

52. Whether he/she was punished or not, do you think what the school did was fair for what happened?

☐ *Yes*
1

☐ *No*
2

☐ *Not applicable*
3

53. Were you offered any support from teachers or counsellors after THIS most recent incident?

☐ *Yes*
1

☐ *No (Please go to **Q.55 on page 11**)*
2

54. If you did take up an offer of support, who did you see? *(Please tick ☑ ALL that apply)*

a ☐ *I did not take up the offer of support*

b ☐ *School counsellor*

c ☐ *Talked to a teacher/principal/deputy principal*

d ☐ *Special teacher (behaviour teacher, district guidance officer)*

e ☐ *Other (please specify)* ....

10

55. How did your parents react to that most recent attack? *(Please tick ☑ ALL that apply)*

a ☐ *They didn't find out about it*

b ☐ *They didn't have any reaction*

c ☐ *They were angry at me*

d ☐ *They were angry at the school*

e ☐ *They understood why I did it*

f ☐ *They were disappointed in me*

g ☐ *They were surprised*

h ☐ *I don't recall*

56. How did your friends react to that most recent attack? *(Please tick ☑ ONE only)*

☐ *My friends didn't find out about it*
1

☐ *They didn't say anything*
2

☐ *They thought I did the right thing*
3

☐ *They thought I shouldn't have done it*
4

☐ *I don't recall*
5

57. How did other people in your year, who are not necessarily your friends, react to that most recent attack? *(Please tick ☑ ONE only)*

☐ *No particular reaction*
1

☐ *Greater respect/popularity*
2

☐ *Less respect/popularity*
3

☐ *I don't recall*
4

58. Have you been suspended for physically attacking someone BEFORE this most recent incident?

☐ *Yes*
1

☐ *No*
2

59. Do you think you would attack someone again?

☐ *Yes*
1

☐ *No*
2

☐ *Don't know*
3

60. Are there any areas of the school you avoid because you are worried you may get hurt/attacked?

Please specify ....

Thank you for completing this survey.
Please check that you have answered all the questions you needed to.
Once you have finished, please fold and place this survey
in the envelope provided and seal the envelope.
Your teacher will collect the envelopes.

APPENDIX B: QUANTITATIVE SURVEY ADMINISTRATION PROCEDURES

ADMINISTRATION GUIDELINES - SURVEY ON AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR

Background

This document is a brief outline of the proposed procedure to be followed for the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR) survey of aggressive behaviour. The Education Minister and the Department of Education have commissioned BOCSAR to undertake this research to help us to better understand aggressive behaviour and its antecedent factors in schools. Through this data we hope to increase understanding of what leads to aggressive incidents between and among students, which, in turn, will assist the Department in developing more effective prevention and management strategies.

The survey is to take place in 60 randomly selected high schools throughout NSW. One Year 8 and one Year 9 class will be nominated from each school. Students will complete an anonymous and confidential questionnaire in class time. Participation by students is voluntary, and parents/caregivers will be given the opportunity to withdraw their child from the study by informed passive-consent prior to the survey.

The following guidelines are designed to assist participating schools in administering the survey and ensuring that data collection is uniform across all schools. We appreciate that schools are busy and have many demands placed upon them. Therefore these guidelines have been developed not only with the aim of maximising the quality of the data collected, but also minimising the disruption to staff and student school routines during the survey. It is important that the staff member delegated the task of coordinating the study is familiar with these procedures and raises any concerns about them with the contact at BOCSAR.

In terms of feedback, all participating schools will receive a copy of the final report from the study. This report will be available in the latter half of 2004 and will provide aggregate findings from the research. For reasons of confidentiality, individual schools will not be identified in the report, nor will results be broken down by school.

STUDY PROCEDURE

The guidelines for participating schools outlined here may be divided into four phases:

- Pre-survey.
- At survey administration.
- Post-survey.
- Collection of school-level data.

Pre-survey

Pre-survey Phase 1: Approach to schools

- 60 schools randomly selected from all schools in NSW.
- District Superintendents contacted by phone by DET and approval secured.
- Letters to school principal seeking approval sent 30th May 2003.
- Early June BOCSAR to contact schools and ascertain willingness to participate.
- Any school declining replaced by a randomly selected "reserve" school.

Pre-survey Phase 2: Initial contact

Should a school agree to participate, arrangements for the administration of the survey will begin immediately:

- The **BOCSAR contact** to ask school principal to nominate a **SCHOOL LIAISON** to coordinate the survey.
- This person should be an executive member of staff.

From the school liaison the following details will be collected in the first instance:

- **Class structure of school**
  - Ideally one roll class from Years 8 and 9 of approximately 30 students will be selected.
  - This class should be ungraded and broadly representative of the students in that year (in terms of gender and academic ability).
  - If there is more than one roll class in the year, BOCSAR will systematically select one.
  - If there is no roll class system, or if roll classes are vertically integrated, one, academically ungraded class (such as PDHPE) will be chosen from each of Years 8 and 9.
  - The size of the classes should be noted for the purposes of sending the appropriate quantity of questionnaires.

