

A BCTF Research Report

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Section III
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Teaching in the '90s

Report No. 3: Teacher Perceptions of Violence in B.C. Schools

By
Dr. John D. Malcolmson, Research Analyst
Research and Technology Division, BCTF

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Teaching in the '90s is a series of reports based on a survey of B.C. teachers conducted in May and June of 1993. It constitutes a *culture map* of B.C. teachers, looking at teacher practices and a range of current issues in education. 2,000 questionnaires were mailed to a random sample of BCTF members. 735 responses were entered into a *Teaching in the '90s* database, and form the basis of the reports.

A. Introduction

The analysis in this report is based upon data contained in a survey conducted by the BCTF in the summer of 1993 entitled "Teaching In The '90s." The survey gathered information on teacher perceptions and opinions covering a range of areas including that of violence in public schools.

What follows is an attempt to summarize the pattern of responses to survey questions dealing with the subject of violence. Where applicable, further comment has been made regarding how teachers working at various levels of the public school system — primary, intermediate, secondary, etc. — perceive problems and factors associated with violence in different ways. In addition, an effort has been made to reveal the different ways that male and female teachers might view the problem of violence.

The following table offers a picture of the percentage gender and school-level breakdown of teachers responding to the survey.

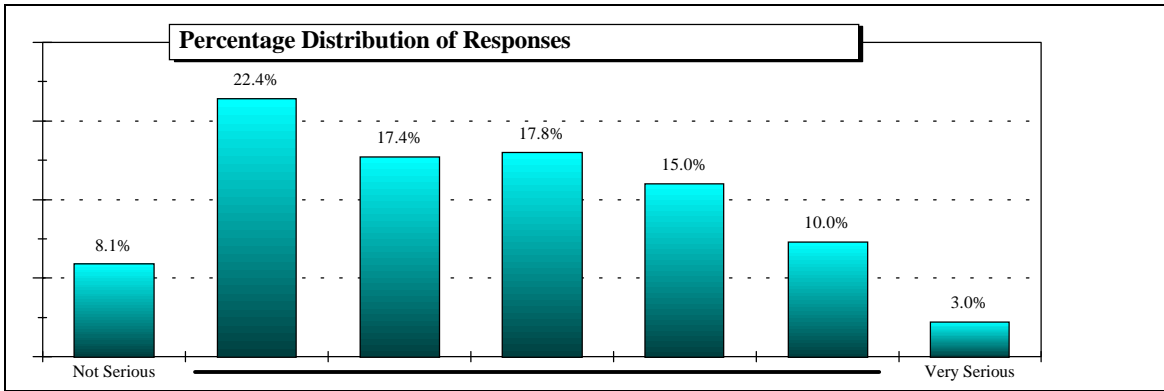
% Distribution of Sample	Gender of Survey Respondents		
	Male	Female	Total
Primary	4.3%	34.5%	25.8%
Intermediate	25.4%	18.4%	20.4%
Secondary	56.9%	21.3%	31.6%
Primary & Intermediate	8.1%	22.1%	18.1%
Not Attached	5.3%	3.7%	4.1%
Totals (by Gender)	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Overall, the survey results indicate that male teachers were more likely to perceive violence to be a problem and to have definite views regarding factors playing a role in the violence currently occurring in and around public schools. In the main, however, gender-based differences are accounted for in the fact that most male teachers work at the secondary level of the public school system where experience with violence is more apparent and pronounced. As will be shown below, when the gender breakdown of survey data is analyzed by school level within the system, the result is often a more subtle and nuanced response pattern on the part of male and female teachers.

Question 1: Please rate the level of violence that you personally perceive occurs in your school?

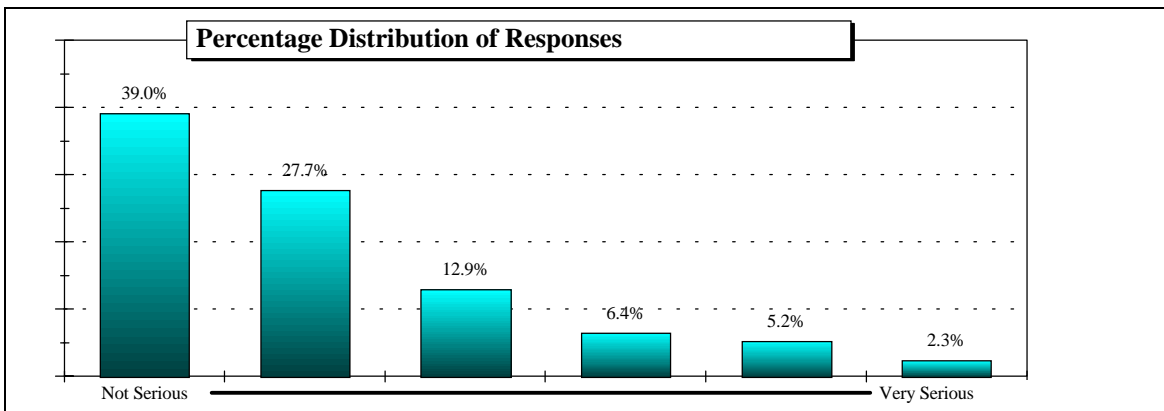
B. Student-to-Student Violence

Responses to this question indicate that most teachers perceive violence to be occurring amongst students. The largest block of responses give the problem a low to middle ranking in its level of seriousness. Teachers at the secondary level of the system typically see the problem as more serious than do other teachers.



