

## **Olie, Olie, Oxen Free: Is school a ‘Safe’ place for High School Students?**

In all areas in the study of Education, there is an increasing concern over the impact that school and community violence will have on the student’s academic and psychological well-being. Additionally, sociologists of Education are seeking to understand the achievement gap between students in Public Schools and those who attend private Catholic schools. For this project I am looking at a combination of both of these issues. Specifically, I am interested in the student’s perception of safety within their schools, and the factors that influence such perceptions. Ultimately, I plan to look beyond their perceptions into how their feeling of safety affects their academic achievement. The differences between the perceptions of students in each of the two types of schools being studied will also be addressed.

For this project I will be utilizing data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study, Third Follow-up (NELS: 88/94), which studies access and choice issues related to postsecondary education experiences of a national sample of young Americans who were eighth-graders in 1988. NELS: 88/94 collected information on postsecondary education participation, employment, earnings, family formation, and other activities and experiences relevant to individuals as they were about to enter their adult lives. The students were re-contacted in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, and two years after graduation from high school. In addition to student questionnaires, parents, teachers and school administrators were also surveyed to provide a complete data set on each student.

The data I chose to use in this study comes from these student's responses during their 10<sup>th</sup> grade year. The dependent variable I chose was F1s7m; Respondent doesn't feel safe at this school. The N for this sample was 10,992. Although there were missing responses to a number of the survey questions I chose to use, the number was quite small in comparison to the total N, so listwise deletion was used and the total N for those variables was reduced accordingly. There are three categories of variables I will be testing for my research, demographic, student reported and school reported variables. Although the data set also contains cases from schools other than public and catholic, I have chosen to concentrate on those two types of respondents, filtering out all the others (private other religious, private non-religious, etc.). In order to best be able to see the differences between the results for public vs. catholic, I utilized the SPSS commands for splitting and sorting files so that all the output would automatically differentiate between the two types of schools.

Most of the variables were coded into likert-scale 'type' responses, so some recoding was necessary to simplify the process. All of the independent variables except SES were either dichotomized or had dummy variables created to ease the analysis. The independent variables were grouped according to the type of effect as follows: Personal experience with crime; social support; school reported crime issues; demographic.

The variables used are as follows:

Personal experience with crime:

- F1s9a – Respondent had something stolen at school (Ever/Never)
- F1s9b – Someone offered to sell respondent drugs at school (Ever/Never)
- F1s9c – Someone threatened to hurt respondent (Ever/Never)
- F1s9d – Respondent got into a fight at school (Ever/Never)

Social Support:

- F1s63r – Respondent can't make friends with members of own sex (Agree/Disagree)
- F1s67h – Respondent doesn't fit into any group (Agree/Disagree)
- F1s62a – Respondent feels good about him/herself (Agree/Disagree)
- F1s65d – It is more difficult to make friends in high school (Agree/Disagree)
- F1s65e – Respondent has felt more alone in high school (Agree/Disagree)

School Reported Crime Issues:

- F1c95e – School says gang activity is a problem (Problem/Not a Problem)
- F1c95d – School says that physical conflicts are a problem (Problem/Not a Problem)
- F1c95m – School says that racial conflicts are a problem (Problem/Not a Problem)

Demographic (Control variables for regression analysis)

- F1sub – Respondent attends school in a suburb
- F1rur – Respondent attends school in a rural area (urban schools are what are being tested against)

- F1black – Respondent is black
- F1hisp – Respondent is Hispanic
- F1other – Respondent's race is Asian/Native American (white is what is being tested against)

- F1sex – 1 is male, 0 is female
- F1ses – an index

- F1catholic – Respondent's religious background is catholic (dummy variable in which Catholics are coded 1 and all others are coded 0).

Initial correlations indicate that there is significant correlation between a student's feelings of safety at school and the independent variables chosen. For example, when looking at the public school student's responses to feelings of social support, there is a .385 (sig. .000) between the safeness variable and F1s67h (respondent doesn't fit in any group), and a .413 (sig. .000) with F1s65e (respondent feels more alone in High School). These same correlations are slightly higher for Catholic school students. The other social support variables chosen all have similar correlates for both types of schools.

Three regression models were run for this research, the first containing most of the independent variables, the second controlling for religion as well as adding another social support variable, and the third adding two more social support variables that seemed pertinent. The table that follows will show only Model 2 and 3:

Student's Feelings of Safety and Security at School: A comparison between public and Catholic schools  
 NELS Data N= 10992 Grade 10 Dependent Variable: F1s7m – Respondent doesn't feel safe at this school

	.05*	.01**	.001***	MODEL 2		MODEL 3	
				Public	Catholic	Public	Catholic
F1s9a – Had something stolen at school				.066***	.633	.350	1.094
F1s9b – Someone offered to see respondent drugs at school				.649***	-.407	.509**	-4.124
F1s9d – Got into a fight at school				.503***	.252	.779***	-1.269
F1s9c – Someone threatened to hurt respondent				.480***	.740	.272*	3.568
F1s63r – Can't make friends with members of own sex				.005	-.015	.002	.096
F1s67h – Respondent doesn't fit into any group				.650***	1.624***	.361*	5.355
F1s62a – Feels good about him/herself				-.202	-1.003	.218	4.854
F1s65d – More difficult to make friends in high school						-.371	-7.732
F1s65e – Felt more alone in high school						-.744**	-.097
F1c95e-School says gang activity a problem				.292***	3.336***	-.128	2.606
F1c95d – School says physical conflicts a problem				.209**	-.267	.138	-2.893
F1c95m-School says racial conflicts a problem				.223***	-.768	.384**	-.105
F1sub – attends school in suburb				-.273**	-.722	-.705***	-15.326
F1rur – attends school in rural area				-.281**		-.627**	
F1black				.552***	.614	-.159	-18.490
F1other-race is Asian/Native American				.200	-.316	-.619	-13.490
F1sex				-.039	.813	-.216	3.534
F1ses				-.108*	-.049	-.015	1.309
F1cath – Religious background is Catholic				-.162	-.323	-.087	-9.608

As can be seen from the above table, in model 3, there are eight significant variables in the public schools that affect whether or not a student feels safe in their school. A student who got into a fight at school would predict the student not feeling safe at school, whereas the negative affect of attending school in a suburb would decrease the likelihood that a student would feel unsafe. Other significant positive affects on public school students include being offered drugs, not fitting into any group and the school reporting racial conflicts as a problem at the respondent's school. The negative effects, which in

this case indicate a student feeling safer at school, are; feeling more alone in high school, and attending school in a rural area.

Another significant finding is the lack of significance for any of these variables for students in Catholic schools. Although Model 2 seemed to be predicting rather strong effects towards feelings of being unsafe with not fitting in and school reported gang activity, these effects disappeared with the addition of what I refer to as the two loneliness variables.

\*\*\*\*\*MORE WORK NEEDS TO BE DONE FOR FINAL PAPER\*\*\*\*\*