

STUDENT LIFE: SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT, SAFETY, PUNISHMENT

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INTRODUCTION

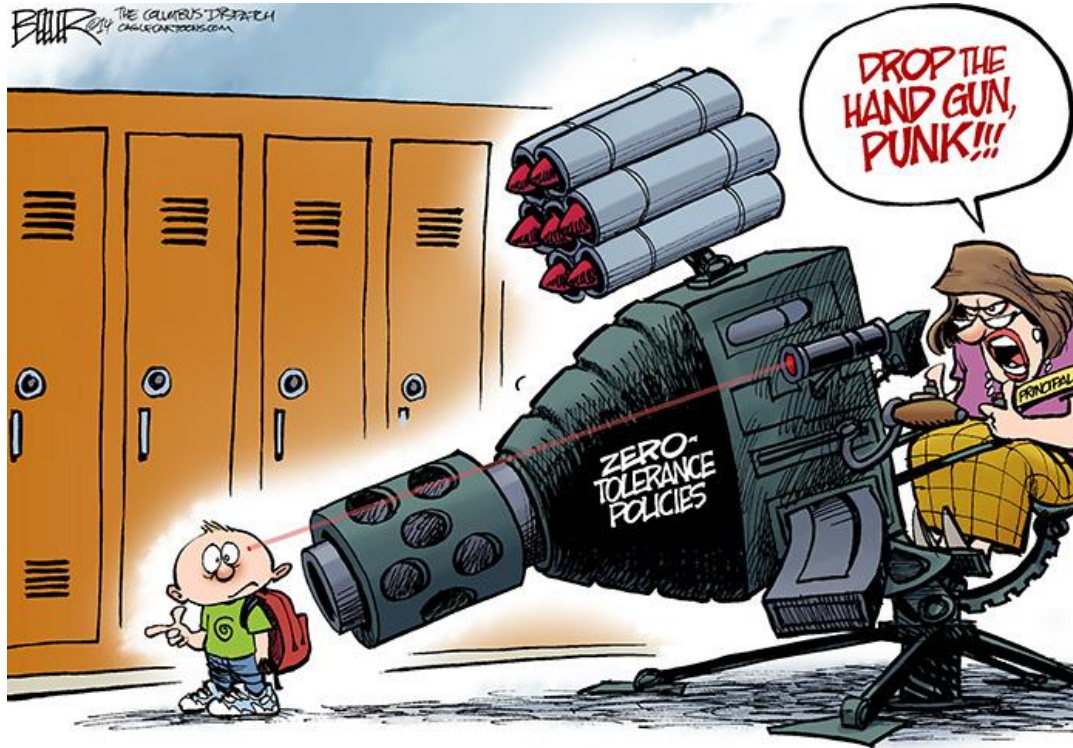
- Today, public schools across the U.S are in crisis (Kupchik, 2016).
- Parent's fear for their children's safety while in school, due to the increase violence and school shootings in the past decades.
- In response to school violence, schools have implemented stricter safety and security policies (Kupchik, 2016).
- The criminal justice system lives in the educational system, schools are starting look more like prisons, and treating children like prisoners.
- Entering some schools, children are required to step through a metal detectors while their belongings are searched through, and while in school students are under constant surveillance with little to no privacy.
- Schools have metal detectors, security guards, surveillance cameras, police officers, and sometimes police dogs are used to sniff through students' lockers (Kupchik, 2016).



SCHOOL SECURITY, SAFETY, & DISCIPLINE

- The National Center for Educational Statistics' 2009 Indicators of School Crime and Safety report showed that during the 2007-2008 school year:
 - 69% of students between 12-18 years old reported having police or security presence in their school
 - 55% of all schools and 77% of high schools used security cameras
 - 11% of high schools used random metal detector checks on students (The National Center for Education).
- Since 2011:
 - Almost 3.5 million students were suspended annually
 - If every suspension lasts about three and a half days, that means students lost 18 million days of schooling
 - Black boys and girls were suspended at four and six times the rates of their white counterparts respectively (U.S. Department of Education, 2016)
 - Disciplinary removal data confirmed that Black students are at the highest risk of given out-of-school suspension, followed by Native American and Latino students (Skiba & Losen, 2016).

ZERO-TOLERANCE POLICIES



- Along with security measures, public schools have also implemented stricter and harsher discipline policies, like Zero-tolerance policies.
- Zero-tolerance policies (emerged in the 1980s) require punishment for any student caught violating any of the school's rules, regardless of the circumstances (Kupchik, 2016).
- Students can be suspended, expelled, or even arrested for misbehaving, even if minor (e.g., tardiness, talking back to staff, dress code violations).
- Research has shown that:
 - these discipline policies are ineffective and can cause harm to students, schools, families, and communities.
 - police presence in schools can be just as ineffective and can negatively change the school environment.
 - Disproportionately affect minority students and poor students
 - Can cause more misbehavior in students, rather than reduce it (Bracy, 2011)
- Schools have shifted from being a site of academic and social achievement to a site of law enforcement, where the focus is on crimes and legal responses to problems.