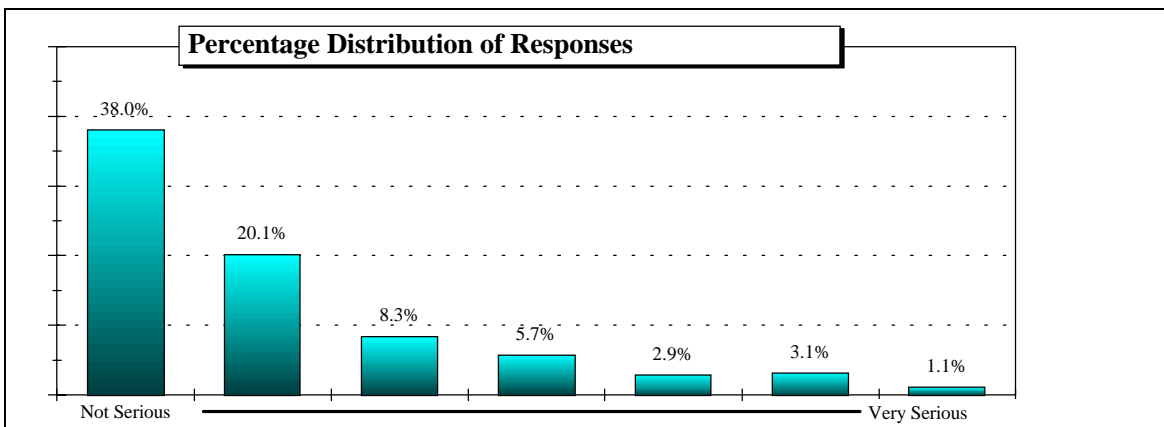
C. Student-to-Teacher Violence

Most teachers regard the problem of Student-to-Teacher violence as not being very serious. This being said, secondary teachers ranked the problem as more serious than did teachers at other levels.



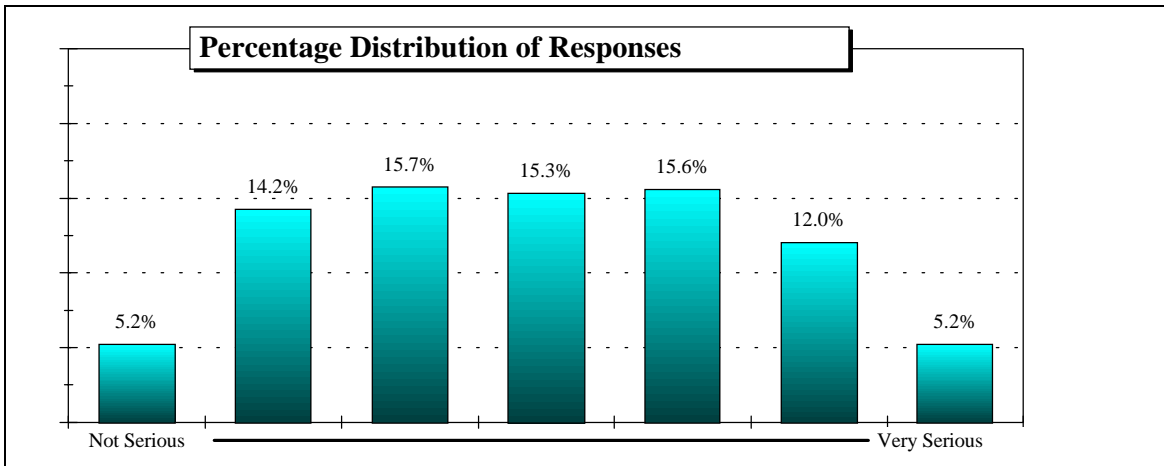
D. Former Students

Teachers in general were inclined not to attach great seriousness to the threat of violence from former students. Secondary level teachers again had the strongest feelings in this area.



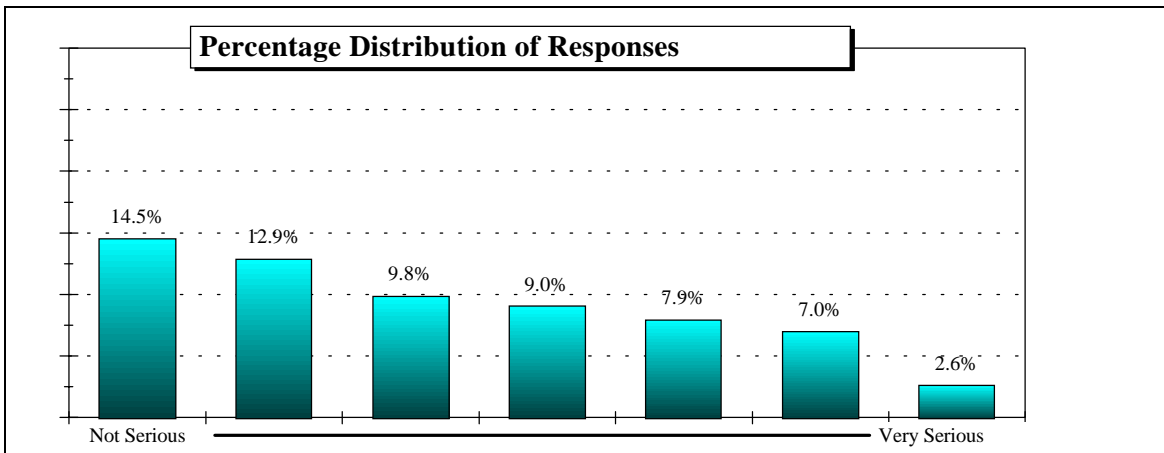
E. Family Violence

Teachers across the spectrum of the public school system attached a greater seriousness to the problem of family violence as it affects the school. Teachers tended to view the situation with a greater sense of seriousness the further up they were situated by school level. Female teachers were also more inclined to rate the problem more seriously than were male teachers.



