

CHAPTER THREE

THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF SCHOOL VIOLENCE

Data on the incidence of violence in schools are available from a number of different sources including the Department of School Education, police statistics, surveys and research papers and evidence presented to the Committee. The following discussion reviews available data brought to the attention of the Committee during the course of its Inquiry.

3.1 DEPARTMENT OF SCHOOL EDUCATION DATA

3.1.1 Critical Incident Reports

The Department of School Education collects data on violent incidents through Critical Incident Reports completed and submitted by school personnel when a critical incident occurs. This reporting system was introduced by the previous Minister for School Education, and relates to all types of critical incidents, such as fires, and including serious violence and bomb threats. Any increase in Incident Reports therefore does not necessarily reveal an increase in violence. It was suggested to the Committee in a preliminary briefing in 1993 that generally the type of violence had not changed in any way in recent years, despite suggestions in the media (Davidson Briefing, 17.09.93).

The Director-General of School Education, Dr Ken Boston, provided the Committee with examples of incidents that have been the subject of Critical Incident Reports, and which together could constitute "a fairly typical sort of day" in terms of reports received. The examples included:

- a student tripping another following an altercation in the playground, leading to serious injury;
- the suspension of a child for a day for swearing openly and loudly at his teacher and biting another teacher on the arm;
- a Year 6 student going wild with a cricket bat and injuring people;
- intruders coming into the school and abusing the principal; and
- a bomb threat telephoned to a school (Boston Evidence, 29.07.94)

These types of incidents, while considered violent, reportable and unacceptable behaviour, are not necessarily the sort of violence which would be reported to the police as a matter of course. The incidents involving intruders and the bomb threat were reported to the police by school authorities, and a parent of a student reported the incident involving the cricket bat (Tabled Document).

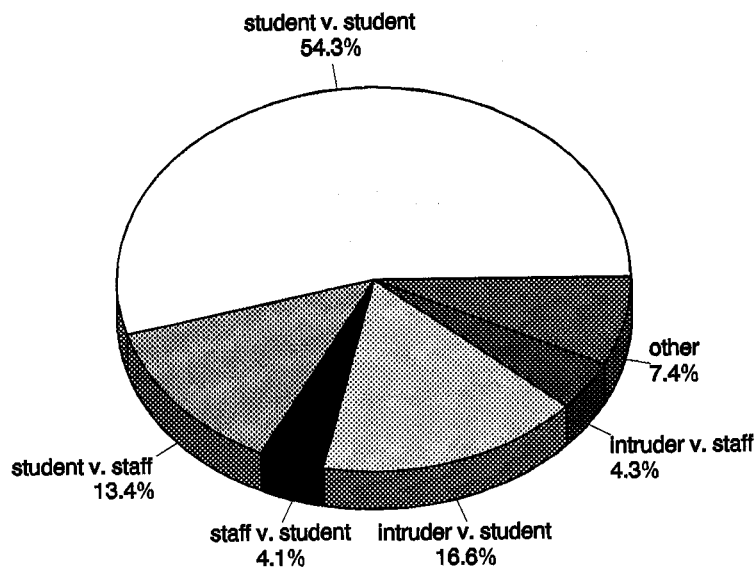
In 1993, there were 412 acts of violence recorded in Critical Incident Reports. In 1994, 1,315 violent incidents were reported by schools to the Department of School Education. A

further 254 were reported in Term 1, 1995. Of the cases reported in the first two terms of 1994, the Committee heard that 13% involved only a threat of violence (Boston Evidence, 29.07.94).

The limitations of various sources of data are discussed in Section 3.13. The Committee found that there remains a degree of confusion regarding the requirements for reporting critical incidents to the Department. While the mechanism was established in 1991, the Committee believes that the utilisation of the critical incident reporting system continues to evolve. It is therefore difficult to separate changes in reporting practices from any actual increase in the number of violent incidents.

Details of the perpetrators and victims of the 1994 incidents, where available, are indicated in Figure Thirty-Two.

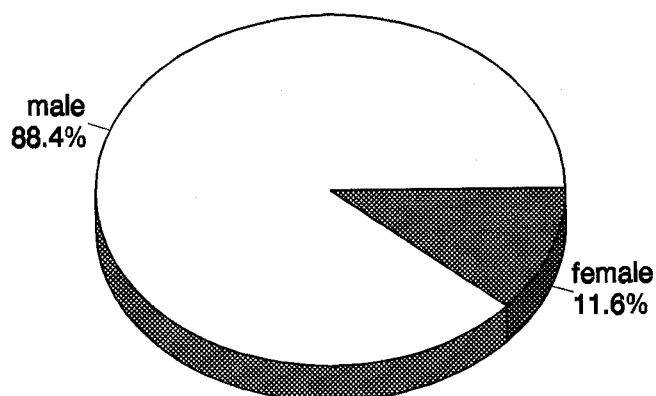
Figure Thirty-Two
Perpetrators and Victims of School Violence
Violent Critical Incident Reports, 1994



Source: Boston, 1995:4.

Of the incidents involving student assailants where gender was specified in the report, the perpetrators of these incidents were overwhelmingly male, as indicated in Figure Thirty-Three.

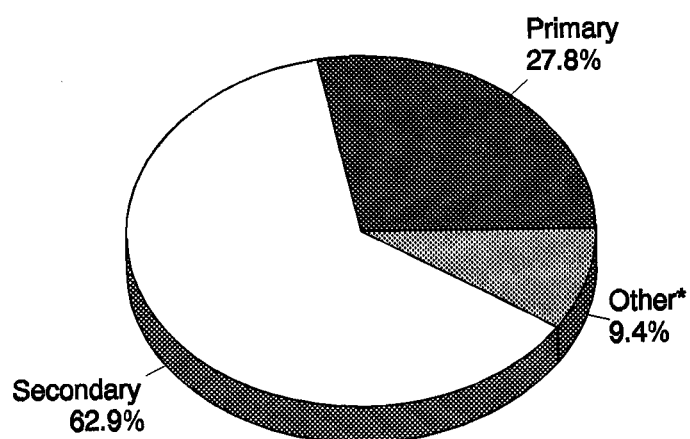
Figure Thirty-Three
Gender of Perpetrators
Violent Critical Incident Reports, 1994



Source: Boston, 1995:5.

The majority of violent critical incidents occurred in secondary schools, as Figure Thirty-Four indicates.

Figure Thirty-Four
School Violence by Type of School
Violent Critical Incident Reports, 1994

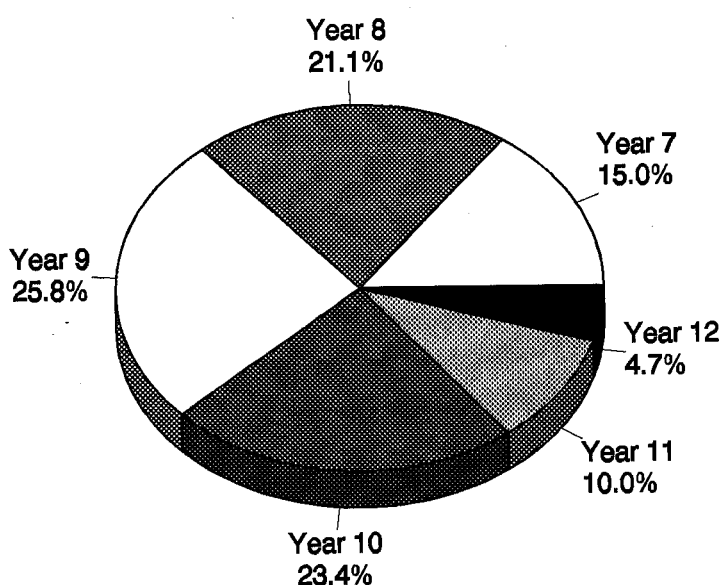


Source: Boston, 1995:5

*Includes Central Schools (63); SSPs (58); Infants, Field Studies (2).

Students in Years 9 and 10 were responsible for approximately half the incidents involving secondary students where school year was stated, as Figure Thirty-Five indicates.

Figure Thirty-Five
Perpetrators of Secondary School Violence by School Year
Violent Critical Incident Reports, 1994



Source: Boston, 1995:5.

Weapons were involved in 15% of cases. The types of weapons involved are discussed in Section 3.5. The Committee heard that in most of the incidents in Terms One and Two, the weapon was used to threaten rather than injure.

Incidents of groups of students being involved in fights or brawls were relatively unusual (Boston Evidence, 29.07.94). Of the 1,315 critical incidents involving violence in 1994, 59 (5%) involved serious injury.

3.1.2 Suspension data

Suspensions generally are not regarded as critical incidents requiring reports to the Director-General and the Minister. Prior to the introduction of the present system of Critical Incident Reports, suspension figures were the only overall set of figures relevant to violence maintained by the Department. However, students may be suspended for a variety of reasons, and all such students have not necessarily acted violently. The data must therefore be used cautiously in relation to school violence.

