



2006 Boston Youth Survey Fact Sheet: School Violence and Safety

This fact sheet presents results from the 2006 Boston Youth Survey (BYS), a biennial survey administered to a representative sample of high school students in Boston Public Schools. The BYS is one component of the Boston Data Project, a partnership between the City of Boston Office of Human Services, Boston Public Health Commission and the Harvard Youth Violence Prevention Center, that tracks factors affecting youth well-being in Boston. The BYS covers a comprehensive range of topics including education, mental health, service use, nutrition and physical activity, with a particular emphasis on violence perpetration, witnessing violence, and violence victimization. 1,233 students, from 18 BPS high schools participated in the 2006 BYS. Students came from neighborhoods throughout the city, and represent the Boston Public Schools considerable racial and ethnic diversity. 56% were girls, 37% were from Dorchester, 11% were from Roxbury, 49% were Black non-Hispanic, 28% were Hispanic/Latino, 12% were White, and 6% were Asian. Thirty percent were born outside the U.S. For more information, visit <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/hyvp/>.

Relationships with Adults at School

Having trusting relationships with supportive adults at school is a vital developmental asset for high school aged youth.

- 74% said there was at least one adult at school who would help them if they had a problem or were upset.
- Those who endorsed this response were less likely to carry a gun (1% vs. 3%) or knife (14% vs. 22%) to school. They were more likely to earn mostly As and Bs (31% vs. 24%) and less likely to be truant (64% vs. 72%), but they were no more or less likely to feel safe at school or have been exposed to violence there.

Discrimination/Harassment at School

- 22% of respondents said they had been discriminated against, bullied, or assaulted for discriminatory reasons (race, foreign-born, perceived sexual orientation, or weight) at school in the previous 12 months.
- Those who were discriminated against at school were more likely than those who were not to exhibit more depressive symptoms (53% vs. 37%) and to believe that most people would take advantage of them if they got a chance (75% vs. 58%). While they were less likely to feel safe at school (87% vs. 92%), they were no more or less likely to be truant.

Weapon Carrying at School

- Fifteen percent of respondents (44% of knife carriers) reported carrying a knife to school in the previous 12 months.
- One percent of respondents (22% of gun carriers) reported carrying a gun to school in the previous 12 months. Since virtually all gun carriers in the sample reported carrying their gun loaded (98%), those who carried to school probably carried loaded guns. 63% of those who carried to school indicated they felt unsafe at school. However, most of them had other reasons for carrying as well.
- While six percent of respondents carried a gun in the past 12 months, on average respondents believed approximately 30% of their school peers had carried a gun during this time. Possible explanations for this discrepancy include: 1) underreporting of gun carrying, 2) a false



perception of the frequency of gun carrying among their peers. Gun carriers on average estimated twice as many of their peers were carrying guns as non-gun carriers did (49% vs. 26%).

