



Preventable or inevitable:

How could news about community safety appear in
California business and education coverage?

May 2015

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Acknowledgments

This work was funded by the Northern California Kaiser Permanente Community Benefit Department. We thank the staff of the Prevention Institute, especially Annie Lyles, Rachel Davis and Lisa Parks for their feedback and guidance in the development of this study. For their invaluable insights, we especially thank Louis Freedberg and the staff of EdSource, Chris Soderquist of Pontifex Consulting, and Dr. Howard Pinderhughes of the University of California, San Francisco, School of Nursing. Thanks to Heather Gehlert for copy editing.

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It's fair to say that we are all familiar with violence. We see it reported in the news, and many of us have experienced it firsthand. In spite of our personal and mediated experiences, however, it can be difficult to understand larger patterns of violence at the community level — and harder still to understand who can end it, and how.

Community violence (defined as “intentional acts of interpersonal violence committed in public areas by individuals who are not intimately related to the victim”¹) happens when complex social issues — like poverty, structural racism, and easy access to alcohol, drugs and weapons — coincide. Community violence is preventable, but it's not always understood that way. Indeed, the public discourse often reinforces the idea that violence is inevitable, and as such, can only be addressed after the fact with punitive criminal justice responses.

News coverage helps us peer into that discourse: The public understands violence (apart from personal experience) through the filter of what journalists think is important to report and what publishers think will sell. News coverage then sets the agenda and tone for debates regarding public policies about violence (as well as other issues) that shape communities.^{2,6}

News coverage of community violence may discourage positive action and reinforce assumptions that the problem is intractable when it obscures the interconnections among violence and various sectors of our society. Comprehensive violence prevention is a multi-sectoral effort that involves not only criminal justice, but also health care, schools, businesses, public health, youth-serving organizations and other groups. Typically, news coverage reflects only criminal justice perspectives^{7, 8} and ignores the voices and views of other stakeholders. The larger social and economic context, and the many stakeholders that are part of it, must be included if community violence is to be truly understood as a preventable problem. Those connections could be made in stories about crime and violence, but they could also be made in the business pages, in education news, or in stories about any sector that has a role to play in preventing violence.



It's reasonable to expect that news coverage about different sectors include information about violence because we know that other sectors are affected by community violence. We wanted to know: Do discussions about or depictions of community violence and safety appear in business or education stories? Though violence affects every sector, we specifically examined the business and education sectors for this preliminary analysis. We know that community violence can interfere with employee productivity and retention, and it interrupts students' learning and attendance.⁹ At the same time, these sectors play an important role in preventing violence and building safe communities. Businesses, for example, can promote community safety by providing economic opportunities and reducing poverty — a significant risk factor for community violence.⁹ The education sector, including the schools where a community's children spend most of their days, plays an essential role in youth development, which supports safe communities.¹⁰

If community violence isn't explicitly addressed in articles from these sectors, where could violence prevention or community safety appear in news about business and education? What are the existing opportunities in the news to demonstrate the role those sectors could play in preventing community violence and building safer, stronger communities?

What we did

To identify stories where community violence prevention could appear in the business and education sections, we adapted our usual content analysis methodology not only to explore what appeared in business and education stories already but also to assess where violence and safety could logically be included.

Developing a coding protocol

Identifying relevant business and education themes

We first read multiple samples of business and education stories from California newspapers to develop a list of common story themes in those sections that could relate to systemic causes and effects of community violence and safety. We further refined the list by reviewing selected literature on business¹¹⁻¹³ and education¹⁴⁻¹⁷ news framing. We also had in-depth conversations with education and journalism professionals and communication consultants who work with the business sector.

We identified 16 preliminary themes that appeared in education articles that could relate to community violence prevention. We also identified eight preliminary themes that appeared in business stories that could connect with community safety.



Creating a tool for analysis

We mapped the 24 themes against a modified version of the Haddon Matrix, a tool developed in the 1970s to assess points of intervention that could prevent injury before, during and after a car crash,¹⁸ which has since been used to address a number of public health and safety issues.¹⁹ The Haddon Matrix helped us assess how different themes in business and education news could connect to community violence prevention before, during or after violence might occur (see Tables 1 and 2). We asked:

- Which themes relate to how community violence affects the business and education sectors?
- Which themes relate to how the business and education sectors reinforce or mitigate violence or promote safety within each sector?
- Which themes relate to how those sectors could prevent or contribute to future community violence?

For example, education coverage sometimes included stories about high school dropout rates. Failure to complete high school is a risk factor for economic instability and contact with the criminal justice system,²⁰ so ensuring that students graduate is one way that the education system can improve community safety. An article reporting on high school graduation rates might make that connection to violence explicitly, or it might not. If the article did mention the connection, we would note that explicit mention of violence prevention. If not, we would note that the article included themes relating to how education can prevent future community violence.