- **Suitable dates for the surveying**
  - Identify blocks of time that should be excluded due to exams, or special events weeks/months.
  - Nominate indicative date range to allow coordination of schools across state.

- **The timetable structure**
  - When the selected class normally meets (e.g., roll call, period 1).
  - How long periods are.
  - When breaks such as recess and lunch occur.

- **Availability of appropriate space**
  - BOCSAR contact to outline to school liaison requirements for space (see At Survey Administration section for details on suitable classroom set-up).
  - Ideally, the room in which the selected class is normally conducted will be suitable. However the room options should be discussed between the BOCSAR contact and the school liaison.

On the basis of this information, BOCSAR may determine which classes would be the most suitable for surveying in each school.

  - Teacher(s) in charge of these classes co-opted onto study by school liaison.
  - Teachers may contact BOCSAR for clarification of role.

Pre-survey Phase 3: Approach to parents

Once the classes to be surveyed and a date for the survey to be conducted have been decided upon parents/ caregivers may be contacted.

- An electronic template of the permission letter that has been approved by DET will be forwarded by email by BOCSAR (or by an alternative method if this is not appropriate).
- Letters to parents/caregivers should be sent BY POST (not sent home with students).
- They should be sent approximately two weeks before the survey is to be conducted.
- In the letter, parents/caregivers should be given one week to respond. A list of students whose parents have withdrawn their consent should be compiled and forwarded to the teacher administering the survey PRIOR to the day of the survey.

Pre-survey Phase 4: Preparation for survey

- Study materials sent to school. This will include:
  - Covering letter
  - Sufficient blank questionnaires and envelopes for Year 8 and Year 9 (plus 2 for school liaison and administrating teacher)
  - 2 x bundle cover sheets (Attachment A)
  - 2 x instructions to students (Attachment B)
  - 2 x study procedures (this document) one set for school liaison and one for administrating teacher
  - 6 x elastic bands (to bind bundle cover sheet to questionnaires, 2 per bundle, and to bind unused surveys together)
  - 1 x "School-level data questionnaire" (for principal/delegate only)
  - 1 x Loose State Mail Courier consignment note OR TNT (or State Mail) courier bag addressed to BOCSAR
- Any questions about survey contents should be directed to BOCSAR prior to surveying
- School counsellor should also be informed that the survey is going to take place

At survey administration

Regarding the payment of a casual relief day (approx. $240), a list of participating schools is currently with the Department of Education. Payment will be made by Direct Deposit to schools' accounts. A letter to this effect will be sent to school principals prior to payment.

Please note, to assist in maintaining the confidentiality of your school's participation in the study, please ensure that all copies of the questionnaire remain within the school, and any unused surveys are returned to BOCSAR.

The following issues will also need to be taken into consideration for the day of the administration of the survey:

- **Space**
  - EXAM CONDITIONS apply during the administration of the survey.
  - Students should be seated, and at a reasonable distance from each other to discourage them from looking at neighbouring students' questionnaires and talking.
  - The administering teacher should remain in the class THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE PERIOD of the survey.

- **Timing**
  - The survey would be best conducted in the morning periods.
  - Year 8 and Year 9 classes surveyed either simultaneously, or closely together to discourage circulation of the content of the survey.
  - The survey ideally should take place during the scheduled meeting time of the particular class chosen.
  - If the class is a roll call class, then the students would need to be excused from whatever class they have following roll call.
  - The survey should take no longer than 50 minutes. Therefore it is likely that students will miss only one period of class time.

- **Excluded students**:
  - A list of students whose parents have withdrawn their consent to be forwarded to the administering teacher prior to the day of the survey.
  - Students should be excused from the class for the duration of the survey – they should NOT remain in the classroom where the survey is to be administered.

- **Administration and collection of questionnaires**
  - Blank questionnaires should be distributed to students only after they have been seated.
  - The administering teacher should count the number of questionnaires distributed and ensure that that many are returned.
  - Each student should also receive an empty envelope and are to place the completed questionnaire inside the envelope and seal it.
  - Even if a student leaves the questionnaire blank they should still return the unused questionnaire in the envelope.
  - The envelopes are handed to the administrating teacher.
  - Under no circumstances should a student leave the classroom with a questionnaire.

- **Instructions to students**
  - Most importantly, students should be told to treat the survey like an exam and therefore should not discuss the questions or their answers with other students.
  - There are instructions for students on the front cover of questionnaire and before each section (Detailed instructions to be given to the students at administration are contained in Attachment B).
  - There are no right or wrong answers, just their experiences and opinions.
  - Any questions should be asked to the teacher not other students.
  - Should they make an error they can just cross it out and indicate their preferred answer.