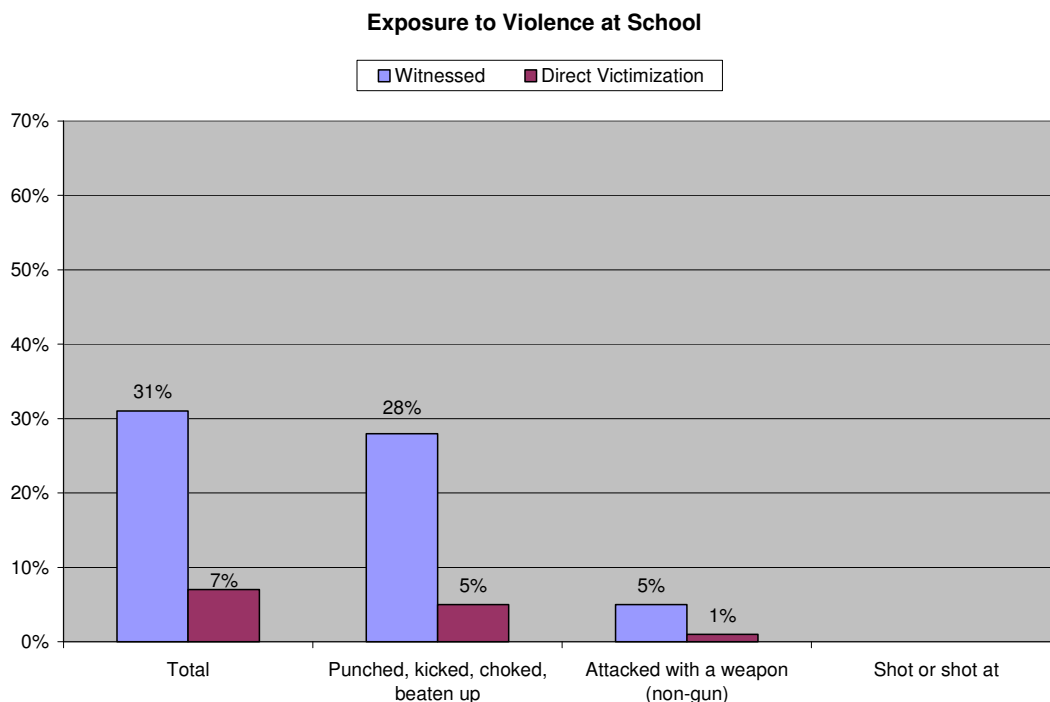
Exposure to Violence at School

The survey asked three questions about exposure to violence. Each question was asked twice: once to ascertain whether the respondent witnessed violence inflicted on someone else and once to ascertain whether the respondent was personally assaulted. The questions were:

“In the past 12 months, have you been/have you seen someone:”

- Punched with a fist, kicked, choked, or beaten up?
- Attacked with a weapon other than a gun- like a knife, bat, bottle, or chain?
- Shot or shot at?

- 31% of respondents reported witnessing one or more acts of violence at school in the past year; 7% reported being assaulted at school.



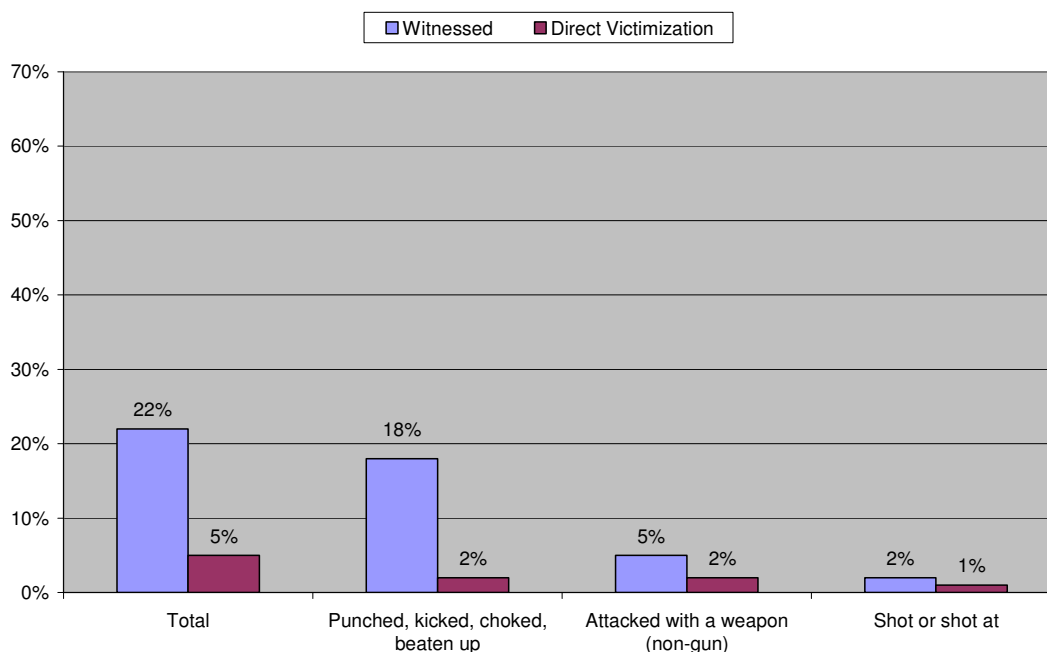
- Less than one percent reported seeing someone shot or shot at in school or themselves being shot or shot at in school in the past year.
- Those who were exposed to violence at school were less likely than those who were not to feel safe there (85% vs. 96%) and more likely to be truant (72% vs. 62%). They were less likely to earn mostly As and Bs in school (26% vs. 37%) and more likely to perpetrate violence (18% vs. 9%).