SCHOOL DISCIPLINE & ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT



- School discipline policies have not provided the outcomes that were expected, when they were first implemented.
- Research shows that a student's history of suspension predicts higher rates of future antisocial behavior and higher rates of future suspensions in the long term (Skiba & Losen, 2016).
- Suspensions have shown to be associated with
 - lower academic achievement and increased risks of negative behavior
 - Higher rates of student drop out
 - Increased risk of contact with the juvenile justice system (Skiba & Losen, 2016).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

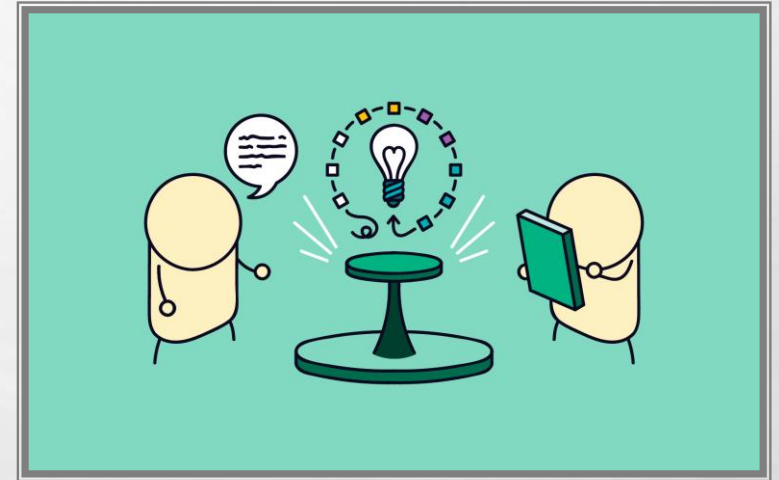


- Did you feel safe at school? Were the security measures used (metal detectors, security, police, cameras) were suffice to ensure students' safety?
- How was the school environment between security and students?
- Do you believe your school had good instruction and methods in dealing with punishment?

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

- This study used qualitative methodology and focused on exploring students' experiences in high-security high schools, as well as their perceptions of safety and discipline used in their school.
- 5 students that attended a public high school, and one parent, were interviewed.



SAMPLING & RECRUITMENT

- Participants were recruited through the distribution of flyers on social media platforms, local churches, public libraries in Waukegan and North Chicago, Illinois.
- Some participants were also recruited by using snowball sampling, as they were referred by another participant.
- All participants were asked a series of semi-structured questions regarding school safety and discipline.



FINDINGS

SAFETY

- The security measures used in high-security schools can cause negative effects on students, and they are associated with higher levels of disorder in schools (Bracy, 2011).
- When comparing the rates of student victimization, before and after the implementation of high-security measures, one will see little to no reduction in crime rates (Bracy, 2011).
- A common concern with school safety was the inconsistency experienced by some of the students and a mother.
 - “I guess they [security guards] were good to make sure, you know, people weren't skipping and, uh, not doing stuff they're not supposed to during school hours. But there are some points where, like, they were just sitting down their lazy asses on their desk and not doing anything, so.” –Shawn
 - “...every time I would go to any of the schools, high school or middle schools, I would see security guards running to the kids trying to stop fights.” –Mary (mother)
 - “...I think some of the security guards already knew me, so they didn't even care to check to see if I was bringing anything in or nothing. I mean, like I said I just came in like nothing. But then there will be other times, like people that I don't know if they were new or what not, or maybe they had somebody watching them at that time, they would be like ‘oh, yes, you need to show your I.D., and you need to do this’. It was just different every time”. –Mary (mother)

PERCEIVED SAFETY IN SCHOOL

- Students interviewed shared concerns about the ineffectiveness of security measures preventing crimes
- For example, one student was concerned because even though his high school had metal detectors, students would still possess weapons during school hours
 - “Like pocketknives, stuff like that.” -Bob
 - “Yeah, and they would even say how they do it and stuff.” -Bob
- A couple of other students and a mother expressed their concern about metal detectors not being fully used appropriately by security guards, in order to ensure safety of school
 - Some of them don't even look at the screen while it's going through the bags. The bags are going through. So, like it could be dangerous. I guess they don't pay attention sometimes to you just let it go through and they're like they're not even paying attention, or they don't want to even go in and be like, ‘ugh, have to check this person's bag’.” –Shawn
 - “...the metal detector, they can detect only some things. And I think they should have more security at different doors because the kid that got stabbed in the eye in the bathroom happened because somebody else let them in through a different door and they brought in the scissors... I think it was scissors.” –Mary (mother)