- **Completion of administration forms**
  - Administering teacher completes BUNDLE COVER SHEET on day of survey for each class surveyed. IT IS VERY IMPORTANT TO ENSURE THAT THE BUNDLE COVER SHEET IS FILLED OUT SEPARATELY FOR EACH PARTICIPATING CLASS AND PLACED WITH THE QUESTIONNAIRES FROM THAT CLASS.
  - Cover sheet identifies the class taking the survey and gives details of absences, refusals and any problems encountered (see Attachment A).
  - **Where classes have been combined for administration purposes, please still keep completed surveys and their bundle cover sheets separate for each class.**
  - Cover sheet to be secured to each bundle of questionnaires corresponding to that class.
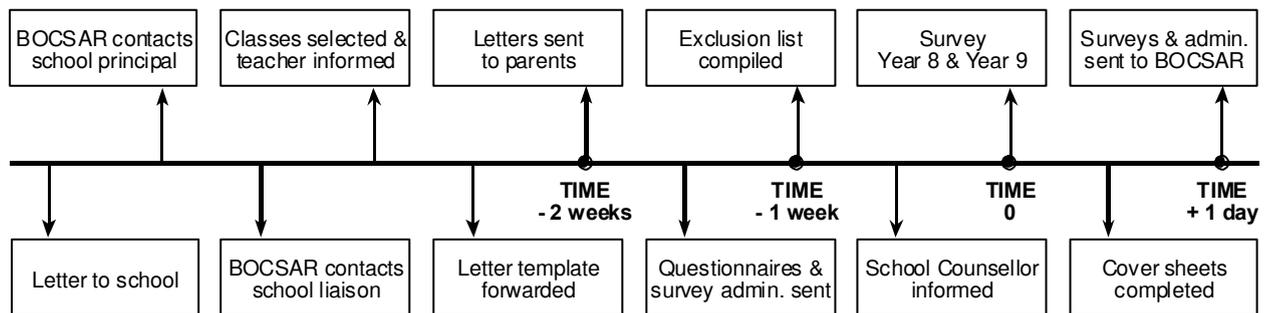
Post-survey

- You should have received in your pack either:
  - ***** An empty TNT or State Mail courier bag with consignment note attached,

OR

  - ***** A loose STATE MAIL/Australian Air Express consignment note.

    Completed questionnaires, still sealed in their envelopes, with their bundle cover sheets should be placed either in the TNT/State Mail courier bag provided OR in the box the study materials were originally sent to the school in.

- Unused or spare questionnaires should also be put into the package.

- For those schools NOT sent a courier bag, please remove the original consignment note and attach the loose return STATE MAIL CONSIGNMENT NOTE to the box and remove the pale green "sender's copy" slip.

- The "Dangerous Goods" declaration should be signed and dated on the consignment note for either TNT or STATE MAIL.

- Please call Anne Grunseit at BOCSAR on (02) 9231-9178 to inform us that the package is ready for collection. We will arrange and pay for a courier to collect the package from your school.

BOCSAR contacts school principal	Classes selected & teacher informed	Letters sent to parents	Exclusion list compiled	Survey Year 8 & Year 9	Surveys & admin. sent to BOCSAR
		TIME - 2 weeks	**TIME - 1 week**	**TIME 0**	**TIME + 1 day**
Letter to school	BOCSAR contacts school liaison	Letter template forwarded	Questionnaires & survey admin. sent	School Counsellor informed	Cover sheets completed

Collection of school-level data

There are a number of questions that are not included in the survey of the students that concern aspects of the school. These questions are detailed on a sheet marked "School-level Data Questionnaire". Either the school principal or delegate would best answer these questions. The sheet of questions will be provided with the other study materials such that the person responsible may collate the information, and the BOCSAR contact will record the answers to these questions over the telephone at a time suitable to the principal/delegate. This may be done at ANY TIME after BOCSAR makes contact with the school.

APPENDIX C: LIST OF ALL PREDICTORS USED IN BIVARIATE, MULTIVARIATE AND MULTILEVEL ANALYSES

Variable (reference category)	Type	Level	Source
Individual demographic & person characteristics			
Sex (male)*	I	1	Q
Year (Year 8)	I	1	Q
ATSI (non-ATSI identifying)	I	1	Q
Language spoken at home (English)	I	1	Q
Parents (two parents at home)*	C	1	Q
Siblings (one sibling)	C	1	Q
Mother's age (Mother aged over 40 years)*	C	1	Q
Nurturing parenting scale*	S (1-4)	1	F q11a-11o
Punitive parenting scale *	S (1-4)	1	F q11a-11o
Supervision by parents scale*	S (1-4)	1	F q11a-11o
Self-rated family problems in last 6 months*	O	1Q	
Self-rated reading problems*	O	1	Q
Self-rated impulsiveness*	O	1	Q
Individual perceptions of school climate & rules			
Knows school discipline policy exists (doesn't know)	I	1	Q
How came to know school rules (haven't found out)*	C	1	Q
Q20	O	1	Q
Q21 (strongly disagree)	C	1	Q
Q22 (strongly disagree)*	C	1	Q
Q23 (strongly disagree)	C	1	Q
Q24 (strongly disagree)*	C	1	Q
Q25*	O	1	Q
Q26*	O	1	Q
Q27	O	1	Q
Q28	O	1	Q
Q29*	O	1	Q
Q30 (strongly disagree)*	C	1	Q
Q31*	O	1	Q
Q32*	O	1	Q
Q33	O	1	Q
Q34*	O	1	Q
Q35 (strongly disagree)	C	1	Q

