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Reporting of Weapon Carrying at School among US Youth: Personal attitudes and Perceptions of Peers' Attitudes

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www.YouthHealthSafety.org

www.SocialNormSurveys.org

Abstract

Objective: Given that adolescents often act and think according to their perceptions of peer norms, perceptions of peer support for student reporting of weapon carrying (SRWC) may predict personal support for reporting of weapon carrying at school. However, perceptions of peer norms regarding support for SRWC may be quite inaccurate.

Methods: To assess the accuracy of perceived norms regarding SRWC to four authority types (principal, teacher, security, or parent), anonymous online surveys were conducted among youth in 29 schools (grades 5 to 12) in 6 states (n= 25,996) between 2006 and 2012.

Results: Most students personally thought that students should report it to each of the authority types. However, 37% to 53% of students misperceived that norm among peers, depending on the authority type. Instead, they thought that the majority of students did not support SRWC. Moreover, 63% of students underestimated the total number of authority types to which SRWC was supported. Multilevel analysis reveals that perceptions of SRWC support are highly predictive of personal support—more so than actual school norms and demographic factors.

Conclusions: Pervasive misperceptions may contribute to bystander apathy about peers with weapons.

Current State of Knowledge

- What's in the news....
- What's in the research literature...
 - Carrying of weapons at school
 - Weapon-related injury and long-term consequences
 - Risk factors
 - Sociodemographic
 - School climate
 - Reporting systems
- What about Social Norms?

Things that are perceived as real,
are real in their consequences.

Thomas & Thomas, 1928

Web-based Survey Instrument

Social Norms Surveys Online
Alcohol Education Project, Hobart and William Smith Colleges, Geneva, NY 14456
<http://www.socialnormsurveys.org>

Funding for the development of this survey was provided in full through a grant by the New Jersey Department of Education with funds from the United States Department of Education under the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act of the No Child Left Behind Act.

Survey of Bullying at Your School

[Español](#)

Please login.

Username:

Password:

Measures of Interest

- Personal support for Student Reporting of Weapon Carrying (SRWC)
 - Do you think students in your school should report weapon (knife or gun) carrying at school to:
 - 1) administrator or principal,
 - 2) teacher or counselor,
 - 3) police or security guard,
 - 4) parent or other adult relative
 - Separate items, then also created index of total support
- Perceived peer norm of support for SRWC
 - Parallel question: And what do you think most other students at your school would say?

Descriptive Statistics of Student Characteristics

Individual Variables	%	Mean Total Support for SRWC	Individual Variables	%	Mean Total Support for SRWC
<i>Gender</i>			<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>		
Female	50.4	2.98	White	65.1	2.94
Male	48.4	2.77	Black	4.7	2.48
<i>Age</i>			Latino/Hispanic	7.4	2.62
9-10 years old	.6	3.02	Asian	8.1	2.99
11-12 years old	25.2	3.18	Other	10.7	2.77
13-14 years old	31.52	2.93	<i>Social Characteristics</i>		
15-16 years old	26.8	2.66	School Sport	50.8	2.89
17-18 years old	14.5	2.62	No Participation	48.5	2.86
19-21 years old	.2	2.12	School clubs/gov't	32.5	3.00
(n=25,987)			No Participation	66.7	2.81
			Felt bullied this year	41.4	2.97
			Did not feel bullied	56.5	2.81

School (n=29) and Cohort Characteristics (n=49)

Variable	Mean	S.D.	Min	Max
% students within school eligible for free school lunch	13	18	0	81
% white within school	76	20	0.7	96
School size (number)	724	439	146	1850

Calculation of Actual SRWC Norm and Misperception of the Norm

- Norm
 - Did the majority of cohort support SRWC to specific types (or not)?
 - Median and mean total support of SRWC (all types) per cohort
 - Percentage of students within cohort supporting reporting to all 4 types
- Misperception
 - Did students' perception of norm match the actual norm for support of SRWC to each type?
 - The total number of misperceptions of supported authority types