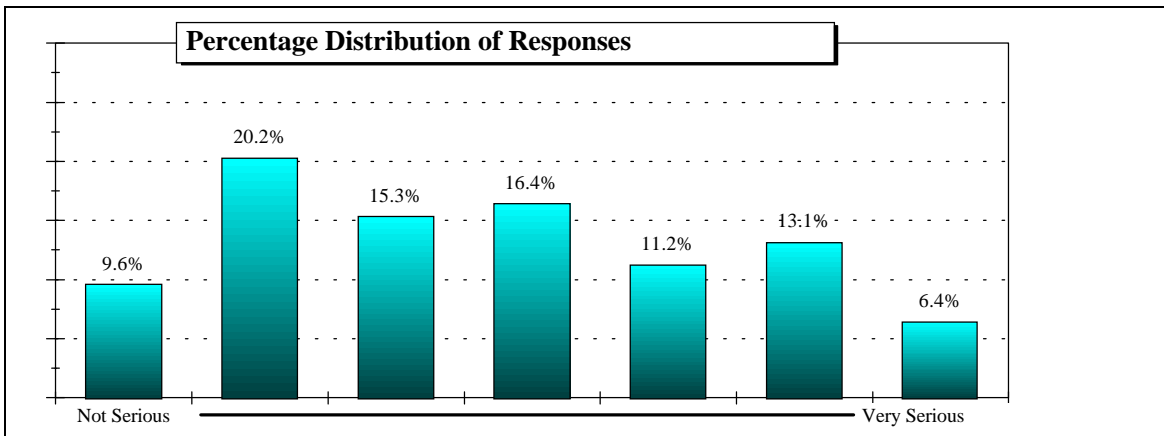
F. Other Outside Sources of Violence

Here the pattern of responses tended to the lower side of the seriousness spectrum. The largest group of teachers — slightly over a third — offered a "Don't Know" response to the question suggesting either the lack of a clear idea of what the source might be or how it might impact schools. Again, secondary teachers had the largest groupings of responses further up the spectrum. In summary though, as the chart shows, the problem was not seen to be that serious by teachers as a whole.



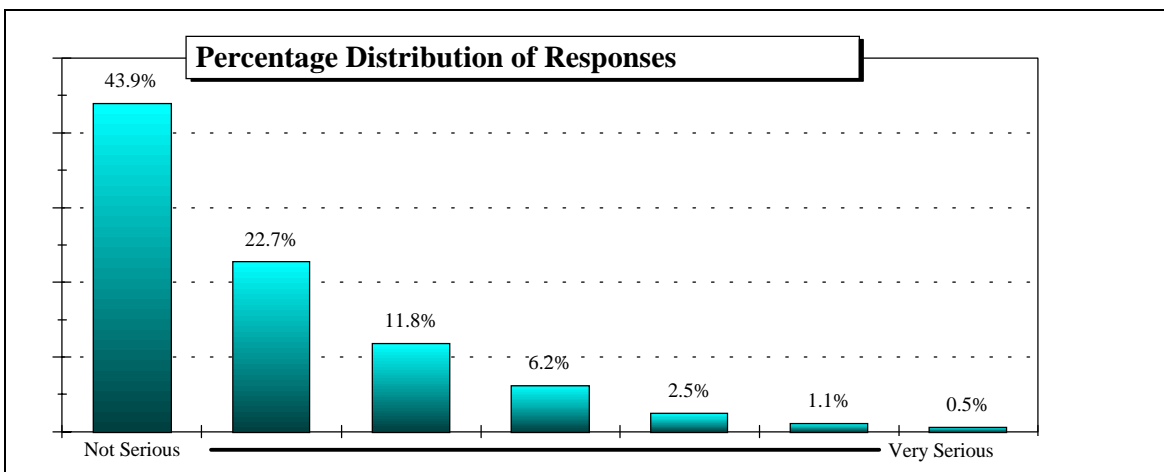
G. Property Damage

Teachers saw this problem as being more serious. Primary and secondary teachers both had large blocks rating the problem as being at or near the "Very Serious" level.