School structure

Selective school (not selective)	I	2	DET
Boys school (not boys school)*	I	2	S
Number of feeder schools (2-5 feeder schools)	C	2	PQ
School size (number of students)	Cont	2	DET
Priority school[36] (not priority funded school)	I	2	DET
Geographic location (capital city school)	C	2	S
Proportion NESB (< 30% NESB)	C	2	DET
Proportion ATSI (< 5% ATSI)	C	2	DET
Proportion head teachers < 3 years experience (<25%)	I	2	PQ
Proportion teachers < 5 years experience (< 25%)*	I	2	PQ
Peer mediation system (no such system)	I	2	PQ
Level system of discipline (no such system)	I	2	PQ
Discipline policy last reviewed	O	2	PQ
Short suspensions for violence 2001	Cont	2	DET
Canteen operation (operated by parents)	I	2	PQ
Parent involvement in discipline policy review (no)	I	2	PQ
Transition strategy from primary to high school (no)	I	2	PQ
Proportion low/elementary reading ability	Cont	2	DET
Proportion low/elementary language ability	Cont	2	DET
Proportion low/elementary numeracy	Cont	2	DET
Proportion low/elementary writing ability	Cont	2	DET

KEY:

Type   I – Indicator variable (1/0)
C – Multiple-category categorical variable
O – Ordinal variable
Cont – Continuous variable
S – Scale score (range)
* – Indicates this variable was tested in the final multilevel model

Level   A "1" for level indicates individual level variable; "2" indicates school level variable (i.e., all students within a school will have the same value on this variable)

Source   Q – Information taken directly from student questionnaire
F – Factor analysis of (questions specified)
PQ – Principal's questionnaire
DET – Department of Education records
S – Determined from sampling frame
A – Aggregate score of (question specified)

APPENDIX D: DERIVATION OF PARENTING SCALES

Fifteen questions from 11a – 11o (see Appendix Q for questionnaire) are taken from the Parenting Questionnaire as described by Lempers, Clark-Lempers, and Simons (1989). The questions are self-report descriptions of interactions between child respondent and parent.

Because only a subset of the questions (15 out of 29) was used in the current questionnaire, a factor analysis using the current data was performed rather than using the sub-scales as outlined by Lempers, Clark-Lempers, and Simons (1989). As it turned out, the analysis showed almost identical factor patterns to those described by those authors. The results of the factor analysis are displayed in Table 20.

Table 20: Factors, percent of variance accounted for, and factor loadings for parenting subscales

"My parents (or stepparents or foster parents)…"[1]	*Loading*[2]
FACTOR 1: Nurturing parenting subscale (27.2%)	
11a Smile at me	.802
11d Praise me	.795
11i Make sure I know I am appreciated	.785
11k Speak of the good things I do	.742
11o Seem proud of the things I do	.718
FACTOR 2: Punitive/inconsistent parenting subscale (14.3%)	
11c Soon forget a rule they have made	.710
11g Nag me about little things	.700
11h Only keep rules when it suits them	.637
11j Threaten punishment more often than they use it	.618
11m Enforce a rule or do not enforce a rule depending on their mood	.523
11n Hit me or threaten to do so	.505
FACTOR 3: Supervision subscale (8.9%)	
11b Want to know exactly where I am and what I am doing	.716
11e Let me go out any evening I want	.651
11f Do tell me when to be home when I go out	.616
11l Do find out about my misbehaviour	.373

1 The response categories were: never, sometimes, often, very often.

2 These are the loadings for the rotated factors and represent the correlation between the variable and the factor.

There were three subscales identified in the factor analysis. The first factor, which accounted for 27.2 per cent of the variance of the variables, was strongly related to questions that described nurturing interactions between respondents and their parents. In the main, these variables depicted acts of positive reinforcement.

The second factor identified was characterised by punitive and/or inconsistent parental behaviour and accounted for 14.3 per cent of the variance. That is, actions whereby parents' disciplinary actions were contradictory and/or harsh.

The third and final factor appeared to measure the degree of control over and monitoring parents exerted. This factor accounted for 8.9 per cent of the variance.

Scores on this scale were generated for each student by averaging the student's raw scores across the constitutive questions for each scale, rather than using the weighted coefficients provided by the factor analysis. Where appropriate, questions were reverse coded to ensure that higher scores on the scale indicated greater experience of the parenting style in question.