■ Long Suspensions

Table Four shows the number of long suspensions for the previous six years in government schools across New South Wales. Prior to 1993, figures were collected only for suspensions of greater than 19 days. As can be seen from this table, there was a peak in suspension rates in 1989, with the figures dropping in 1990. In 1991, the figures were still below the rate recorded in 1989. The 1992 figures were higher, but trends were not standardised across the various regions.

Table Four
Number of Long Suspensions in New South Wales
Government Schools by region (1989 - 1994)

Education Region	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993*	1994*
Met East	27	13	8	9	152	279
Met North	7	18	25	22	134	377
Met SW	76	75	94	72	391	675
Met West	44	28	33	62	344	562
Hunter	67	57	70	41	376	293
Nth Coast	7	20	4	32	38	194
Nth West	18	16	7	13	125	254
Riverina	5	8	2	6	36	122
Sth Coast	24	31	32	45	66	357
Western	11	8	5	7	67	240
TOTALS	286	274	280	309	1732	3353

* Data not directly comparable to previous years - includes all long suspensions of five days or more.

Source: Boston, 1994:3, Boston, 1995:1.

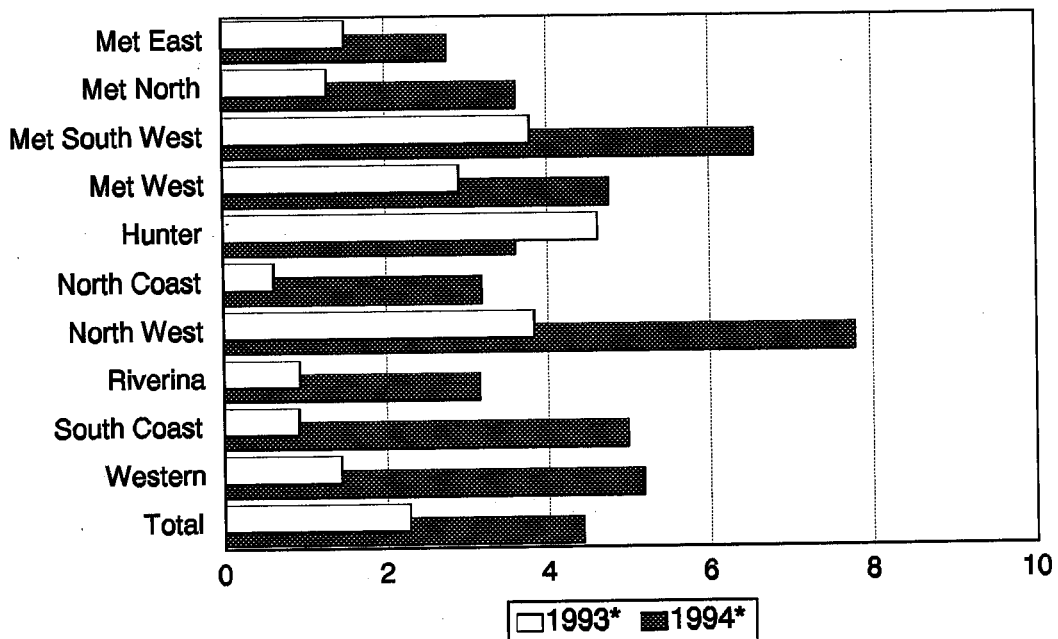
Since 1993, data have been collected for all long suspensions (suspensions of five days or more) and all short suspensions (periods of up to 4 days).

The 1994 figures demonstrate a substantial increase in numbers of long suspension across all areas of the States with the exception of the Hunter where the number decreased. The Metropolitan South West and Metropolitan West continue to record the highest numbers of

long suspensions. The upward trend in the number of suspensions appears to be continuing in 1995. Each region has recorded more suspensions in Term 1, 1995 than in Term 1, 1994 (Boston, 1995:1).

Figure Thirty-Six demonstrates the rate of long suspensions per 1,000 students for each region in 1993 and 1994, based on the 1993 student population in each region.

Figure Thirty-Six
Rate of Long Suspensions per 1,000 students by Education Region
1993 - 1994



Boston, 1994:3; 1995:1.

* Based on 1993 student population

The South Coast and North Coast regions recorded the most substantial increases in the rate of long suspensions. Both areas reported more than 5 times as many long suspensions in 1994 than in 1993. The rate of long suspensions in Riverina and Western regions increased more than threefold over the same period. However, the rates for all these areas had been below the State average for 1993.

The North West Region has the highest overall rate, followed by the Metropolitan South West and Western regions of the State.

■ Short Suspensions

Short suspensions are suspensions of up to four days duration. The following table reports the number of short suspensions in government schools for 1993 and 1994.

Table Five

**Number of Short Suspensions in New South Wales
Government Schools by region (1993-1994)**

Education Region	No. of Students (1993)	Suspensions (1993)	Suspensions (1994)
Met East	100,834	1669	2103
Met North	104,248	2348	2676
Met South West	103,076	2913	3680
Met West	118,017	2909	3333
Hunter	81,439	1873	2179
North Coast	61,048	467	1634
North West	32,613	753	1158
Riverina	38,677	840	1341
South Coast	71,667	1629	2363
West	46,425	1269	1616
TOTAL	758,048	16670	22083

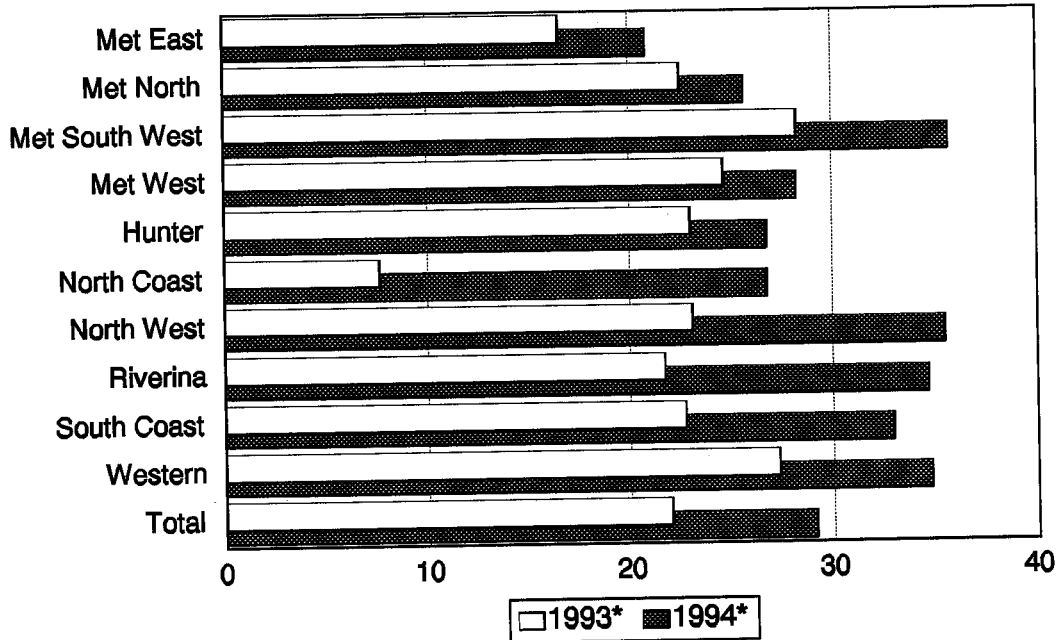
Source: Boston, 1994:3; 1995:1

All regions recorded more short suspensions in 1994 than 1993. This appears to be continuing in 1995. With the exception of the Metropolitan West region, numbers of long suspensions in Term 1, 1995 are higher than in Term 1, 1994 (Boston, 1995:1).

As a result of different student populations in the various regions, it is not possible to make comparisons between regions from these data. Figure Thirty-Seven shows movements in the rates of short suspensions per 1,000 students, from 1993 to 1994 based on the 1993 student population.

The increase in the rate of short suspensions was most marked in the North Coast region, where the rate increased by 350%. However, the rate for this region in 1993 was considerably lower than other regions, and the 1994 rate is still below the state average. Regions with rates above this average include Metropolitan South West, the North West region, the Western region, the Riverina and the South Coast.

Figure Thirty-Seven
Rate of Short Suspension per 1,000 students by Education Region
1993 - 1994



Boston, 1994:3; 1995:1.

* Based on 1993 student population

It should be noted that these data are based on numbers of suspensions, rather than numbers of students suspended. It may be the case that a single student is suspended on a number of occasions during a year.