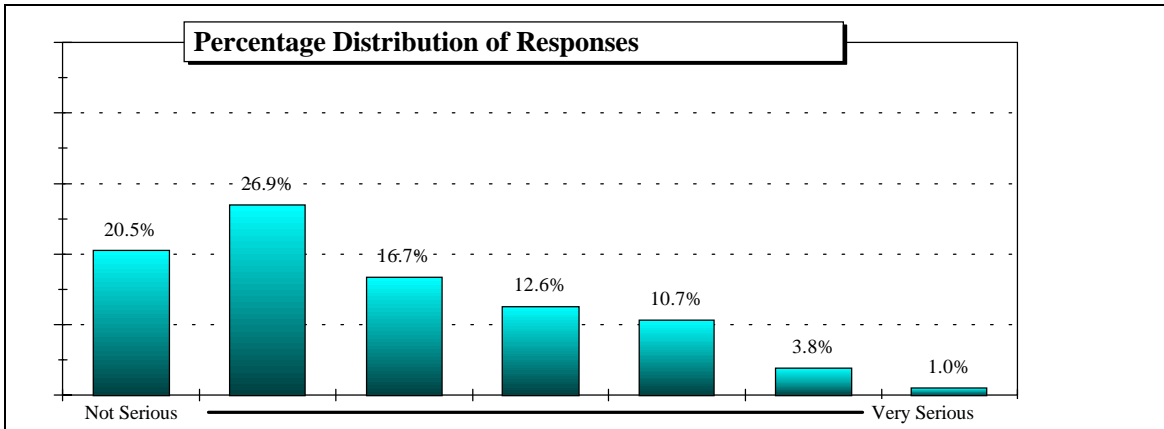
H. Parent-to-Teacher

Teachers universally saw this to be a minor issue. There were no significant differences in response pattern on the basis of gender or school level for this factor.



I. Violence in My School Overall

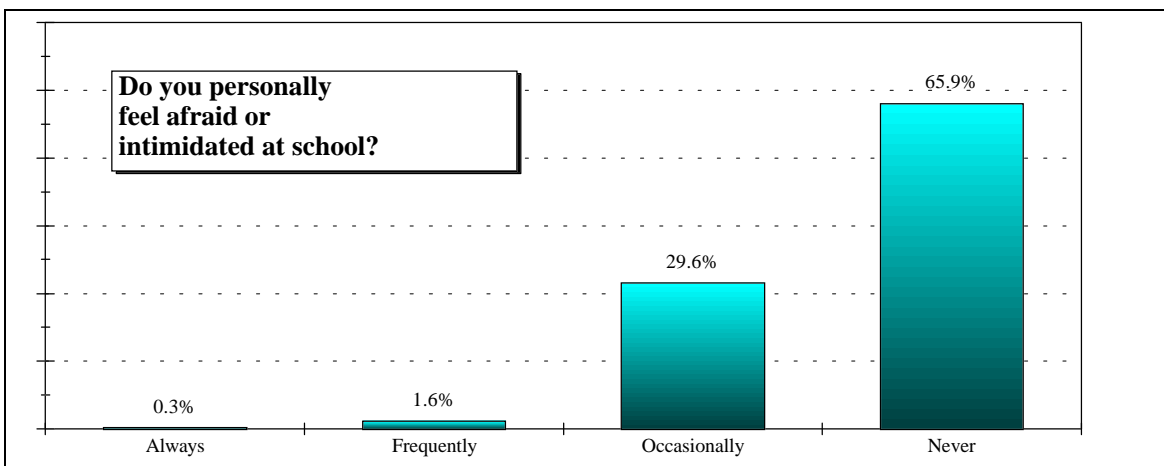
Teachers were inclined to view the situation with violence in their schools as not being very serious. Here, there were no clear differences on the basis of gender. Teachers in secondary schools once again returned responses with the highest degree of seriousness. Relative differences amongst responses from the various levels were not great.



In a general sense, the pattern of responses to this question indicate a widespread perception of the problem of violence yet a sense that the situation had not yet deteriorated greatly. The one exception to this is the area of "Family Violence" where the pattern of responses indicates that teachers perceive the existence of a social phenomenon and problem that is adversely affecting schools.

Question 2: Do you personally feel afraid or intimidated at school?

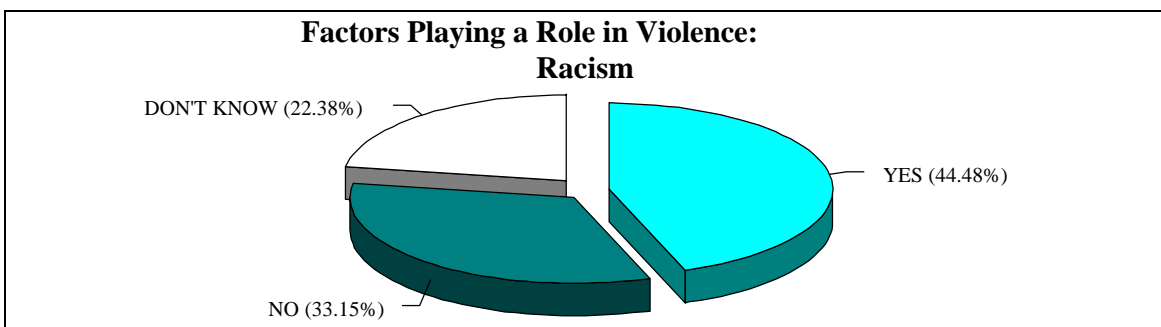
Responses to this question indicate most teachers never feel threatened or intimidated within the school setting — close to two-thirds of both males and females felt this way with almost all of the rest of teachers feeling a problem only "Occasionally." When secondary teacher responses are analyzed separately, female teachers have a slightly higher perception of "fear and intimidation" than do males.