Exposure to Violence on the Way to or from School

- 22% of respondents reported witnessing one or more acts of violence on their way to or from school in the past year; 5% reported being assaulted.



Exposure to Violence on the Way to/from School



- Those who were exposed to violence on the way to or from school were less likely than those who were not to feel safe there (84% vs. 95%) and more likely to be truant (72% vs. 63%).

They were less likely to earn mostly As and Bs in school (28% vs. 34%) and more likely to perpetrate violence (21% vs. 9%). They were also less likely to have confidence in their ability to avoid fights (81% vs. 89%).

Safety

- Ten percent felt unsafe at school (down from 21% in 2004), and 16% felt unsafe on their way to or from school (down from 27% in 2004).
- Immigrants were less likely than U.S. born respondents to feel safe at school (87% vs. 92%), or on the way to or from school (78% vs. 87%).
- Those who did not feel safe at school were more likely than those who did to be truant (78% vs. 65%), as were those who did not feel safe going to or from school (72% vs. 65%).

Note

The survey was administered during homeroom, the first period of the school day. Students who were tardy began the survey late (and often did not complete it), or missed it altogether. Additionally, students who were absent from school on the day of administration did not take the survey. This may have impacted the sample in that those students who were late or absent are not represented. Reported results are based on the answers of those who answered a given question, **not** on the sample as a whole.

The inclusion of exam schools in the sample may or may not result in an underestimation of school violence exposure and/or feeling unsafe at school or on the way to or from school.



Table 1. Perceptions of Safety and School Social Capital

<i>Percentage of students who...</i>	Feel Safe at School ...always/sometimes feel safe at school	Feel Safe Commuting ... always/sometimes feel safe on the way to or from school	Exposure to Violence in School ...witnessed violence or were assaulted at school	Exposure to Violence Commuting ... witnessed violence or were assaulted on way to/from school	Feel Supported by a School Adult ...is at least one adult at school who they could turn to for support
Total Sample (n=1,233)	90%	84%	35%	25%	74%
Gender					
Male	90%	86%	36%	26%	70%
Female	90%	84%	35%	25%	76%
Nativity					
US Born	92%	87%	35%	26%	74%
Immigrant	87%	79%	37%	23%	73%
Age					
≤14	88%	84%	35%	20%	74%
15	92%	86%	40%	29%	71%
16	90%	83%	38%	27%	74%
17	90%	86%	30%	26%	78%
≥18	90%	82%	35%	18%	71%
Grade Level					
9 th grade	90%	85%	40%	28%	69%
10 th grade	89%	83%	36%	25%	71%
11 th grade	94%	87%	31%	25%	81%
12 th grade	86%	81%	34%	21%	71%
Race/Ethnicity					
Hispanic	90%	86%	40%	25%	73%
White , non-Hispanic	98%	91%	25%	17%	82%
Black, non-Hispanic	88%	82%	38%	28%	72%
Asian	91%	83%	17%	20%	78%
Other, multiracial	85%	81%	44%	35%	67%
School Statistics					
Mean Across Schools (SD)	90% (0.29)	84% (0.36)	35% (0.48)	25% (0.43)	74% (0.44)
Range Across Schools	73%-99%	71%-96%	21%-65%	15%-50%	50%-83%