These suspension data are not available according to gender. The Committee believes that such a breakdown of data would be beneficial as research suggests there are differences in the types of violence engaged in by boys and girls. The Committee, for example, heard that the violence by girls tends to be in the form of verbal harassment, with very little resort to physical violence whereas boys tend toward physical violence (Davidson Briefing, 17.09.93).

While there have been increases in suspensions in most regions, the patterns are generally not uniform across all schools in a particular region. Where particular schools demonstrate a problem, the Department of School Education is attempting to intervene to identify problems and solutions. The Committee believes that maintaining records on the reason for suspensions would better enable information on suspensions for violent behaviour to be monitored and appropriate intervention strategies to be developed.

RECOMMENDATION 1

That the Minister for Education ensure that records relating to the suspension of students include

- the sex of the student; and
- the reason for the suspension

so that information on suspensions for violent behaviour can be obtained, trends monitored, and appropriate intervention strategies developed.

3.1.3 Exclusion Data

Exclusion from a school may take place when a long suspension has failed to resolve the initial problem and it is considered that the student might develop self-discipline and co-operative behaviour in a suitable alternative school. If regional staff cannot arrange a suitable alternative school, an application for expulsion or a return to the school are the only other options (Department of School Education, 1994a:4).

When a request for exclusion data was made to the Director-General, he informed the Committee that exclusion data have only been collected centrally since 1993. That material is reported below in Table Six.

In evidence to the Committee, the Director-General indicated that the exclusion rate was declining. In commenting on this pattern, the Director-General stated that he found it

very comforting. It means I think that our welfare programs are working and that we are getting a lot of support from other agencies (Boston Evidence, 29.07.94).

However, while this trend had been evident from mid-1993 to mid-1994, there have been 69 exclusions in Term One, 1995, which is higher than in any term during 1994 (Boston, 1995:2).

Table Six
Number of Exclusions from Government Schools
by Region (1993-1994)

Education Region	No. of Students (1993)	No. of Exclusions (1993)	No. of Exclusions (1994)
Met East	100,834	35	26
Met North	104,248	52	58
Met South West	103,076	66	31
Met West	118,017	25	28
Hunter	81,439	28	9
North Coast	61,048	1	16
North West	32,613	4	10
Riverina	38,677	2	5
South Coast	71,667	24	23
West	46,425	14	21
TOTAL	758,048	251	227

Source: Boston, 1994:3; 1995:2

3.1.4 Expulsion Data

The Committee has heard that students involved in serious acts of violence may be expelled:

if the incident were malevolent and malicious ... the student would be suspended ... if it appeared to be deliberate, it is likely that within two days, or even less time, there would be an application for expulsion - that is the prerogative of the principal (Davidson Briefing, 17.09.93).

The procedures state that expulsion may be recommended following violent behaviour or the bringing of weapons to school, irrespective of any police action taken (Department of School Education, 1994a:4-5).

The Director-General of the Department of School Education has supplied the Committee with details of expulsions from 1988 to 1994 which are recorded in Table Seven.

Table Seven
Number of Expulsions from Government Schools,
1988 - 1994

Education Region	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
Met East	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Met North	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Met SW	0	0	0	3	1	5	0
Met West	3	3	3	0	0	0	0
Hunter	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nth Coast	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nth West	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Riverina	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sth Coast	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Western	4	1	0	0	0	0	1
TOTAL	9	2	1	3	2	5	1

Source: Boston, 1993:5; 1995:2.

The Committee believes that data relating to the suspension, exclusion and expulsion of students should be publicly available. Publication in the Department of School Education's Annual Report would ensure that the data is accessible and that trends can be monitored.

RECOMMENDATION 2

That the Minister for Education ensure that suspension, exclusion and expulsion data are published in the Department of School Education's Annual Report.

3.2 DATA RELATING TO NON-GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

Representatives from the Catholic education system and independent schools gave evidence before the Committee during the course of its Inquiry.

■ Catholic Education System

A total of 213,997 students are enrolled in Catholic schools in NSW. There are eleven separate diocesan systems and 58 independently managed non-systemic schools within the

state. The Catholic Education Commission, while representing the eleven autonomous systems, does not manage them on a day-to-day basis. The Committee heard evidence from both a representative of the Commission, and a representative of the Parramatta diocese.

The Committee heard that within the Catholic education system, administrative requirements relating to the reporting of incidents are the responsibility of the various diocesan school authorities. The Catholic Education Commission maintains no centralised statistics (Baker Evidence, 08.11.93).

Information was however provided by the representative from the Parramatta diocese. In 1992, of the 38,279 students in this diocese, 530 students were identified through referral procedures as exhibiting inappropriate behaviour. Of these students, 12.5% were classified as being behaviour disordered, and three of these students were carrying out violent behaviour which required intervention (Jackson Evidence, 08.11.93).

Within the Parramatta diocese, the school principal would consult the area administrator for the cluster when considering actions following a violent incident. The parents of the child would then be asked to be a part of the intervention approach regarding the child's behaviour.

■ Independent Schools

The Association of Independent Schools of NSW is a service organisation to which independent schools can choose to belong, although services are provided to all 250 independent schools in NSW. These schools have a total enrolment of approximately 65,000 students. While the Association has not conducted any statistical survey on the incidence of violence in these schools, the number of schools seeking assistance and support for students in difficulty has increased significantly in the last two years, particularly in relation to behaviour disorders. The Association's Special Education Directorate provides assistance to help schools deal with the needs of those children, both socially and educationally (Chapman Evidence, 08.11.93). Private schools are not required to report violent incidents to the Association of Independent Schools (Chapman Evidence, 08.11.93).

From the perspective of a single school, the Committee heard that while the number of cries for help from children or parents to teachers and school counsellors may have significantly increased in the last ten to fifteen years, there has been no significant increase in violence accompanying this trend (Rae Evidence, 08.11.93).

However, the Committee heard evidence from other teachers in independent schools which suggested behavioural problems are becoming more evident. A representative of the Independent Teachers' Association suggested that

the perception of teachers is that verbal abuse has increased markedly and that there has been some degree probably of shifts in physical violence Certainly, primary teachers are raising more and more the problems they are having with anti-social behaviour in younger children (Hickey Evidence, 26.04.94).

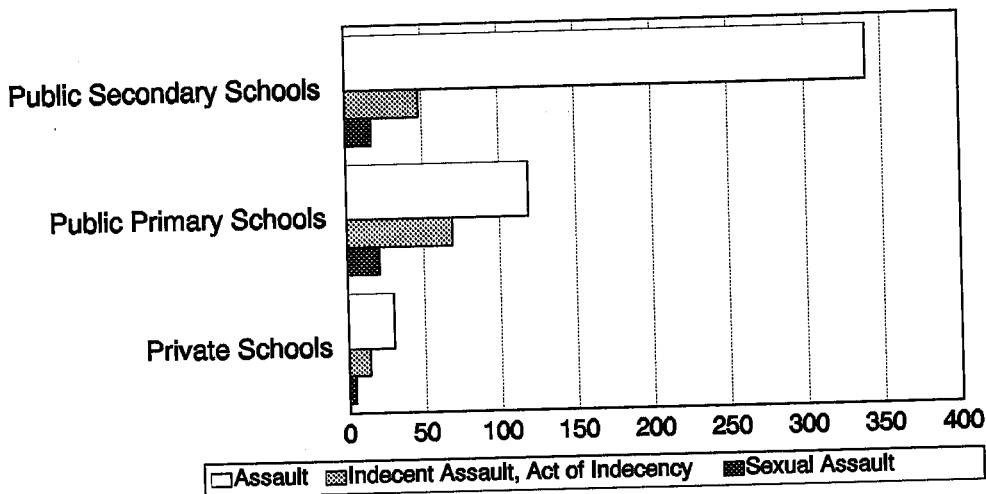
3.3 POLICE DATA

Some information on police involvement in school violence is provided by the Department of School Education's Critical Incident Reports, as the report form has a box to be ticked if "police or outside agency" are involved. **Of the 1,315 violent critical incidents recorded in 1994, 618 (47%) involved contact with the police.** Of the 517 violent incidents in Term 1, 1995, 110 (21%) involved police. However, these cases include incidents in which police may have entered school grounds in pursuit of violent offenders and which may have been reported to education authorities, which cannot be classed as school violence.