APPENDIX E: RATIONALE AND EXPLANATION FOR MULTILEVEL MODELLING

Multilevel modelling is a technique that has been in use in statistics for over a decade. It has been particularly useful in epidemiological and educational settings because the data collected in these research areas is often "clustered". That is, subjects or observations are nested in higher-level groups (students within classes within schools, or patients within hospitals). The significance of the clustering for analysis is that people/observations *within* the clusters are more likely to share characteristics, or be more homogenous than *between* the clusters. This introduces a problem with the appropriate estimation of standard errors (they are too conservative) and hence tests of statistical significance may be too liberal. In multilevel models (and other techniques that account for clustering) an appropriate adjustment is made for the clustered design hence producing reliable standard errors and significance tests.

A second problem generated by nested or hierarchical designs relates to interpretation. Concerns about extrapolating from variables analysed at the cluster level (e.g., the school level) to individuals, or analyses performed at the individual level extrapolated to higher levels have been raised in the academic literature (see atomistic fallacy and ecological fallacy literature). For example, is it appropriate, if we find a relationship between the proportion of students from minority backgrounds and the proportion reporting being involved in violence in a school to conclude that an individual from a minority background will be more or less likely to be involved in a fight? Conversely, if students from low SES families are more likely to be involved in a fight at school, can we extrapolate from that and say schools in low SES communities are likely to experience greater rates of violence in their schools than high SES communities? There are examples in the literature that demonstrate that such cross level inferences may lead to erroneous conclusions (Aitken, Anderson & Hinde 1981).

One solution is to only draw conclusions at the level at which the analysis was performed. However, as many phenomena of interest to social and medical researchers have predictors of import that are measured at the individual and at higher levels, the issue remains, how to best assess the combined effects all of these variables adjusted for each other. Multilevel modelling addresses this issue by being able to simultaneously model the effect of several levels of variables on an outcome variable, taking into account the nested structure. Therefore, the relationships between predictor and outcome variables are tested at the same level as they are to be interpreted. Another advantage is that such techniques can distinguish between within group and between group relationships between the dependent and independent variables.

The multilevel statistical software program used for this analysis was MLWin. Restricted iterative least squares with second order, penalised quasi-likelihood estimation was used. For more technical information on modelling capacities and parameter estimation, see Snijders & Bosker 1999, Goldstein 1995, Bryk & Raudenbush 1992, or any number of academic articles on multilevel modelling available in refereed journals.

APPENDIX F: QUALITATIVE INFORMATION
AND CONSENT FORM FOR PARENTS

Dear Parent / Caregivers,

Our school has been selected to assist in a study on aggressive student behaviour that is being conducted by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR) in collaboration with the NSW Department of Education and Training. Our school is one of a number being asked to participate. The aim of the study is to gain a better understanding of student perceptions of aggressive behaviour. The information will be used to make schools safer.

Part of the research involves personal interviews with all students who were involved in an incident of aggressive behaviour at this school in the last term. As your child was involved in such an incident, I am writing to seek permission for your child to be interviewed. The purpose of the interview is to get your **child's version of what happened**. It is a chance for them to tell their story and to say how they feel about what happened. Student interviews will be kept in the strictest confidence with no-one (including the school counsellor, principal, friends or family) other than the researchers being able to view the reports. Neither your child, nor the school they attend will be identified.

A trained and experienced interviewer, appointed by BOCSAR and approved by the Department of Education and Training, will conduct the interviews. Your child's participation is entirely voluntary and he or she may withdraw at any time.

The interview will take about an hour and will be conducted on school premises at a time convenient to the school and your son or daughter. Although the interview is likely to be conducted during school hours arrangements will made to minimise any disruption to your child's school routine.

We would greatly appreciate your support in this research. It is an important part of our ongoing efforts to make schools safer. If you consent to your child being interviewed please complete the attached form and forward it to me at the above address using the enclosed envelope.

Thank you for your assistance. We look forward to working with your child on this important issue in the coming months.

Yours sincerely

School Principal

CONSENT FORM

I (please print your name) .... have discussed
with my child (please print child's name)... in Year ......
about taking part in an interview on aggressive behaviour and I give my permission for him/her to be involved.

Signed: ....

Date: ....

AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR STUDY

Participant information

A study on aggressive behaviour is being jointly conducted by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR) in collaboration with the NSW Department of Education and Training. Your school is one of a number of schools invited to participate.

This study involves personal interviews with students who were recently involved in an aggressive incident at school. As you were recently involved in such an incident, you have been asked to be interviewed. The purpose of the interview is to get **your version of what happened** during the incident in which you were involved. It is a chance for you to tell your story and to say how you feel about what happened. All your responses at interview will remain strictly confidential, with only the researchers having access to them. (Your interview will not be shown to anyone, neither to school personnel such as the school counsellor or the principal, nor to any teachers or friends.) This information will not be used in any way for disciplinary purposes in response to your incident. Finally, neither you, nor your school will be identified when the results are compiled.

Please remember that your participation is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time you wish. The school counsellor has also been informed that interviews are taking place, so if you feel you need to speak to a counsellor, he or she will be available to speak to you.