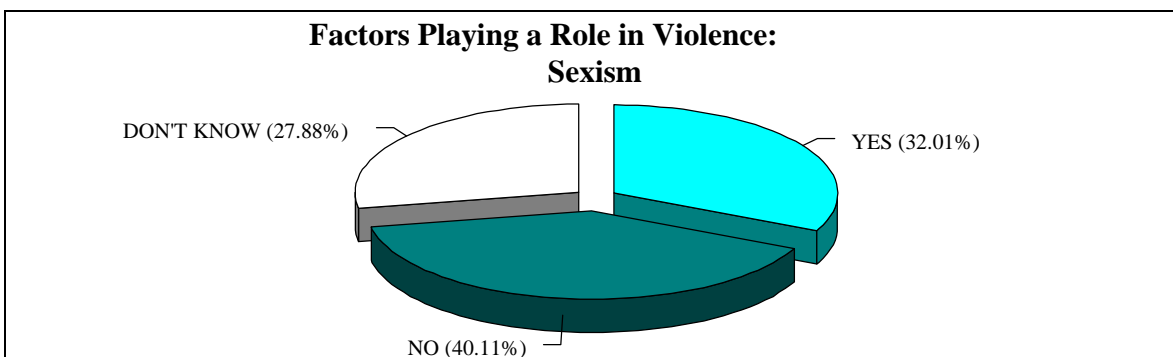
Overall, responses to this question provide a clear indication that teachers by and large do not feel a major personal threat of violence within the schools.

Question 3: Which factors are you aware of that play a part in the violence that has occurred in your school?

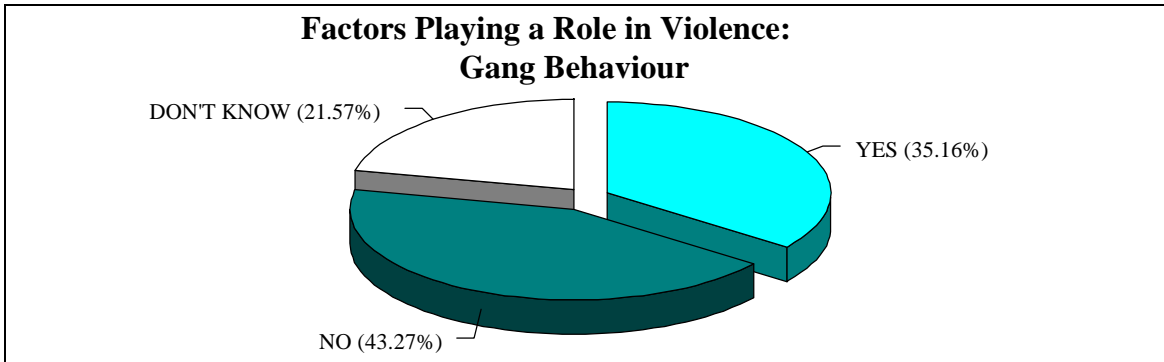
A significant group of teachers believe that **racism** plays a role in violence that occurs at the school. Overall, male teachers were more predisposed to feel this way than were female teachers largely because of the numeric concentration of males at the secondary level. When gender and school level data are cross-tabulated separately, the results show that females at the intermediate and primary-intermediate levels were significantly more inclined than males to view racism as a contributory factor. At the secondary level, close to 60 per cent of all teachers — both male and female — saw racism as contributing to violence.



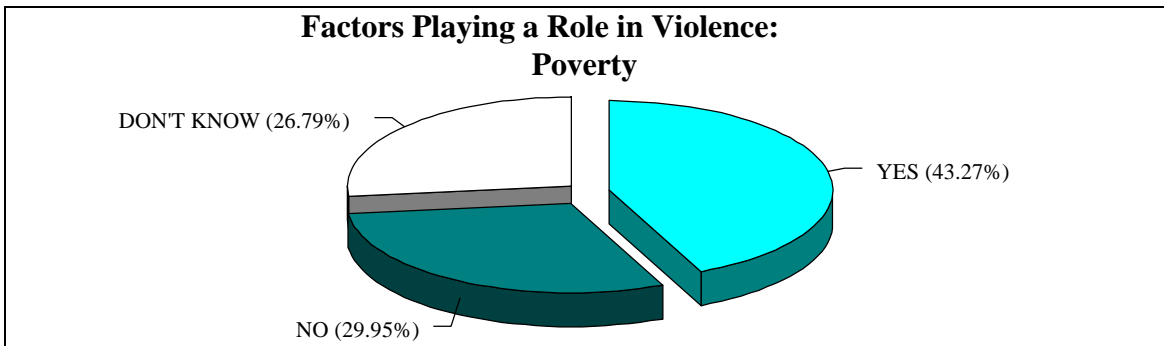
A smaller group felt that **sexism** played a role in instigating violence at school. Here, interestingly, males felt much more strongly this was the case than did females. A significantly larger percentage of men at both the intermediate and secondary levels felt that sexism was a contributory factor while the reverse was true at the elementary level. Overall, the largest block of all teachers feeling sexism to be contributory were grouped at the secondary level — close to 45 per cent of the total at this level.



Teachers were also asked whether **gang behaviour** was a factor in creating violence. In total, about 35 per cent agreed it did. Here, secondary teachers were twice as likely as intermediate teachers and four times as likely as primary teachers to feel this way. Overall, males were also more inclined to see gang behaviour as a factor because of their numeric preponderance at the secondary level. Females at the elementary level were significantly more inclined than males to answer this question in the affirmative.