Similarly, articles about real estate prices occasionally appeared in the business section. High levels of community violence can depress neighborhood real estate prices,²¹ which could be mentioned explicitly in business articles. We noted if the article included the connection, and if it did not, we noted that the theme was present.

Selecting and coding a sample

Using a constructed week sampling methodology,^{22, 23} we collected all stories from the business and education sections, as well as all those tagged “business” or “education” in the Nexis database, from five major California newspapers (the Contra Costa Times, The Sacramento Bee, the Los Angeles Times, the San Jose Mercury News and the San Francisco Chronicle).^a We analyzed newspapers because, although new media platforms are changing the way news is gathered and reported, as well as how people consume the news, newspapers and their online versions continue to set the news agenda and influence debates around public policy.²⁴

^a We analyzed each article in our sample for the presence or absence of the community safety-related themes we identified. Before coding the full sample, we used an iterative process and statistical test to ensure that coders’ agreement wasn’t occurring by chance.

Table 1: Preliminary list of story themes from education sector news that could relate to community violence prevention		
How community violence affects the education sector	How the education sector addresses or reinforces violence in schools	How the education sector prevents or contributes to future community violence
<p>Community violence can contribute to poverty and homelessness, which may make it harder to educate children.</p> <p>When kids experience community violence or trauma, the need for mental health services in schools increases.</p> <p>Community violence can impact attendance, truancy and chronic absenteeism.</p> <p>Violence can cause problems in terms of recruiting and retaining skilled teachers.</p> <p>Safe Routes to School is a program that keeps children safe on their way to school.</p>	<p>Mental health services help children experiencing or perpetrating violence.</p> <p>School environment issues can contribute to violence in school or help prevent it (e.g. trauma-informed schools).</p> <p>School discipline impacts community violence — for example, restorative justice may reduce violence in and out of schools, while punitive measures could exacerbate it.</p> <p>Teacher training allows teachers to effectively address violence at school.</p>	<p>Systemic education issues (like underfunding, the opportunity gap, Common Core, test scores, etc.) can force kids out of school or help them succeed, affecting economic outcomes and community safety either way.</p> <p>Opportunities for low-income students and students of color promote economic stability.</p> <p>Mental health services in schools address mental health and substance abuse issues that could contribute to later community violence.</p> <p>Early childhood education improves student outcomes.</p> <p>School discipline impacts community violence — for example, restorative justice keeps kids in school, while punitive measures can funnel them into the school-to-prison pipeline.</p> <p>Adult education and jobs training promote economic stability and community safety.</p> <p>Joint use is a program wherein schools open their grounds to the community, creating safe places to be active.</p>

Table 2: Preliminary list of story themes from business sector news that could relate to community violence prevention		
How community violence affects the business sector	How the business sector addresses or reinforces violence in the workplace	How the business sector prevents or contributes to future community violence
<p>Violence may inhibit business development making it difficult, for example, to attract customers or to recruit or retain employees in places perceived as unsafe.</p> <p>Violence can depress real estate prices.</p>	<p>Oppression in the workplace (racism, sexism, or homophobia) can contribute to violence.</p>	<p>Wages, unions and labor issues affect economic stability and community safety.</p> <p>Job growth and job loss impact economic stability and community safety.</p> <p>Corporate social responsibility initiatives can help build safer communities.</p> <p>Business development promotes economic stability and community safety.</p> <p>Diversity in the workplace promotes economic stability and community safety.</p>

What we found

We found 171 education articles and 310 business articles published in 2014. Due to the high volume of business stories, we randomly selected half of the business stories to code; for the analysis below, we weighted the results from business stories to restore the representation of the sample. After we discarded the articles that were not substantively about education or business (for example, a community calendar that appeared in the education sample because it listed an event to be held in a high school gymnasium, or an article about community politics that was tagged “business” because it mentioned the Chamber of Commerce in passing), we had 220 business articles and 126 education articles to code.



Education news

Community violence occasionally appears in education coverage.