Similar limitations apply to data from the New South Wales Police Service. Reports of assaults on school grounds made to the police are collated by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research. The Bureau began compiling such statistics in 1990. **In 1990 there were 282 cases reported to the police. From April 1994 to March 1995, 541 incidents of assault were recorded as occurring on school grounds.**

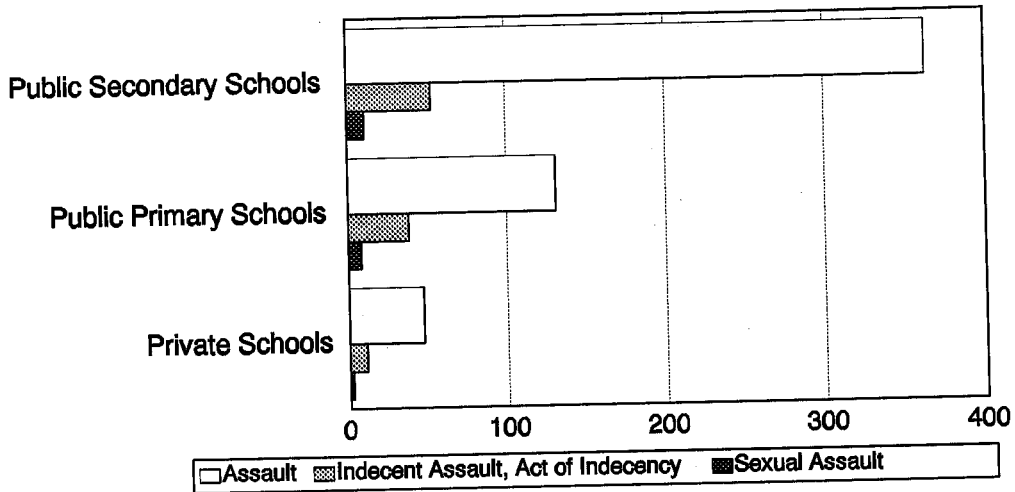
Data relating to violent offences on school premises in 1993, and incidents for the twelve months from April 1994 to March 1995 are shown in Figures Thirty-Eight and Thirty-Nine respectively.

Figure Thirty-Eight
Violent Offences in Schools by School Type
1993



Source: NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research

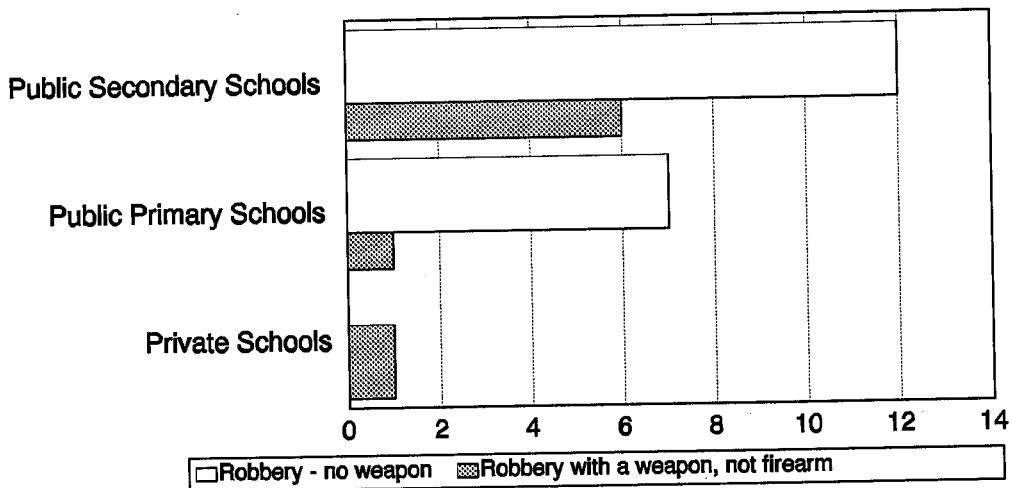
Figure Thirty-Nine
Violent Incidents in Schools by School Type
April 1994 - March 1995



Source: NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research

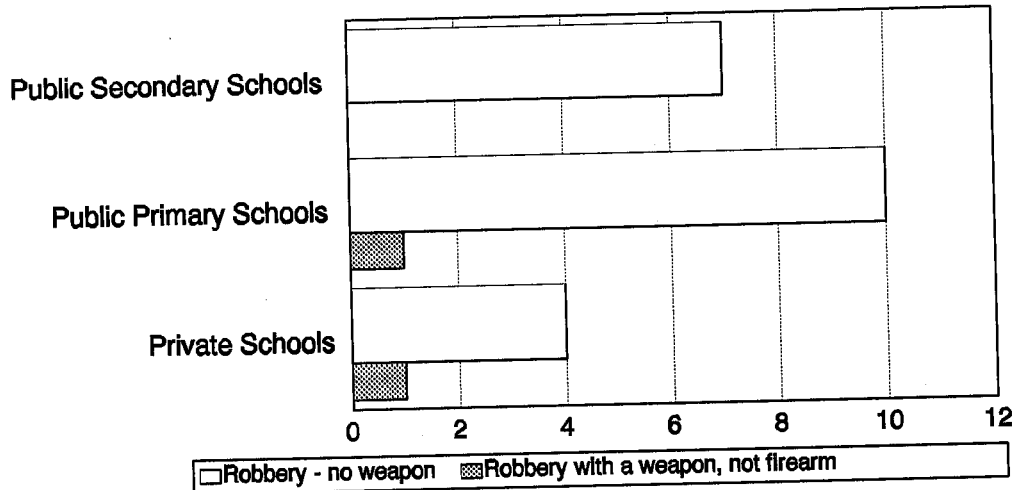
Data relating to robbery offences on school premises in 1993, and incidents for the twelve months from April 1994 to March 1995 are shown in Figures Forty and Forty-One respectively.

Figure Forty
Robbery Offences in Schools by School Type
1993



Source: NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research

Figure Forty-One
Robbery Incidents in Schools by School Type
April 1994 to March 1995



Source: NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research

In 1991, the Minister for School Education and Youth Affairs directed principals to report to police all assaults on a student on school premises by any unknown adult, which may have contributed to the increase in reported assaults. The extent to which the rise is attributable to an increased willingness to report incidents of violence to the police, rather than any actual change in the number of assaults occurring on school grounds, remains unclear.

In addition, it is difficult to attribute all incidents of assault and robbery to students. These incidents may include crimes that occur outside school hours that do not involve students. The limitations of police data are further discussed in Section 3.13.2. The Bureau of Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research has carried out a more detailed analysis of assaults on school premises from 1990 to 1992. Data from this study is presented in Section 3.3.1 below.

In commenting on the available data in evidence to the Committee, the Director of the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research suggested that, in the period for which data have been collated, there had been a very marginal change in the risk of assault in schools. Given that there are nearly 1,000,000 school children in NSW the 408 cases in 1992 gave an official risk of approximately 0.04% (Weatherburn Evidence, 30.7.93).

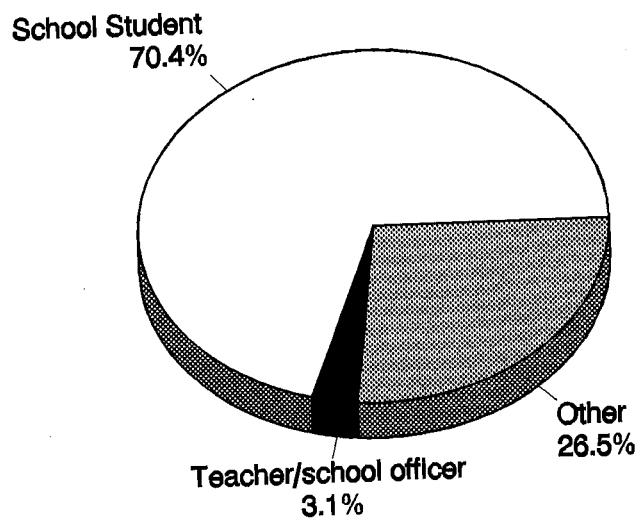
To place the above data in perspective, the Committee was also informed that it can be clearly stated that **the risk of being assaulted outside school grounds is substantially higher than that of being assaulted within school grounds.** The Director of the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research asserted that

If I were a parent ... I'd be encouraging [children] to stay in school - it's obviously a much safer place to be than going to discos or going to pubs or going to entertainment venues that attract large numbers of people intoxicated with alcohol (Weatherburn Evidence, 30.7.93).

3.3.1 Analysis of Assaults on School Premises, 1990 - 1992

The Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research has released a report, *Assaults on School Premises*, detailing the result of a study of police data from 1990 to 1992. Figure Forty-Two reveals that of the 707 incidents for which the occupation of the offender was recorded, a significant majority were perpetrated by students. However, occupation was not recorded in an additional 170 incidents.