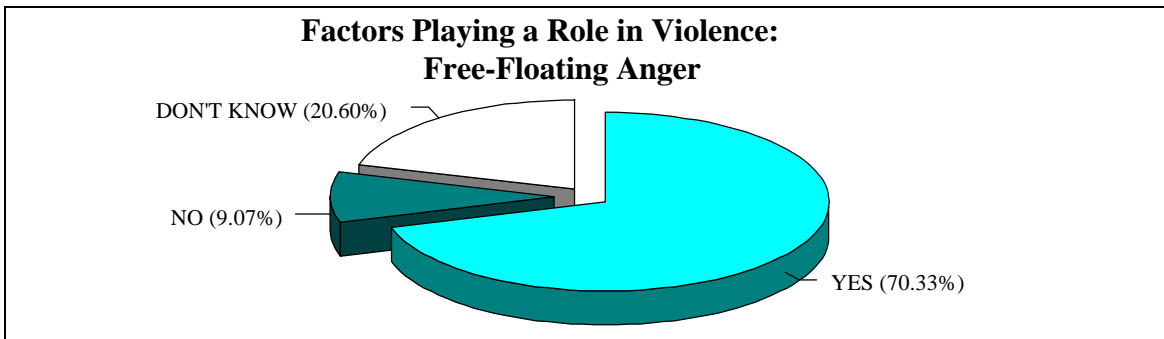
Teachers also felt that **poverty** was a major element in engendering school violence. Intermediate level teachers subscribed to this view most strongly. Female teachers were also substantially more inclined to feel this way than were males with the largest gender-based gap in affirmative responses occurring at the elementary level.



Alcohol and substance abuse was also perceived to be a factor, particularly at the secondary school level where 7 out of 10 teachers saw alcohol and drugs as contributing to violence. Female teachers at all levels of the system were considerably more inclined to see things this way than were males.



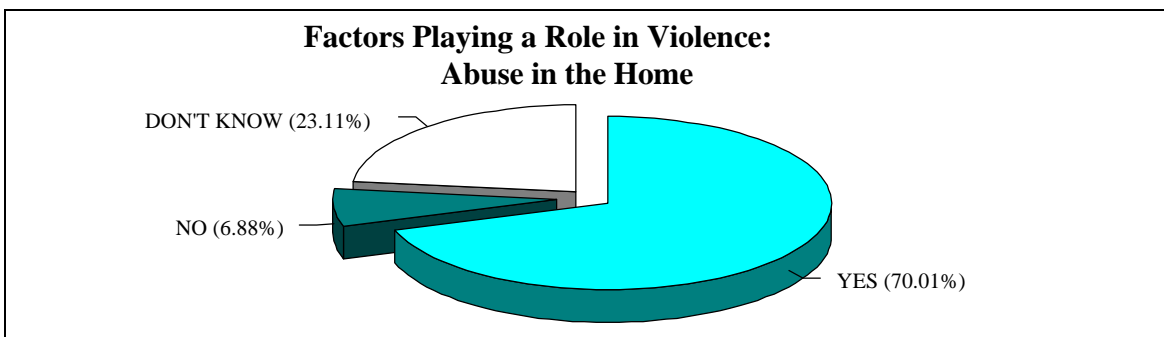
Teachers were also asked for their opinions as to whether **free-floating anger** amongst students was a factor promoting violence. In general, teachers were inclined to see this kind of anger as a highly significant problem. Women teachers at the primary and intermediate levels recorded higher "Yes" percentage as did males at the secondary level.



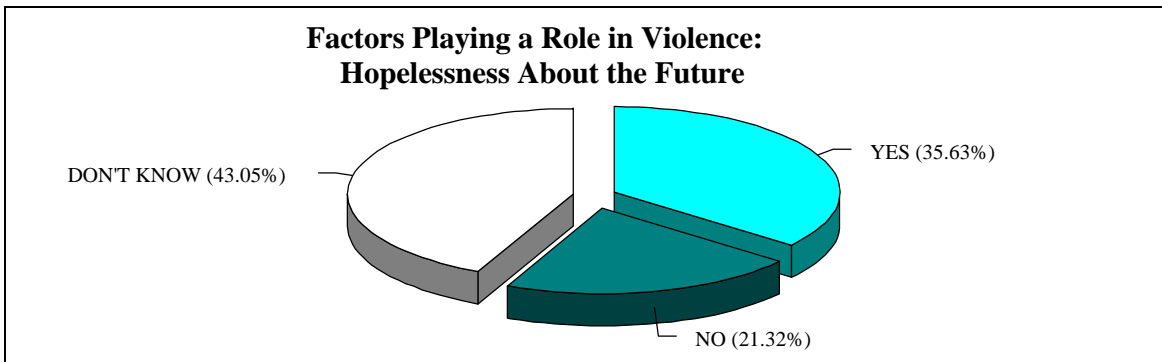
Violence in the media is a topic of major public concern at the present time and teachers were asked to indicate how they felt this influenced occurrences of violence in and around public schools. Overall, a little more than half of respondents saw this as a contributory factor. At the same time, a third of responses fell into the "Don't Know" category, perhaps indicating widespread ambiguity regarding the mechanics of how media violence translates into school-centred violence. Males at the elementary and secondary levels saw this as more of a factor than did females; conversely, females were preponderant at the secondary level.