PERCEIVED SAFETY-SECURITY

- A couple of students shared their distrust in security guards, specifically, because they did not attempt to prevent violence from occurring
 - “Oh yeah. I know there’s always like fights and stuff going on.” -Bob
 - “A lot of the time they [security guards] just stood there and kind of like walked over and it seemed like they were kind of instigating fights, like they were kind of spectating rather than like putting an immediate end to any fights that occurred or anything like that.” -Sandra

FAVORITISM IN SCHOOL

- A common theme that came up during interviews was the favoritism that security would show to certain students, and the role it played in the school's safety.
 - “Like a lot of the students viewed them [security guards] more as friends than they did as personnel that were supposed to be safe, which like it didn't make me feel safe at all because it makes me think that like in a situation where something was to happen, they don't seem that prepared because they're more busy socializing with students.” -Sandra
 - “like there were some [people] that would be really close to these people [security guards] and like, they will get passes for free, like they would never have to go get a late pass. Because three of those will equal like a Saturday school, so like they would just walk into the class and they'd be like, 'oh, he's my pass'. So, they never got, like, those type of late passes.” –Shawn
 - “The securities should be a little bit more professional in how they do their job...they often tend to develop relationships with the students that become a little bit too personal and not in a bad way, you know, but sometimes those relationships get in the way that they handle things.” -Peter

POLICE OFFICERS IN SCHOOLS

- Research shows that placing police officers in schools does not have an impact on crime rates, some studies show an increase in student offenses.
- Student participants were asked about the impact of police presence on students and school environment.
- Students stated that even with police presence, there were still a number of fights during school, and students possessing weapons or drugs during school hours.
- Students also stated that police presence made them uncomfortable, not because they did something wrong, but because they felt stereotyped to be criminals or dangerous, as if they absolutely needed to have police in their school.
- Particularly, it was common for police to observe students during lunch periods, and students stated they felt like prisoners being watched in a prison cafeteria.
 - “It was like every so often they would be in the hallway and, you kind of like felt a little weird, like, ‘hey, keep your distance’ even if you had no reason to. But I guess just their presence, because, you know, it's a little bit threatening.” -Sandra

POLICE OFFICERS IN SCHOOLS

- One student shared her traumatic experience on her way to school, and the aftermath process with school police:
 - “I was like assaulted, going to like my bus stop and like I didn't feel I mean, I didn't really feel safe. But then the police came and even the police didn't really make me feel safe because, like, they just asked me questions and they kind of dismissed it. Like there was nothing else that happened afterwards. I mean, I did see like patrol cars and stuff. But I feel like surveillance does not equate to safety, if that makes any sense.” –Sandra
- Students did not feel any safer with police officers or security inside the school
 - “...they [students] would know their way around it. They'll find a place where there is no security because they are always around the same places, and there's always like a place where there isn't security, and they would just go there.”

PERCEPTION OF PUNISHMENT

- Research shows an important link between the perceived fairness of policies and their actual effectiveness (Bracy, 2011).
- Schools in which students perceived the rules to be fair and fairly applied, had lower levels of disorder and result in safer schools, but schools that were inconsistent with rule enforcement and more punitive, were counterproductive to safety (Bracy, 2011).
- Students were asked about the application and effectiveness of punishment in their school
 - “...they’ll just put the kid in the freaking room and have them just sit there and do nothing, which I think is really redundant. Like. Why are you going to bring them to school just for them to sit and not learn? I feel like it’s very contradicting...the priority should be to learn, but they don’t even let them bring their homework or anything in there. And they do in school suspensions for stupid things like tardiness or talking back to a teacher.” –Sandra
 - “...there's sometimes you can't even control like being late, like sometimes we have to go to the bathroom. Our teachers don't let us go to the bathroom. So, you have to use that five minutes you have [between classes] to go to the restroom. And, you know, sometimes you can't control your yourself.” -Shawn

PERCEIVED FAIRNESS IN PUNISHMENT

- There is a disproportionate representation of Black students in school discipline settings.
- Black boys and girls are suspended at three and six times the rates than their White counterparts, often punished harsher and more often for the same misbehavior than other students.
- In the 2015-2016 school year, Black students made up about 16% of the school-age population, and 39% of those who received an out-of-school suspension (Bell, 2020).
- The overly use of school discipline can crucially impact students' achievement, cause verbal or physical bullying, or facilitate dropping out of school altogether.
 - “A lot of teachers also like rely on the security guards, like forcefully remove students from the classroom even if they haven't acted up or acted violently towards them. But that's like another phenomenon that happens a lot, the like. And it always tended to be like Black students, unfortunately, where like Black students were being kind of forced off of the classroom because teachers felt ‘unsafe’.” -Sandra

FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research should seek a larger sample for students and parents

Furthermore, future research should explore the impact of socioeconomic class on perceived fairness of safety and punishment

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