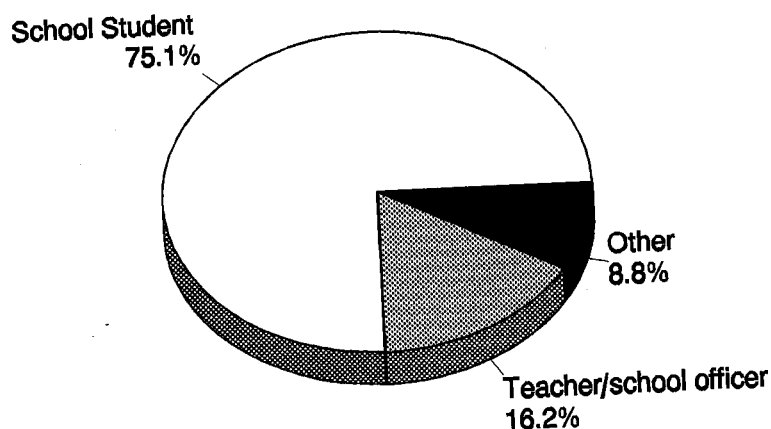
Figure Forty-Two
Type of Offender in Recorded Assault Incidents on School Premises
1990 - 1992



Source: Trimboli and Bonney, 1994:14

Details of the type of victim in 786 recorded assault incidents on school premises are shown in Figure Forty-Three. Data in this figure does not include 91 incidents for which the occupation of the victim was not recorded.

Figure Forty-Three
Type of Victim in Recorded Assault Incidents on School Premises
1990 - 1992



Source: Trimboll and Bonney, 1994:14

A total of 406 incidents of assault were recorded as having occurred between school students on school premises between 1990 and 1992, which accounts for 46% of the total sample.

Table Eight demonstrates that in every Department of School Education region except the South Coast, the rate of assault between students in 1992 was higher than in 1990. The largest increase occurred in the Hunter region, with a 1992 rate over three times higher than the 1990 rate.

Table Eight

Trend in Rates* of Assault between Government School Students by School Region, NSW, 1990 - 1992.

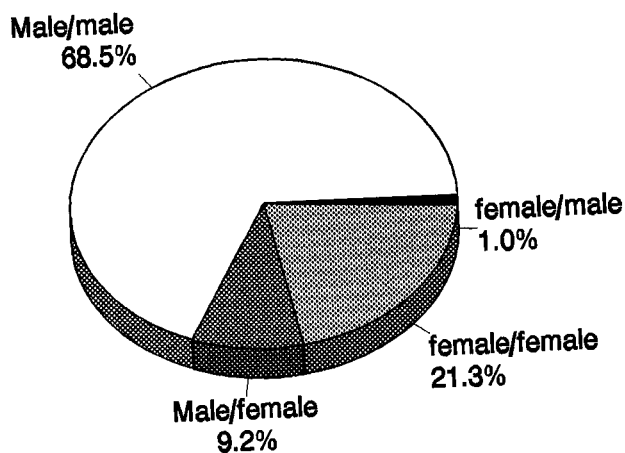
School Region	1990	1991	1992
Hunter	6.3	12.6	21.0
Metropolitan East	6.0	16.1	14.9
Metropolitan North	9.9	19.8	19.4
Metropolitan South West	15.1	16.9	24.5
Metropolitan West	9.4	15.4	22.1
North Coast	12.3	15.3	16.6
North West	9.2	18.3	12.2
Riverina	13.2	13.0	28.6
South Coast	24.8	17.3	9.9
Western	28.8	19.6	38.8

* Rate per 100,000 students

Source: Trimboli and Bonney, 1994:16

Figure Forty-Four demonstrates that the majority of these assaults were perpetrated by male students against other male students. However, a significant proportion were assaults by female students against female students.

Figure Forty-Four
Gender of Victim by Gender of Offender in Recorded Incidents of Assault between Students 1990-1992



Source: Trimboli and Bonney, 1994:14

Assaults on School Premises also reveals that in relation to assaults between students:

- The vast majority of recorded incidents resulted in no injury at all or involved abrasions, bruises or minor cuts.
- 97.5% of all recorded incidents occurred on school days.
- 91.9% of all recorded incidents which occurred on school days also occurred in core school hours, with the largest single category of incidents occurring during lunchtime.
- The school playground was the location of 63.1% of all recorded incidents which occurred during core school hours and the location of 66.7% of all incidents which occurred at other times on school days.
- 85.5% of all incidents involved one victim and one offender, with most victims and offenders being of similar age, and the most common age being 14 or 15 years.
- A weapon of some type was involved in 12.3% of all recorded incidents but in only one case was the weapon a gun (a replica pistol).
- Most recorded incidents resulted from unexplained physical assaults (40.3%), arguments (26.3%), and/or retaliations (21.2%).
- Police action against the offender differed according to the type of assault: 23.3% of all incidents of non-aggravated assault resulted in an arrest/charge whereas 48.5% of all incidents of aggravated assault resulted in an arrest/charge (Trimboli and Bonney, 1994:1-2).

Teachers were the victims of assaults perpetrated by students in 52 recorded incidents between 1990 and 1992. In 35 of these cases, the assault occurred following disciplinary issues (Trimboli and Bonney, 1994:25).

3.4 OTHER DATA

3.4.1 School Counsellors Survey

In their submission to the Committee, School Psychologists Australia Inc provided a copy of *School Counsellors in New South Wales: A Study of their Work and Occupational Stress Factors*, completed in June 1993 and based on the work of school counsellors in the twelve months prior to November 1992. Statistics extrapolated from a survey sample consisting of one-third of all school counsellors in NSW suggest that there were 2,853 cases of violence among peers (including dating violence), within the school or towards a teacher.

The report concludes that peer violence is positively correlated with a number of factors including family violence, grief over a past rape of a student, traumatic family breakdown, the terminal illness of parent or friend, running away from home, notification of physical abuse, or the rape of a parent (Submission 7).

3.4.2 Australian Youth Institute Surveys

The Australian Youth Institute recently surveyed 1031 young people aged from 18 to 25 years in New South Wales on law and order issues. While 67.4% of respondents indicated they had never experienced violence at school, 29.4% stated they experienced such violence frequently or all the time. A greater number of respondents experienced violence at school than was the case for violence in the home, neighbourhood or shopping areas. Male students were more likely to experience violence than female students. While 36.7% of respondents over the age of 21 years indicated that they had experienced physical abuse at least frequently when they were at school, this was true for 27.5% of respondents aged under 21 years, perhaps indicating a decrease in school violence (Fantuzzi, 1995:10-11).

The results of a 1994 survey also support these findings on the extent of school violence. Of 1295 young people aged between 15 and 25 years, 25% reported they had been frequently affected by violence, and a further 38% affected "now and then". Public schools students were 55% more likely to be frequently affected by violence than private school students, and males 50% more likely to be frequently affected than females (Dua, 1994:15-16).

3.4.3 Views of Students

The Committee received submissions from a number of schools, and spoke with groups of young people to assess their experiences and perceptions of youth violence.

The submission prepared by Hurstville Boys' High School for the Committee was based on points raised in a forum meeting of 18 boys from Years 7-11. One third of the group had been the victims of violence while another one third had been aggressors at some stage in the previous two years. Bullying, extortion of small amounts of money and racist name calling were identified as school violence issues, with gang-related violence being the greatest fear outside of school. This violence was seen as an extension of stealing or bullying used to promote a macho image among peers. One third of the group considered that they had been victims of gang violence (Submission 20).

3.5 USE OF WEAPONS

Early in its Inquiry, the Committee was informed that contrary to impressions that may be created from media reports, there have been only three incidents involving guns in Government schools in the previous five years (Davidson Briefing, 17.09.93).

The Committee was subsequently advised that these incidents were:

- the shooting of two primary school students with a slug gun on a corner outside the school grounds in 1991;
- A thirteen year old student firing a rifle at a school sports carnival in 1991 and seriously injuring two teachers and a twelve year old girl; and

- A fourteen year old female student taking a sawn-off shotgun and ammunition onto school grounds in 1992 and informing other students of her intention to shoot the principal and herself.

A further incident involving a student threatening to blow up the school and shoot teachers in 1991 was also reported to the Committee (Whelan, 1995).

Of the 412 Critical Incident Reports involving violence received by the Department of School Education in 1993, 80 cases (14%) involved a threat with a weapon or the actual use of a weapon (Boston Evidence, 29.07.94). The following types of weapons featured in these incidents:

- 47 incidents involved a knife, usually a Swiss army knife or a pocket knife;
- 13 incidents involved another cutting instrument;
- ten cases involved instruments such as slingshots, knuckledusters or rocks; and
- six cases involved hitting or striking with a piece of wood or metal (Boston Evidence, 29.07.94).

In 1994, 196 (15%) of the 1,315 Critical Incident Reports involving violence received by the Department of School Education involved a threat with a weapon or the actual use of a weapon (Boston, 1995:5). These incidents included:

- 104 incidents involving a knife;
- 11 incidents involving a gun or toy gun;
- 81 cases involving other instruments such as bats, sticks, glass, scissors, screwdrivers or explosive devices (Boston, 1995:5).