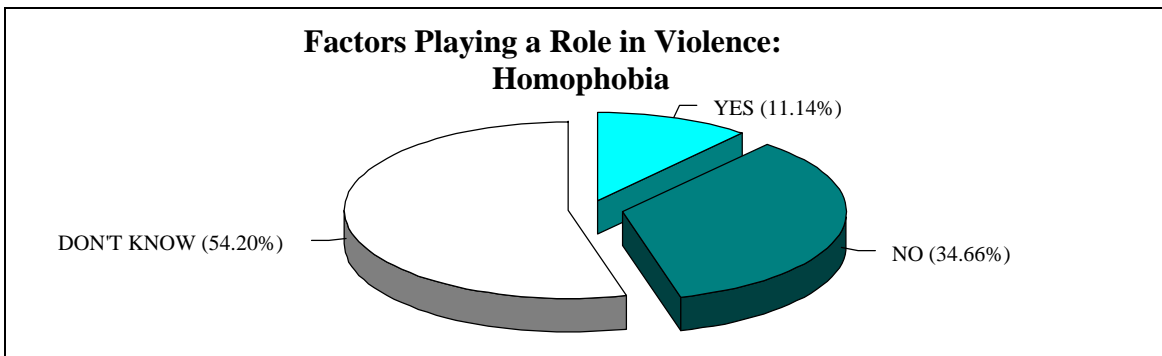
The issue of **abuse in the home** and its impact upon school violence was viewed as a serious problem by seven out of ten teachers overall. Those at the intermediate level gave it the highest ranking. In gender terms, males recorded a higher share of affirmative responses at the intermediate level while women led at both the elementary and secondary levels. Clearly, there was widespread awareness amongst teachers that violence and abuse within the home environment has a major effect on the schools receiving children from these homes.



Survey respondents were also asked to comment on the perception that today's students exhibit a widespread sense of **hopelessness about the future**. Slightly over a third of the sample indicated "Yes." However, teachers at the secondary level were twice as likely to perceive this as a factor than those at the primary or secondary levels. At this level, males and females recorded similar percentages of positive responses. At the intermediate and elementary levels, higher percentages of males answered in the affirmative.



The final factor for which the survey solicited opinions was that of **homophobia**. Here, a clear majority of respondents opted for "Don't Know" responses with a significantly smaller group answering "Yes." Again, teachers at the secondary level were twice as inclined to offer "Yes" responses as were other teachers with females at this level recording an affirmative response rate close to twice the overall average. However, the data do indicate widespread ambiguity amongst teachers as to the role this factor might play.



Taken together, the responses suggest that teachers view certain factors as playing the most important role in contributing to violence in the school environment. The data can be construed as suggesting that teachers see home-based violence contributing to widespread free-floating anger as the primary contributory causes of violent occurrences within the public school system. At the same time, teachers viewed media-based violence as playing a major role in perpetuating the overall syndrome.

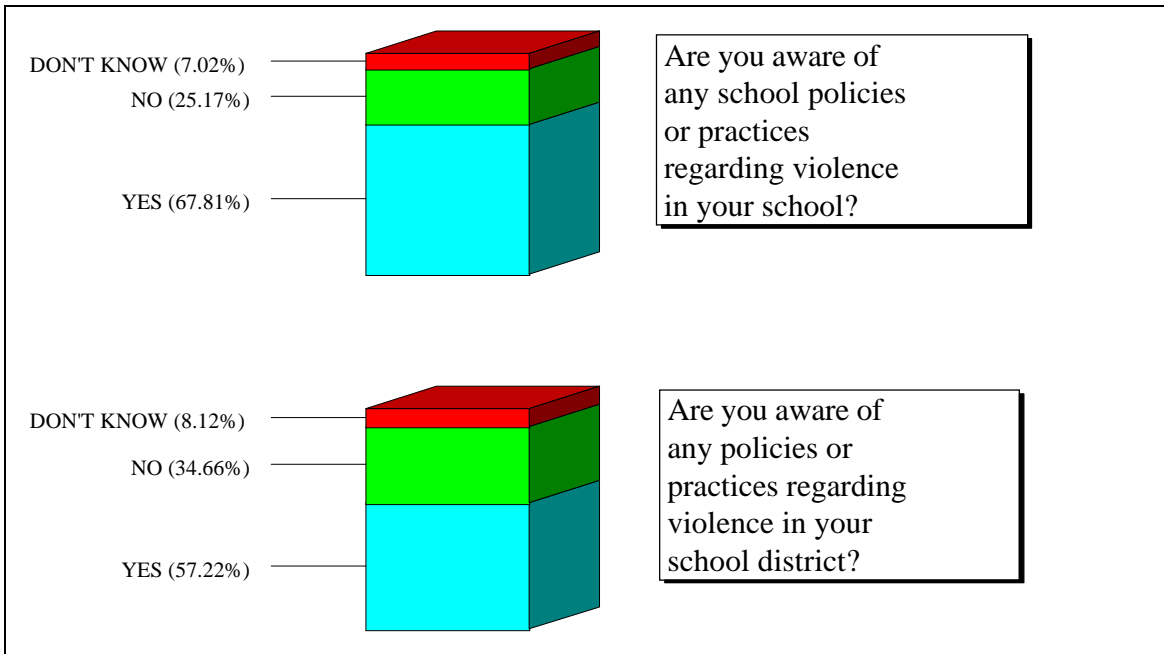
The responses also show the problem is perceived as most serious by secondary and to some extent intermediate-level teachers. Finally, there are some gender-related differences

in response patterns, particularly at the secondary level where the overall perception of seriousness is most acute overall.

Question 3: Are you aware of any school policies or practices regarding violence in your school?

Question 4: Are you aware of any policies or practices regarding violence in your school district?