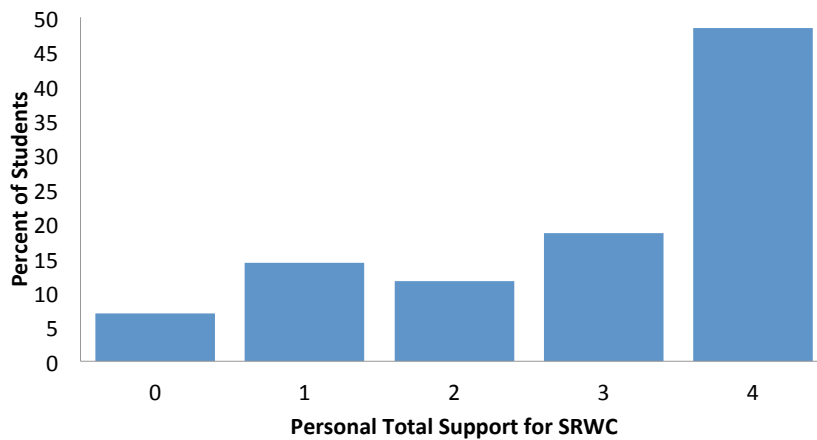
Prevalence and Distribution of Support for Student Reporting of Weapons Carrying (SRWC) to Specific Authority Types per School Cohort

Authority Type	Number (%) of Cohorts with Majority Supporting SRWC to Specific Authority	Mean percentage of students across school cohorts supporting SRWC within a school cohort	Standard deviation
Principal or School Administrator	49 (100%)	76%	10%
Teacher or Counselor	49 (100%)	78%	7%
Police or Security Guard	48 (98%)	69%	10%
Parent or Adult Relative	44 (90%)	60%	10%

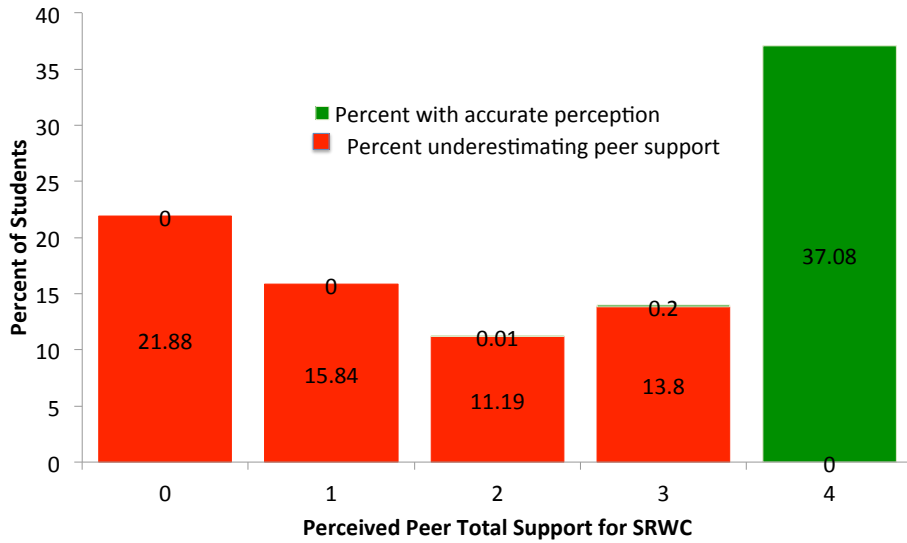
Percentage of Students who Accurately Perceive and Misperceive the Norm for Support of SRWC

	Percent Accurately Perceiving the Norm Supporting SRWC (the % who think the majority of their peers support SRWC)	Percent Misperceiving the Norm Supporting SRWC (the % who do not think the majority of their peers support SRWC)
Principal or School Administrator	59%	41%
Teacher or Counselor	63%	37%
Police or Security Guard	55%	45%
Parent or Other Adult Relative	47%	53%

Distribution of Personal Support for SRWC Across All Four Authority Types



Distribution and Accuracy of Perceived Peer Total Support for SRWC



What Matters More for Adolescents' Support of SRWC?

How much peers actually support SRWC?

How much adolescents think peers support SRWC?

School context?

Personal engagement in school?

Standardized Regression Coefficients Predicting SRWC

Covariates	β	(SE)
Perceived mean total support for SRWC at school	0.51***	0.006
Actual mean total support for SRWC at school	0.04	0.022
Female (vs. Male)	0.07***	0.005
Age	-0.03***	0.005
Black (vs. White)	-0.03***	0.006
Hispanic or Latino (vs. White)	-0.03***	0.006
Asian (vs. White)	-0.01	0.006
Other (vs. White)	-0.03***	0.006
Missing (vs. White)	-0.02*	0.009
Participation in athletics (vs. None)	0.01	0.006
Participation in school club/student government (vs. None)	0.06***	0.006
Ever felt bullied during this school year (vs. None)	0.06***	0.006
% of students eligible for free school lunch	0.01	0.028
% of student body that is White	0.01	0.021
Total population of school	0.03	0.032

* Coefficient is significant at $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Questions, Future Research and Implications

- Self-reported data?
- Causal direction?
- What creates misperceptions?
- Proximal vs distal norms?
- How can we reduce misperceptions of support for SRWC?