An additional four cases involving guns, replicas or threats of shootings were reported in Term 1, 1995.

The Committee was informed that no student used or operated a firearm at school in 1994 (Boston, 1995:5). However, critical incident reports reveal that students fired pellets at other students from replica pistols in two cases. The 15 incidents involving a gun or toy gun in 1994 and 1995 included the following types of incidents:

Students producing/threatening with replica or toy gun	5
Students firing replica/pellet gun	2
Student found with non-working pistol (no threat)	1
Student found with air rifle (no threat)	1
Student firing cap gun near another student's ear	1
Student threat to shoot teacher (no gun produced)	1
Intruders threatening student/teacher with gun	3
Intruder threat to shoot other parent (no gun produced)	1

The main category of incidents involving students producing or threatening others with replicas or toy guns ranges from a case where a small pistol-shaped cigarette lighter was produced to a student being charged with an attempted armed robbery at a local store.

While noting that the level of seriousness of these incidents varies substantially, The Committee is concerned that the number of cases of this nature may perhaps demonstrate a growing problem in this regard.

Of the 1031 respondents to the Australian Youth Institute's survey on law and order, 2.3% of respondents indicated that they had carried a weapon all the time when they had been at school, and a further 1.8% that they had frequently or occasionally been armed at school (Fantuzzi, 1995:6).

3.6 GANG ACTIVITY

The Committee considered the issue of "gang" activity with some caution given the media sensationalism that often accompanies the term. In taking evidence, the Committee was conscious that the expression was often loosely applied with witnesses using the term in a variety of ways.

The Committee heard from a Department of School Education official that gang warfare in schools is:

not a significant problem at this point. There may be the precursors though (Davidson Briefing, 17.09.93).

The principal of a school located in an area frequently linked with reports of gang activity suggested to the Committee that

As far as I am concerned, they are neighbourhood groups. Usually they are spread over a number of schools. I do not know of a school gang, but I do know of so-called gangs being reported in newspapers where normally the bulk of them are non-school attendees (James Evidence, 22.02.94).

A representative of the Catholic Education Commission stated to the Committee that there had been only one incident which could be perceived to be "gang" violence in Catholic schools in the last several years. He did however, acknowledge that gang activity outside of school time appears to be more of a problem, which has prompted community concern (Baker Evidence, 08.11.93). The Executive Director of the Association of Independent Schools stated that he was not aware of any increase in, or particular focus of, gang activity (Chapman Evidence, 08.11.93).

While the Committee heard evidence of gangs operating in schools, no evidence of criminal behaviour was available to the Committee.

3.7 BULLYING

No data are maintained on the incidence of bullying in schools in NSW. In considering the nature and extent of bullying in New South Wales schools, the Committee has drawn upon available Australian and international research as well as material supplied in written submissions and oral evidence to the Committee.

There has been a surge of interest in bullying among school children following Norwegian studies in the late 1970s and subsequent research in the U.S and U.K. These studies have identified at least 10% of children as victims of bullying in primary schools, with somewhat fewer identified in high schools (Rigby and Slee, 1991:615).

Professor Ken Rigby, the Director of the Institute of Social Research at the University of South Australia, and Dr Philip Slee from Flinders University have undertaken extensive research on the incidence and characteristics of bullying in Australian schools. Data have been collected from over 15,000 students from over 60 schools. While most of these data relate to South Australian schools, these researchers have also been attempting to gather data from other states. Most of the respondent students have been between 10 and 18 years of age, although some have been as young as five years old. Data are drawn from responses to self-administered questionnaires, and some from face-to-face interviews with children and teachers (Rigby Evidence, 29.07.94).

"Bullying" has been defined in this research as "repeated oppression, psychological or physical, of a less powerful person by a more powerful person or group of persons" (Rigby, 1994b:1). Psychological bullying includes name calling, verbal disparagement, and exclusion from groups.

Adolescents who report that their family life or families are somewhat dysfunctional are more likely to bully others. The contention that dysfunctional families are more likely to produce bullies is supported by research by Olweus in Norway and by Bowers in England. Rigby has identified six features of poor family life that tend to result in children bullying others: a low level of affection; poor communication; lack of acceptance or lack of concern for a person as an individual; methods of control and discipline which do not respect the child; a lack of concern about values; and a lack of interest in the adolescent's future (Rigby Evidence, 29.07.94).

Rigby found a gender difference in respect of the effect of family environment. While boys from dysfunctional families tend to turn out to be bullies, girls from such families tend to be bullies and also tend to be victims:

it is more likely [these girls] will either be a bully or a victim than that they will be neither (Rigby Evidence, 29.07.94).

Boys are more likely than girls to be victims of bullying in all categories except exclusion from groups, in which girls are overrepresented (Rigby Evidence, 29.07.94).

Bullies do not tend to lack self-esteem or social skills, and do not necessarily achieve at a notably lower level academically. They frequently have many friends, as bullies are often admired by a clique of peers, and bullying is often perpetrated by groups (Rigby Evidence, 29.07.94). While Rigby and Slee have found that a large majority of children avowedly

oppose bullying, support for victims tends to decline as children grow older (Rigby and Slee, 1991:625).

3.7.1 Levels and Effects of Victimisation

In researching the incidence of bullying, Rigby and Slee set a criterion for serious bullying of being bullied at least once a week. They have concluded that approximately 15% of children, or one in seven, report such victimisation. Separate data collected from the national Kids Helpline reveal that 3,000 telephone calls had been received from children who had been bullied during the year (Rigby Evidence, 29.07.94).

Rigby and Slee's research reveals that the majority of victims reporting physical bullying are boys. The age group that is most at risk is the 12 to 13 years group, which correlates to their entry into secondary school. The incidence rate for this group is one in five students being bullied, and one in ten experiencing frequent physical attacks (Rigby Evidence, 29.07.94).

The researchers had a sample of 103 Aboriginal children within a total sample of 7,000 and concluded that Aboriginal students are much more likely to be victimised than non-Aboriginal students. Approximately 31% of Aboriginal girls say they are victimised each week, more than double the victimisation rate for non-Aboriginal children. Aboriginal boys are similarly vulnerable. Social class does not appear to be a significant variable (Rigby Evidence, 29.07.94).

Victims tend to be physically weaker and younger than those who are bullying them. Psychological tests suggest they have significantly lower self-esteem, are non-assertive, have fewer friends and are more introverted than those who bully them. Some victims, however, do not fit this pattern, and can be characterised as "provocative victims", seeking attention and provoking aggression by irritating and aggravating their peers. Research has also revealed the phenomenon of "bully-victims", who act as bullies in one context and victims in another (Rigby Evidence, 29.07.94).

Victims tend to become withdrawn, and are often very suspicious of other people. Their peers tend to reject them, so they become increasingly isolated, and increasingly likely to be targets. Surveys suggest that approximately 6% of children have stayed at home because they are afraid of bullies (Rigby Evidence, 29.07.94).

Rigby and Slee have also used a health questionnaire to measure the effects of bullying on 770 students in two high schools. Through self-reports, 15% of these respondents were identified as victims, and these students were twice as likely to respond that they were not in good health; felt ill; lost sleep over worry; were panicky without reason; and had bad nerves. Students from this group were also more likely to feel depressed, feel worthless, and that life was not worth living. These victimised children were two to three times more likely to indicate that they had thought of "doing away with themselves", wished they were dead, and to have the recurring idea of taking their own life (Rigby Evidence, 29.07.94).

Professor Rigby indicated to the Committee that anecdotal evidence suggests some children have taken their lives as a result of being seriously bullied. A British researcher, Dr Delwyn Tatum, has indicated he is aware of 12 such cases. While a multitude of factors may

contribute to this tragic outcome, it is clear that bullying can contribute towards suicidal ideation (Rigby Evidence, 29.07.94).

Studies in Norway undertaken by Olweus, and in England by Farrington, suggest that the loss of self-esteem that is a consequence of bullying at school tends to persist into the victims' twenties, and may result in difficulties in forming relationships later in life. Rigby and Slee have found a correlation between depression and having been bullied at school in a survey of adults in Adelaide (Rigby Evidence, 29.07.94).

Rigby has also surveyed students' attitudes to domestic violence. Approximately 40% of boys and 19% of girls indicated that under some circumstances it was justifiable for a man to hit his wife. Interestingly, male victims were more likely to say it was acceptable in certain circumstances for a man to hit his wife, whereas bullies were no more likely to support this contention than non-bullies (Rigby Evidence, 29.07.94).

The Committee is of the opinion that it is difficult to draw firm conclusions on the incidence of bullying in schools in New South Wales. Even if data were maintained, the Committee recognises that bullying often goes unnoticed and unreported. The culture of the playground continues to condemn "dobbing" as a greater evil than bullying.

Strategies for addressing bullying are discussed in Section 10.4.