Responses to these questions indicate that a majority of teachers were aware of existing policies and practices regarding violence. Overall, more teachers were aware of school-level as opposed to district-level initiatives in this area. At the same time, teachers attached to schools had a significantly higher level of awareness of policy initiatives than did unattached teachers. There were no significant differences in the responses of males and females in this area.

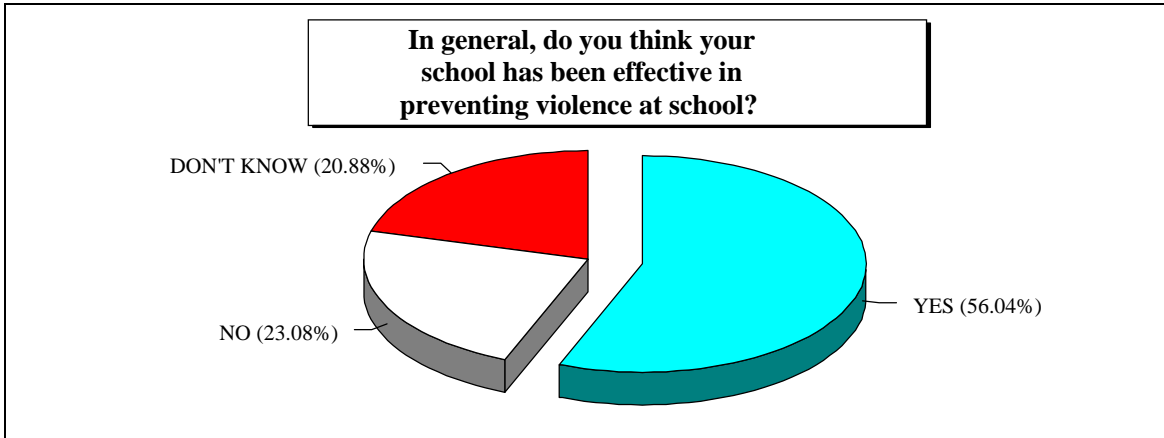


The above pattern may indicate either a relative lack of district-level policy or, alternatively, a need for districts to make existing policies better known amongst teachers at the school level.

Question 5: In general, do you think your school has been effective in preventing violence at school?

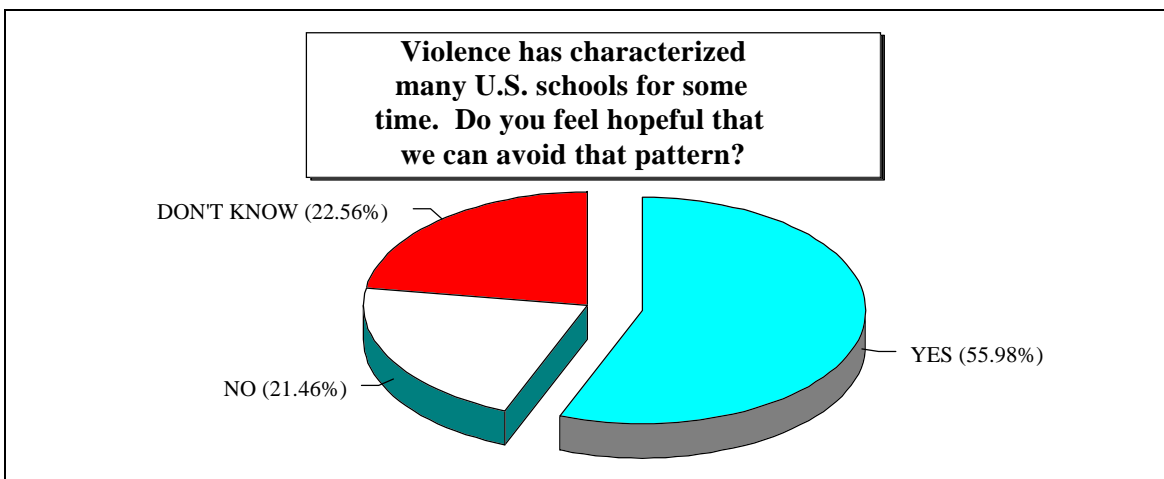
A majority of teachers indicated they felt their school was doing an effective job in preventing violence. However, the size of that majority fell steadily going from the primary to the intermediate and secondary levels of the system. At the secondary level,

only a small majority felt that measures to date had been effective in countering or preventing violence at school. There were no significant gender-based differences in this pattern of responses for this area.



Question 6: Violence has characterized many U.S. schools for some time. Do you feel hopeful that we can avoid that pattern?

A clear majority of teachers indicated hope that we might avoid the U.S. model of violence. The only level where a majority did not feel this way was with primary-intermediate teachers. Secondary teachers also had a significantly higher likelihood of answering this question in the negative. Male and female teachers shared this hope to the same percentage degree. Females were, however, significantly more inclined to answer "Don't Know" and less inclined to opt for "No" than were males.



J. Conclusions

The survey results indicate that teachers in B.C. view school violence to be a significant problem, particularly within the secondary system. While males were more inclined to feel this way, the difference can largely be explained in terms of the concentration of male

teachers at the secondary level of the school system where both the incidence and visibility of violence are the greatest. Teachers also felt that home-based violence as well as violence portrayed in the media played the largest role in contributing to an atmosphere of widespread anger and hopelessness amongst significant numbers of students.

At the same time, most teachers indicated a belief that their schools were dealing effectively with the problem and a hope that our schools can avoid repeating the experience of the United States in this regard.

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