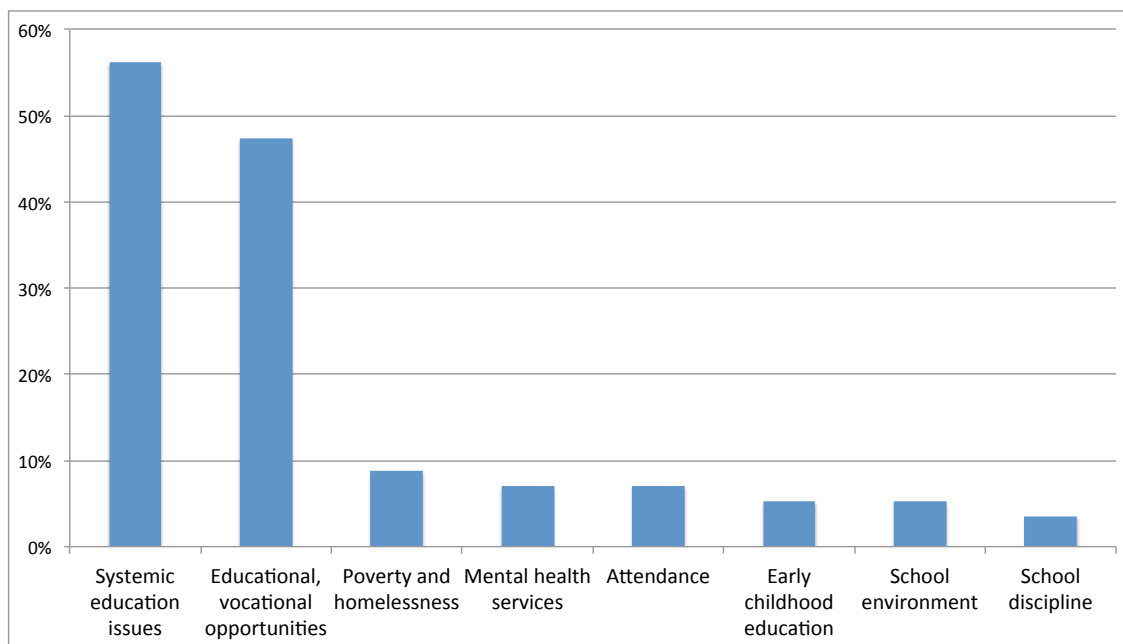
Three articles, all from the education sections of newspapers, explicitly discussed the impact of community violence on students,^{25, 26} especially young men of color,²⁷ and how schools around California are addressing that impact. A fourth story addressed the role of adult education programs for previously incarcerated residents in reducing recidivism and criminal behavior.²⁸

Many more education stories could explicitly include community safety.

Though they did not explicitly reference community violence, more than 40% (56 articles) of relevant education stories contained themes that related to causes of or solutions to community violence.

The remaining stories were profiles of specific students or teachers, stories about school athletics, or stories about construction projects within school districts.

Figure 1: What themes related to community violence appeared in California education news?





The themes that appeared most often related to how the education sector can help prevent future community violence and build safe communities for students and their families (see Figure 1^b). The most common themes related to violence prevention were about systemic education issues that could force students out of school, or help them succeed, with implications for students' economic success and, ultimately, for community safety. The second most prevalent theme in education stories was opportunities, such as special classes or discounted community college tuition, for low-income students and students who might otherwise be unable to complete school or attend college. Opportunities like these could increase school retention rates and ultimately decrease community violence.

Many of these stories could build on these themes to explicitly connect with community safety and violence prevention. For instance, one education story focused on Oakland school superintendent Antwan Wilson's plans to raise the district's graduation rate. Wilson observed, "[W]e don't have all our kids in career pathways, and all our students don't have personalized learning plans" and concluded, "This plan is about providing quality schools in every neighborhood."²⁹ The article goes into detail about how students and teachers will benefit and, with just a few questions to the right sources, could have gone further to illuminate how the community as a whole will benefit as well.

Another education article focused on the innovative work of a community college professor to develop applied math classes that would help improve graduation rates for African American and Latino students.³⁰ Raising graduation rates can reduce community violence by keeping students connected to school and on a path to graduation and eventually good jobs. A few sentences in that story could have highlighted the broader benefits that accrue for the whole community when students complete high school — including benefits like violence prevention and safety. Similarly, stories about teacher training and retention (for example, union issues, wage disputes or training programs) could report that the consistent presence of caring adults in the lives of young people is key to community safety. Consequently, anything that enhances teachers' ability to forge stable, long-term relationships with their students ultimately helps lay the foundation for safe and healthy communities.