3.8 SEX-BASED HARASSMENT

The Committee heard from a Department of School Education representative that

many girls are concerned that there is an increase in what they call sexual harassment some female staff are also concerned about what they consider to be verbal harassment from 14 and 15 year old boys (Davidson Briefing 17.09.93).

In a qualitative study of five Victorian primary schools conducted by the West Education Centre, violent sexual attitudes to girls were revealed in discussions with boys. Girls in one school reported being repeatedly and severely harassed by the male students. This harassment included sexual intimidation and physical and verbal abuse. Boys believed male sexual desire was something uncontrollable, and one boy suggested that violence is caused by "watching a movie where a guy's getting on to a girl, and then you want to go out and do it too." At an in-service workshop for school welfare personnel, the most commonly reported element of school culture was male domination by students and staff, with boys dominating sports, computers and other equipment, classroom time and playing space in the schoolyard (Forsey, 1992).

A research project has been commissioned to examine these issues as part of the Commonwealth Government's Gender Equity in Curriculum Reform Project, which originated in 1987. Teachers from 10 pre-schools and primary schools in Northern NSW and Queensland participated in the research, co-ordinated by a team from James Cook University in Townsville. Some findings have been published in *Foundation Stones: the Construction of Gender in Early Childhood* (Alloway, 1994).

the school (Gilbert, Gilbert & McGinty 1994:27).

Other data reinforces this finding. The Gender and Violence Project of the federal Department of Employment, Education and Training undertook an extensive consultation process with government and non-government education communities in all states and territories. The consultations revealed that incidents are "often dismissed as trivial or untrue", and that

When teachers have complained to the school administration about violence to themselves or amongst students, they have been met with disbelief and a denial that the issue was serious enough to warrant a response (Ollis and Tomaszewski, 1993:21)

Evidence to the Committee from an Education Officer of the Independent Teachers' Association also suggests that responses to allegations of sex-based harassment are often less than adequate:

Certain girls' schools ... [have reported] that mobs of boys continue to intimidate girls teachers in girls' schools take great umbrage to this and find a lot of resistance from the teachers and principals in boys' schools certainly it is an issue in single sex education sister and brother schools that are close to each other (Hickey Evidence, 26.04.94).

This continuing resistance to recognise and condemn sexual harassment in schools reflects commonly-held attitudes of 'natural' male behaviour:

the intimidation of girls and sexual abuse that is treated as though "boys will be boys", that they did not mean anything. We have had instances where female classroom teachers in particular have been outraged at the administrative response to certain instances (Hickey Evidence, 26.04.94).

The Gender and Violence Project also found that many girls are unable to articulate their experiences of violence, and that teachers need to assist girls to recognise and name these behaviours. Concern was expressed regarding the numbers of girls who dropped classes to avoid harassment by teachers or students and avoided areas of the playground (Ollis and Tomaszewski, 1993:21).

Responses to sex-based harassment in schools are discussed in Section 10.2.

suggested that a lot of fights are started by "black" students identifying as "homies". It was suggested that these students have bashed teachers at a neighbouring school, and threatened others to ensure they do not intervene in the harassment of other students (Submission 58).

In preparing a submission to the Committee, staff at Boys' Town discussed the issue of violence and concluded from their combined experience that racist remarks can trigger violent incidents, and that Aboriginality can be a source of frustration leading to violent interchange (Submission 31).

A group of Aboriginal students from an inner-Sydney High School consulted by the Committee contended that they constantly confront racism, and that it is particularly prevalent on the streets and on the sporting field.

The political situation overseas at times affects relations between groups of young people in Australia. The ongoing conflict in the former Yugoslavia has produced tension between students identifying with the various ethnic groups of that region. The Committee has heard that

some students are looking at videos which are coming from Bosnia - their families are there, they are very violent situations that are occurring - and then when students get to school and there are people from other groups ... some of that has clearly erupted at school level (Davidson Briefing, 17.09.93).

However, the Committee has also heard from staff in schools in areas with large groups of students from these backgrounds that there has not been evidence of problems of this nature. It is therefore difficult to draw generalised conclusions on the effect of ethnic tensions.

Other evidence to the Committee also suggested that racism is not a problem evident in schools. The Committee heard that racism in the Catholic Education system is not considered to be prevalent (Jackson Evidence, 08.11.03). It was suggested that gospel values, the close contact between the schools and the community, and the close involvement of the families in the parish, all contributed to the low incidence of racial problems (Baker Evidence, 08.11.93). The Executive Director of the Association of Independent Schools suggested that the values-based approach to education of independent schools, and focus on self-discipline and pastoral care, ensured the internalisation of appropriate personal values (Chapman Evidence, 08.11.93).

Programs addressing racism in schools are discussed in Section 10.5.

3.10 VIOLENCE AGAINST HOMOSEXUALS AND LESBIANS

The Committee heard that the students who are victimised most readily are those who are perceived to be in some way different from others. Homosexual and lesbian students appear to be particularly vulnerable to abuse by other students at school:

Certainly at the moment in the secondary school [system], some of the students who are declaring that they are gay are being victimised ... a number of students have left schools - they identified themselves and other students victimised them (Davidson Briefing, 17.09.93).

The Gay and Lesbian Teachers' and Students' Association (GALTAS) represents gay and lesbian teachers and students in all educational institutions, and has released the SchoolWatch report. This report includes data from 145 respondents, most of whom contacted the Association on their own initiative to discuss their experiences. These data reveal that 60% of student respondents experienced verbal harassment and 30% of students who responded experienced physical harassment or violence. The majority of these incidents occurred in schools, perpetrated by fellow students and peers (Edwards Evidence, 29.06.94).

Given the small sample size and self-selecting nature of respondents in a school system with close to one million members, the Committee found it difficult to draw firm conclusions regarding the extent of harassment and violence that lesbian and homosexual students and teachers experience in schools. It is of concern that of the 37 students reporting incidents of verbal or physical harassment, 31 had not reported the most serious incidents to school authorities (Submission 43).

In two submissions to the Committee from school students, little sympathy was expressed for victims of this form of violence (Submissions 20 and 58). It was suggested to the Committee that 46% of young people involved in an anti-homophobia workshop in one school were not aware that it was illegal to bash homosexuals. A group of ten students, charged with the murder of a Sydney man at a park near their High School, expressed genuine surprise upon their arrest (in camera evidence). The Committee also heard that school personnel have demonstrated homophobic attitudes:

A study of the types and frequency of disruptive behaviours and the frequency of verbal and physical abuse directed towards teachers by students has recently been completed. A survey of 212 high school teachers was carried out in five inner western Sydney high schools. The results were that:

- approximately 75% of teachers claimed that they spend more time than they ought on matters of classroom order and control;
- 85% of teachers reported having been verbally abused at some time in their career;
- 50% had been abused in the past academic year;
- approximately 27% of teachers reported having been physically abused by students at some point in their career; and
- 8% reported abuse in the past academic year (Crawford, 1993:viii).

3.12 UNAUTHORISED ENTRY ONTO SCHOOL PREMISES AND OFFENSIVE BEHAVIOUR

The entry of unauthorised people on to school grounds has caused concern in some schools. The Committee has heard that a number of violent incidents have occurred in schools when non-students enter school grounds to pursue outside disputes. A submission was received from a teacher who was one of several teachers assaulted by a group of non-students on school grounds after they had been asked to leave. The teacher was subsequently medically retired (Submission 8).

The Marrickville Community Youth Co-ordinator informed the Committee that one school in the Marrickville area has reported a number of instances of young people entering the school during school hours. While the presence of outsiders is disruptive to the process of the school, the Committee also heard that these young people are not there to cause problems or vandalise school property, but simply to fill in time:

school is one place that they still feel relatively safe. School is somewhere where there is activity (Pisarski Evidence, 29.07.94).

some caution.

It is the Committee's understanding that there is a degree of confusion regarding requirements to report violent incidents to the Department and the obligations on teachers and principals to report such incidents.

The President of the Secondary Principals' Association suggested that differing applications of this discretionary power are demonstrated by statistics over one period which suggested a higher rate of violent incident reporting in the Department's Metropolitan-North region than any other metropolitan region:

I do not believe that [the result] is true I believe that it reflects the level of incident that was reported as violent being different in different places (Hurley Evidence, 22.02.94).

Mr Hurley summarised the feelings of a number of teachers when he commented that "the interpretation of violence leaves us all a bit confused" (Hurley Evidence, 22.02.94). He suggested that situations can arise where a minor incident occurs which may be the culmination of a succession of violent incidents or a long-term antisocial attitude. Such an incident may not appear serious, but may require more intensive intervention (Hurley Evidence, 22.02.94). Other teachers appearing before the Committee referred to differing reporting practices and a lack of guidance. Another secondary principal indicated that he had reported one incident to the Department of School Education which had involved the use of a weapon on school grounds and he was in the process of resolving a second incident. He informed the Committee that this latter incident

does not fall into official guidelines [but] I consider [it] more serious than the one I have reported (James Evidence, 22.02.94).