We hope you will agree to participate in this study. Your story is important to us.

If you would like any further information, or have any concerns about your participation, please call Dr Anne Grunseit at the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics on 9231 9190.

APPENDIX G: QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW GUIDE

<u>School Violence Project - Interview Guide</u>

The overriding outcome of the interviews is an understanding why this fight occurred between these particular people, at that particular time, in that particular place.[37] In addition, we would also like to know why, at other times the interviewee has been in conflict with someone (either the person in the current situation or another situation), it has not escalated to violence. Therefore, the qualitative interviews should:

1. Elicit a detailed description of actual incidents and preceding events of physical assault on school premises from the point of view of both victim and perpetrator (or mutual participants).

2. Identify points of conflict within the narrative that did not escalate to physical violence despite having potential to do so – this would include exploring the interviewee's interaction with the other participant where there was conflict but no assault, and also, the interviewees' interaction with others where there was conflict.

3. Document the interaction between victims/perpetrators of physical assault and school disciplinary practices/authority figures.

4. Gather interviewees' opinion of the disciplinary practices of their schools.

5. Gain information on the expected and actual consequences (apart from disciplinary action) of physical assaults (in order to see what benefits may attenuate the ability of school discipline to detract from becoming involved in fights).

Generally speaking, the actual questions asked in each interview will depend very much on the trajectory of the individual interviewee's stories. However, there are a number of areas that need to be explored in all interviews as outlined below. Note that it is not necessary to ask these questions verbatim, or in the exact, same way each time. Further, the language in the actual interviews will be less formal than given here, and would be modified to the circumstances as the interviewees' reveal their stories.

Important issues to pick up on are:

· Any information on how the school reacts (or doesn't react) on disciplinary issues (for example, if they describe fighting in the classroom ask what did the teacher do, or was the teacher there).

· If they mention being teased or bullied, find out where and when this tends to occur and whether there are any school authority figures around when it happens.

· If they describe bullying/teasing happening intermittently, get them to try and identify if there are any apparent triggers for the stopping and starting of this behaviour.

· If their parents approach the school, it is important to find out how the child feels about that – whether they are pleased, embarrassed or hopeful it will change the outcome of the disciplinary process. If the parent does not meet with the school but had the opportunity to do so, we also need to know how they feel about that and how that impacts on the perceived fairness of the punishment (if any).

Warm-up/demographics:

Give the student a chance to settle into the interview with some general questions about themselves.

Specific questions: What year are you in? How old are you? Do you live with your Mum and Dad? Do you have any brothers or sisters? (Get whether siblings are older/younger, male/female, live at home); How are you finding school this year (apart from incident)? Do you enjoy your subjects? Are you involved in any sports?

Get them to describe what they like about their favourite teacher (if they have one) or the one whose class they enjoy the best. Get them to also describe what makes their worst teacher.

You were involved in a fight a couple of weeks ago [or whatever time period was], and what I would like to do is to get you to tell me in as much detail as you can what happened. However, I don't want to just get what happened on the actual day you were involved in the fight, I would like to get the whole story from when you first encountered this person, and your interactions with them up to the fight and also after. So I would like to get the whole picture, if you like, of the circumstances around what happened. As I said before [in Consent discussion prior to interview] this information will not be passed onto the school so please don't be worried if what you tell me is different from what you may have said to your parents or the principal. What is most important here is that we get the WHOLE story in DETAIL from YOUR perspective.

First encounter (if first encounter was not the incident in question):

Now I want you to think back to the very first time that you noticed X [insert name of other participant] – doesn't matter if it was insignificant, I just would like to start with that very first time.

Specific questions: What happened during that first encounter with X? Where were you? What were you both doing? Did you know anything about X [like heard anything through friends or anyone else]? What did you think when you first noticed them? Did you have any positive or negative feelings towards them?

Subsequent encounters:

Get them to fully describe their successive encounters with the other person. You need to pay particular attention to points of tension and how these were dealt with.

Specific questions: How often did you see X after that first encounter? Under what circumstances do you see him/her? [At sport, in class, in playground, on bus etc]. [For each encounter where appropriate ask:] Did you talk to X? [If yes] What was said? How did that encounter make you feel? What did you think of X and what they did/said? Did your opinion of X change because of this encounter? [If yes], how and why did it change? Did you at any time during or after that encounter feel like getting into fight with him/her? Did you (get into a fight)? [If yes get description]. [If they did feel like getting into a fight but didn't ask] what stopped you from getting into a fight? How did *not* fighting X when you wanted to make you feel? Did you mention the encounter to anyone else? [If yes] what did they say? How did that make you feel – did it help? [If no] Did you want to tell someone? [If yes] Who? Why didn't you tell them about it?

Other encounters:

These questions are similar to above in so far as they are intended to elicit information about circumstances where there is tension but no physical assault. In this case, however, the questions relate to whether the interviewee has been in this situation with people apart from person X (with which they had the fight where a suspension resulted).

