

The kids most likely to go armed

July 28 2008

A new analysis of a 2005 survey of American schoolchildren has identified factors that may be used to help improve school safety. The research, published in BioMed Central's open access journal *Annals of General Psychiatry*, gives detailed information about the carrying of guns, blades and clubs.

13,707 students participated in the study, 6,664 (50.5%) were male and 7,193 (49.5%) were females. Overall, 10.2% of males and 2.6% of females reported carrying a weapon on school property. An estimated 29.8% of males and 19.3% of females had carried weapons elsewhere.

The analysis was carried out by Emmanuel Rudatsikira, from the Loma Linda University, California, and his colleagues. They showed that the variables most associated with the carrying of weapons were being male and being a member of certain self-selected racial groups. Pupils who identified themselves as white were more likely to carry weapons than those who identified themselves as black.

The authors point out that, "We do not believe that there are any inherent genetic differences that determine race and that affect the way that adolescents behave. We take the view that racial categorization has facilitated the distribution of social and economic resources (housing, school districts, wealth, social networks) that may consequently influence adolescent behaviors and perceptions toward violent behavior".

The results were surprising. The authors state that as the poor are likely to live in violent neighbourhoods, they would be more likely to feel

unsafe and therefore carry weapons to school, "We would have expected that minorities such as African Americans, being largely disadvantaged in the United States, would be more likely to bear weapons." Rudatsikira suggests some explanations for this apparent discrepancy "If black students felt less threatened at school, it's less likely they'll carry weapons. Alternatively, the schools they attend may be more vigilant in policing weapon carrying as a possible result of high violence and weapon bearing in black neighbourhoods."

Other factors associated with weapon carrying were substance use, depression, having been a victim of theft or property damage at school, having been raped, having been threatened with a weapon or having been involved in a physical fight.

Source: BioMed Central

Citation: The kids most likely to go armed (2008, July 28) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2008-07-kids-armed.html>

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