It would therefore appear that the evaluation of the seriousness of different types of incidents, and reporting requirements, remain ambiguous at the school level.

While teachers expressed confusion as to the type of incidents to be reported to the Department, the Federation of Parents' and Citizens' Associations were concerned with the question of whether school principals are in fact obliged to report all incidents to the Department. In evidence to the Committee, the Executive Officer of the Federation of Parents' and Citizens' Associations indicated that he had received conflicting advice as to the obligation of principals to report. He was informed that the provisions for mandating the obligation to report all incidents to the Department were to be found in a 1993

there must be immediate reporting. Any major and very serious violence would have to be the subject of an Immediate Critical Incident Report to the Assistant Director-General, then the Director-General, then the Minister ... anybody not doing that is simply not complying with the instructions [to principals] (Davidson Briefing, 17.09.93).

However, in later evidence to the Committee, the Department's Director-General stated that

We do not have a statewide provision that says that a punch is defined as violent behaviour and must be reported . . . At a state level we cannot make a list of what constitutes violence or malice. That judgment is essentially made at the local level (Boston Evidence, 29.07.94).

The Director of Executive Services of the Department of School Education informed the Committee in correspondence that

the responsibility for implementing statewide policy lies with schools ... across the state there will be some variation in what is considered a violent incident (Whelan, 1994:1).

The clearest reporting directives the Committee noted were contained in a confidential document provided by the Department, the circulation of which was limited to the Department's State Executive. It is understood that regional Assistant Directors-General, who are members of State Executive, used the document to brief their staff. The document states that Critical Incidents should include:

Violence or threats of violence involving staff, students, and/or other individuals associated with schools, eg. assaults leading to serious injury; use or possession of a weapon; arrest or charges by police.

It is the Committee's understanding that Critical Incident reporting forms have been redesigned to improve the consistency of reporting with the distribution of the new forms resting with regional offices.

It is understandable, given the Department's emphasis on devolution of power to regions and schools, that judgements on reporting be made at the local school level. However, the Committee believes that school executives require more detailed information to assist them in exercising this judgement. The Committee believes information should be distributed to all schools containing a comprehensive definition of the types of violent behaviour which

- contains a comprehensive definition covering the types of violent behaviour which should be the subject of a Critical Incident Report;
- includes examples of these types of violent incidents; and
- advises that the degree of malice and the nature of injuries incurred should be considered in decisions on completing Critical Incident Reports.

3.13.2 Shortcomings in Police Data

Relying on police reports of crime to assess levels of violence perpetrated by school students is inherently problematic. Crime reports of assaults in schools include all offences on school grounds, including those which occur outside of school hours, and on weekends and during holiday periods. The Committee's Youth Violence Issues Paper (Table 12) demonstrated that the data suggest that while assaults are most prevalent during school hours, the evidence is less clear in relation to sexual offences because the time of day was not recorded in a substantial number of cases (Standing Committee on Social Issues, 1993:30). Sexual offences were excluded from the Bureau of Crime Statistics *Assaults on School Premises* report.

The Committee was informed that little circumstantial detail is provided in the narrative section of police incident reports, reducing the comprehensiveness of the data. The Director of the Bureau of Crime Statistics offered to assist the Police Service to prepare an instruction manual on the completion of crime incident reports involving schools. The offer was declined (Weatherburn, 1994:1).

Limitations also exist as a result of probable inconsistencies in reporting practices. Clearly only the more serious incidents of violence will be recorded in police statistics with the result that some forms of violence such as bullying will not be evident in these data.

In addition, different interpretations of seriousness may be applied to a particular incident, and the Committee has heard conflicting evidence regarding the obligations on teachers and principals to report incidents of violence to Police.

simply state:

If a student's behaviour is threatening to other students or staff, the principal may call the police (Department of School Education, 1994:2).

A discretionary power clearly exists in this regard. Briefing notes supplied to the Committee contained information on a recent study of schools in the South Region of the Police Service. The study indicates that, of 396 schools surveyed, 72 school reported incidents of assault within the past 12 months. Of those assaults reported within schools:

- 55.6% were not reported to Police;
- 41.6% were reported to Police; and
- 2.8% were not recorded.

The South Region study showed that substantial numbers of assaults took place in schools in the Eastern Suburbs, Mascot, Kogarah and Arncliffe areas.

It is apparent, however, that police are becoming increasingly involved in school incidents, evidenced by the statistical increase in crimes recorded on school grounds. In briefing the Committee, Chief Superintendent Clamp, District Commander, Prospect, suggested that

As a result of the present emphasis on the issue of youth violence, police are required to respond more and more to the requests of the various Headmasters and Principals at the various schools in the area (Clamp Briefing, 17.09.93).

Teachers at one high school visited by the Committee suggested that the decision to report or not report a particular incident could lead to conflict among school staff.

The President of the Teachers' Federation of NSW stated that he had reservations regarding the mandatory reporting of all incidents of violence in a school, as it could result in teachers being too busy typing out reports for the police to be able to counsel students and attempt to encourage conflict resolution by negotiation (Cross Evidence, 11.10.93).

instructed to review their decision-making procedures relating to reporting to police, and that this general review should be carried out with appropriate input by the school community.

Studies have identified the educational disadvantages of convicted criminals. The Lawyers Reform Association suggested that charging students involved in school violence could lead to a cycle of school offenders becoming adult offenders (Submission 5). The Committee recognises that bringing students to the attention of police may have on-going detrimental effects regarding their development as responsible and contributing members of their society. For this reason, the Committee believes that the criminalisation of students should only occur following serious incidents. Decisions on reporting to such incidents to the police should be based on clear guidelines that apply to cases for which the Minister of School Education has indicated reporting is essential, and cases requiring the exercise of judgment at the school level.

The Committee believes that incidents of school violence should be recorded and collated at a central level, so that appropriate policy adjustments may be made by the Department of Education as required. In relation to reporting to police, the Committee is reluctant to criminalise children, and recommends that any incidence of conflict be resolved within the operation of the school itself, with an atmosphere that is conducive to conflict resolution and the minimisation of violence. However, the Committee recognises there is a level of serious assault that should be regarded as a matter that must be reported to the police. The Committee stresses that any statistical details produced from such reports should be on an anonymous basis that does not target particular schools as being overrepresented in cases of school violence, as it would be unproductive for schools to be stigmatised in this way.

- require schools to lay down a set of clear guidelines on the reporting of violent incidents to police that apply both to cases in which reporting is essential and cases in which the exercise of judgment is required.

■ **Non-government Schools**

The Catholic Education Commission does not become involved in police reporting of incidents in Catholic schools, and there are no central directives on the circumstances under which matters should be reported to the police (Baker Evidence, 08.11.93).

The Association of Independent Schools has promoted discussion among heads of schools regarding the question of when a matter should be reported to police and when it can be regarded as a school matter. The Committee was advised that legal advice was being sought on the issue. The Committee heard, however, that

there is a general support, I think, for heads of schools, with their staff, to attempt to deal with these matters in a corrective manner, rather than a punitive manner, with a view to achieving self discipline rather than labelling the child and having the matter dealt with as a criminal offence (Chapman Evidence, 08.11.93).

3.14 CONCLUSIONS AND FINDINGS

- There has been a considerable increase in numbers of violent critical incident reports by schools to the Department of School Education between 1993 (412) and 1994 (1,315 violent incidents). It is difficult to separate changes in reporting practices from any actual increase in the number of violent incidents.
- Suspension rates may be an indicator of violence in schools. The Committee found increases in the number of long and short suspensions in 1994.
- School violence reported to the police revealed that reports to police of assaults on school grounds had increased, and that 47% of violent critical incidents recorded in 1994 involved contact with the police.

than adequate.

- Young people who provided the Committee with information often linked violence with racism. Students spoke of the problems of categorising people on the basis of their racial background or appearance.

However, the Committee also heard that the fact that Australian schools have become so multi-cultural has led to a greater tolerance and acceptance of all students.

- Homosexual and lesbian students are often victimised at school. However, the prevalence of such victimisation is difficult to determine.

- The Committee recognises the methodological difficulties in determining the level of school violence with any certainty. However, the risk of being assaulted outside school grounds is substantially higher than that of being assaulted within school grounds.

- The evaluation of the seriousness of different types of incidents, and reporting requirements to both the Department of School Education and the Police, remain ambiguous at the school level, and the Committee recommends action in this regard. The criminalisation of students should only occur following serious incidents, and decisions on reporting such incidents should be based on clear guidelines.