Specific questions: Have you ever been in a situation like this before? [If yes] how was that conflict resolved? Did you feel like hitting that person? Did you actually hit them? [If no, but wanted to] How come you didn't get into a fight? What were the consequences, do you think, of not getting into a fight? What do you think the consequences may have been if you had got into a fight with that person?

Actual fight:

Get them to fully describe the day they had the fight. You need to ask to them to "walk you through it", that is the sequence of events as they occurred and their feelings at each juncture. Find out how it ended and how long it would have continued if the event that stopped it had not happened? Ensure you elicit details on who was there, where each episode occurred so if the context changed how and why did it change? Be sure to find out if any authority figures were involved at any point and what their behaviour was (as seen by the interviewee) and how did that impact on events as they happened? Ask them to speculate on what they thought the other person was thinking, and how that impacted on their (the interviewee's) thinking/actions?

Further questions: Did anything else unusual apart from the fight happen that day? Did you have any idea that morning that the fight would happen? What do you think could have changed your mind about [active participant]/got you out of [passive participant] being in the fight? If you could change things, what would you have done differently if anything? Did you think about it much afterwards? Did your thoughts/feelings about the fight change as time passed?

Disciplinary action:

[They should have described how the fight ended under the above, which may involve the appearance of an authority figure. If not, ask:]

Specific questions: When did the fight first come to the attention of a teacher/principal/other staff member? What did they do? How were you disciplined? Who was in charge of the disciplinary process? What did the principal [or whoever was meting out the discipline] say? Did he/she make reference to any specific rules about student behaviour? [If yes] what were they? Did you know about these rules before you had the fight? Do you think they are fair? What kind of disciplinary action were you expecting to receive? What disciplinary measures were you actually subjected to? Do you think it was fair? Were you offered any assistance (e.g., counselling, informal help)? How did you feel when [you were on suspension or whatever they were subjected to]? Do you think the discipline you received would stop you from getting into a fight again? Do you think that the rules are the same for everyone, or do you think some people get treated differently even though they break the same rules? [If yes] why do you think they get treated differently [really probe – what do you think the teachers/principal is trying to do by treating some people more leniently/harshly than others]? How does the fact that some people get treated differently from others make you feel? How did other people (friends, non-friend peers, family) react when they found out what happened? Did they think the discipline you received was fair?

Subsequent relationships/consequences:

Specific questions: What happens now when you see X? How do you feel? Do you feel differently about yourself since the fight? Do you think it helped the situation or did it make it worse? How has the fight changed things for you (if it has)? Does anyone treat you differently since the incident [include friends, non-friend peers, family, teachers, principal]? [If yes] how? Why do you think they treat you differently?

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NOTES

1 Unpublished data: NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research. The population denominators for these rate calculations are, respectively, the NSW population aged 12-18 (633,510) and the population of students in NSW public and private secondary schools (482,394).

2 The questions eliciting estimates of school violence do vary somewhat in terms of time period covered (e.g., the last month, 6 months, 12 months), whether the violence measure is of victimisation, perpetration or no distinction is made (such as being "involved in fighting"), the conceptualisation of physical violence as specific behaviours (e.g., hitting or kicking), or using the more mutual term "fighting", and if an attack is with or without an intention to harm the other person. However all the prevalence estimates quoted here do refer to *physical* violence in some form.

3 The precise reference period is not made clear in the study.

4 Violent girls had been suspended or expelled for violence or bringing a weapon to school or had been charged with a violent offence.

5 Some criticism has been levelled at this study due to the small number of schools, and therefore lower sensitivity to school-level differences (Hoffman & Johnson, 2000).

6 Quality of parenting was measured by a subset of questions drawn from Lempers, Clark-Lempers and Simons (1989) designed to measure the level of parental supervision and warmth, the level of parent-child involvement, consistency of discipline and parental use of violence.

7 By maximising variation in the dependent variable we increase our chance of identifying factors that influence the dependent variable.

8 We use 'short' suspensions for violent behaviour as an index of violence because 'long' suspensions are comparatively rare.

9 "Low" violence schools were defined as those that were in the lower quartile for total short suspensions for 2001 (less than 9). "Medium" violence schools were schools in the inter-quartile range for suspensions (between 9 and 40 suspensions), and "high" violence schools were from the upper quartile (40 plus short suspensions).

10 This was not always possible because there was not always a school in each stratum for violence for all districts.

11 A systematic random sample was chosen by the project liaison using the year roll as a sampling frame. This procedure was used in the case where the school had only graded classes including their roll class.

12 Given the exploratory nature of the analysis, a criterion of = .05 was used. Because of the large number of predictors to be included, only those predictors significant at the .05 level are displayed in the results tables.

13 For a detailed discussion of the rationale for using multilevel modelling, see Appendix E.

14 Note that this procedure produces estimators using pseudo maximum likelihood methods.

15 The question for percentage attacking was: "During the past 12 months, how often have you PHYSICALLY attacked another student to hurt them AT SCHOOL or on your way TO/FROM SCHOOL?".

