

School Safety

with Derrick Crews

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US Secret Service & Dept. of Education Releases Study on School-Based Violence

The United States Secret Service and the Department of Education released their study titled, Prior Knowledge Of Potential School-Based Violence: Information Students Learn My Prevent A Targeted Attack. Its purpose was to help clarify what actions if any students took when they knew about potential school attacks. The report just released last month resulted in six key findings. However, the authors noted the study has limitations in part because so few students participated.

Participants

Of the 29 individuals who qualified for the study, only 15 actually participated. These 15 students represented eight school locations. Six had prior knowledge of a potential school shooting at their school, to which was prevented. The other nine also had prior knowledge, however the school shooting occurred.

Six Key Findings

1. *Their relationship to the attacker and how the students came to learn about the planned attack varied.* 82% of the students got the information directly from the attacker and 13% were told secondhand. Most got the information more than a day before the attack. 59% were told days or weeks before the attack.
2. *Bystanders shared information related to a threat along a continuum that ranged from bystanders who took no action to those who actively conveyed the information.* Some students who knew about a possible school shooting did nothing with the information. Others who knew needed to be somewhat persuaded before telling an adult. Finally some students opening told an adult when they were told of a potential threat.
3. *School climate affected whether bystanders came forward with information related to the threats.* Students who came forward reported having a positive relationship with an adult helped.
4. *Some bystanders disbelieved that the attacks would occur and thus did not report them.* Some students didn't tell anyone due to an unbelief the attack would occur. Some of the reasons the study gave for this was due to the attacker making the threat to attack over and over or the threats were overheard by school personnel (who did nothing) which made the students believe the threats were not serious.
5. *Bystanders often misjudged the likelihood and immediacy of the planned attack.* Students who decided not to tell an adult about the potential attacker felt they had time to figure out what to do.
6. *In some situations, parents and parental figures influenced whether the bystander reported the information related to the potential attack to school staff or other adults in positions of authority.* The adults in the student's lives helped them decide whether to come forward or not with the information of a possible school attack.

Implications

The study includes direction for adults who are in position to help prevent a school attack. A few of these suggestions are:

1. Convey to students if they report their concerns it will be kept in confidence.
2. Create positive relationships between school staff and students.
3. Greet students often calling them by name.
4. Tell students when they report a student of concern it will not mean the student will automatically face punishment or discipline.
5. Establish steps to report a threats of violence.
6. Train school staff to report when they hear potential threats to school safety, and not disregard it as youthful talk.

Summary

While the report should be viewed with caution since only 15 students were interviewed for the report, it does follow the same guidelines as the more in depth SSI study. Combining the results of this report along with others can help you create and maintain a safer school. I strongly recommend one read the entire report to see first hand all the suggestions schools should take to prevent a school attack. In addition the study provides some insightful words from students in the appendix.

Source: Prior Knowledge Of Potential School-Based Violence: Information Students Learn My Prevent A Targeted Attack, May 2008.
www.secretservice.gov/ntac/bystander_study.pdf

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