16 This proportion is not equal to the proportion that indicated that the fight occurred in class time (Figure 2) because some of the students named sports as the subject in which the incident occurred.

17 See NSW Board of Studies Assessment Certification and Examination Manual (2002) for mandatory required hours for successful completion of subjects.

18 Seventy-one students indicated that there was one person in the fight despite being asked to include themselves in the count. These respondents have been assumed to have not included themselves and therefore were counted as having two people in the fight in total. Note also there was a large number of students who said they could not recall how many people were involved (n = 404).

19 However, note that the denominator for the estimated rates of suspension for the current sample was of those students reporting attacking another, rather than total students in the sample.

20 However, in detailed analysis, it appeared that number of siblings was confounded by mother's age and family structure: families with two or three children at home (i.e., one or two siblings) tended to have mothers aged over 40 and two parents, and of those with no siblings almost one-third were not living with either of their parents. The multivariate analysis took account of these confounding effects.

21 Although this variable was only marginally significant, given its importance as a measure of school climate, it was retained for testing in the multilevel model.

22 The school level variables (school structure) were analysed using MLWin to test for the effect of level 2 predictors (i.e., school level) on a level 1 outcome variable (i.e., probability of physically attacking another student) to be modelled. Note the degrees of freedom associated with level 2 variables are based on the number of level 2 units (i.e., schools, n = 60).

23 Feeder schools are those primary schools upon which the high schools officially draw their student population.

24 This is the estimate for the category "often" because the odds ratio reported in Table 17 is the increase in odds of attacking another student per unit increase in having reading/writing problems. That is, from "never" to "sometimes", "sometimes" to "often".

25 School climate values were: Q22 If you break the rules you still get to tell your side of the story (agree), Q26 We spend a lot of time copying from text books (often), Q29 My teachers spend more time controlling the class than teaching (sometimes), Q31 The students at this school are racist (sometimes), Q32 Kids who make racist remarks get into trouble (sometimes), and Q34 The teachers at this school stop bullying if they know about it (often).

26 Suspension data from Term 1 2002 was used. It was the most recent data available (collection of suspension data from schools was discontinued after this term whilst it underwent review).

27 Districts and schools within districts in the top quartile for short suspensions for violence were ranked "high", those in the interquartile range were ranked "medium", and those in the lowest quartile were ranked "low" for violence. Raw numbers rather than rates per head of population were used for selection in order to include districts/schools that had a comparatively high incidence of violence irrespective of the size of the school. A rate per 100,000 students (for example) may have ranked schools with low numbers of suspensions highly simply because the school population was small.

28 Unfortunately it is not feasible to calculate a truly accurate response rate as it was not always possible to determine how many students and/or their parents were actually approached by the school because this information was not consistently passed on when the response was negative. It is also likely that the pool of potential interviewees was much larger than the number actually approached. Project Liaisons were often very busy and did not have sufficient time resources to follow-up every case.

29 A small group of school principals and counsellors participated in an informal discussion about the proposed study early in 2002.

30 Delays between incident and interview mainly occurred with students from a school that required long distance travel because we tended to wait until a sufficient number of interviews had been arranged before travelling.

31 Unfortunately, due to a technical fault with the tape recorder, four interviews were completely lost and a further seven were partially erased. This fault was not discovered until transcription commenced, as both pre- and post-interview tests of recording were not affected by the fault. The lost interviews were not repeated. Detailed field notes assisted with some of the information lost in the partially erased interviews.

32 This is not unexpected given the sample is drawn from students who ended up in an incident of physical violence. However, the students were also asked about other conflicts they had experienced that did not necessarily result in a physical fight.

33 Two of the students subsequently quoted just happened to live with their grandmothers who acted in the parental role rather than their parents.

34 Out of school suspension refers to suspension where the child is kept off school premises for the period of the suspension. There are also in-school suspensions where the student is isolated from other students for both class and free time but on school grounds.

35 The options were: providing classes that are more interesting and useful, teaching better ways to respond if this happens again, providing classes that would help get a job, providing someone to talk to about my problem with my friends, providing more help with school work, helping me to develop pride in myself and providing someone to talk to about my problems at home.

36 The priority school funding variable is a DET devised indicator based on school data on:
   • The percentage of families in which no parent worked.
   • The percentage of families where any parent received a government pension or benefit.
   • The percentage of sole parent families.
   • The percentage of Aboriginal families.
   • The percentage of families in which both parents worked.
   • The average of the occupation ratings of parents, weighted by hours worked and gender.
   • The average of the highest education level of the parents.

37 Note that the understanding that the interviewee holds and describes will not necessarily be at the same level as the understanding we will come to through analysis. We will use their explanations to build our own analysis of how conflict escalates into violence. In particular, we would be interested in what are the facilitators and disruptive forces *across interviews* that shape the outcome of conflict.