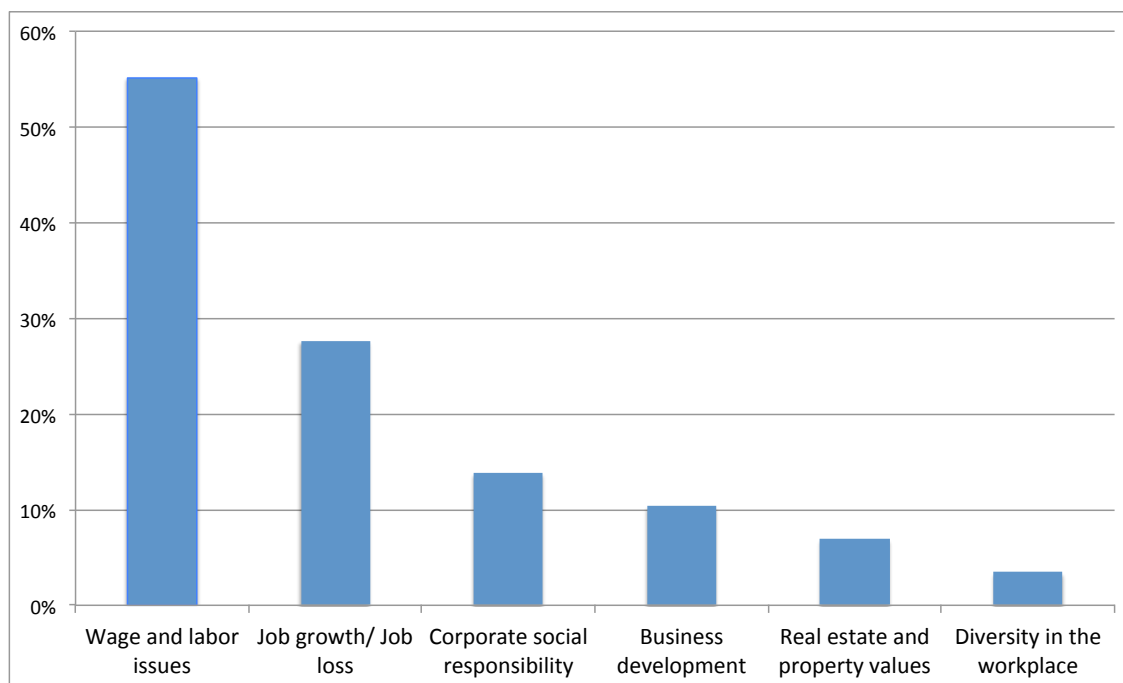
^b For a list of all of education themes we coded for, including those that did not appear in the sample, see Table 1.

Business news

Business news does not include community safety, but it could.

We did not find any business stories that addressed community violence explicitly. However, approximately one-quarter (58 articles) of relevant business articles contained themes that could easily connect with community violence or prevention; most of these themes related to how business sector actions can support or undermine community employment, economic stability and, ultimately, communities' long-term safety.

Figure 2: What themes related to community violence appeared in California business news?

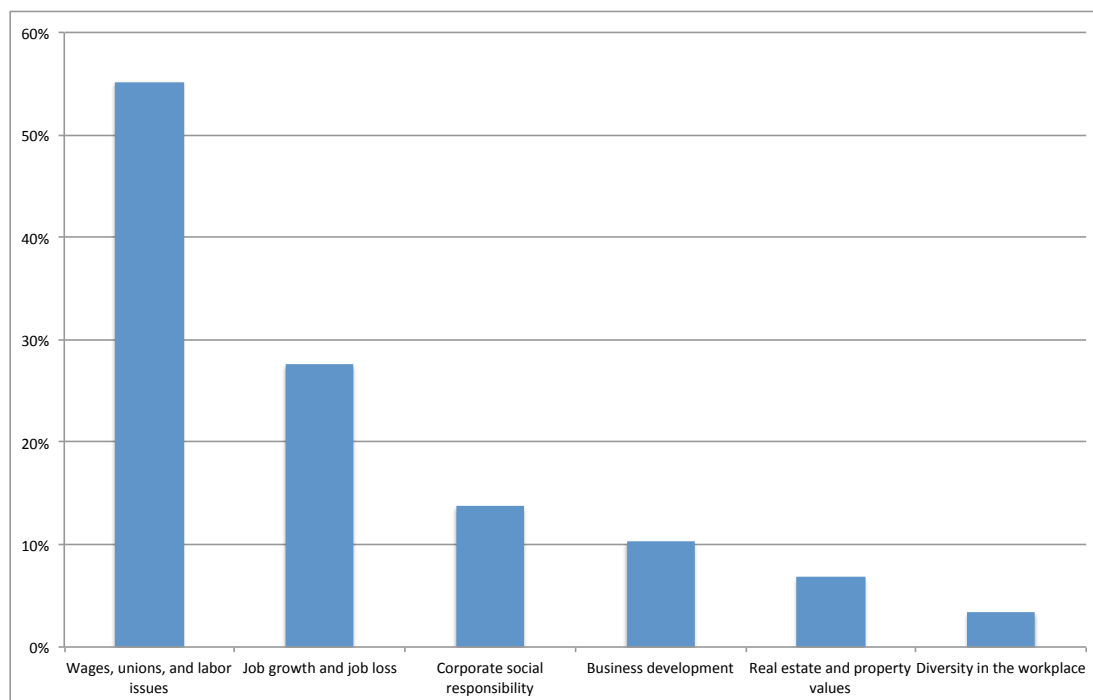


The most common themes in business stories were wages and labor issues (see Figure 2^c), which can affect community members' ability to maintain stable employment and quality of life. For example, one typical article detailed Starbucks' efforts to change its scheduling policies to give baristas more "stability and consistency."³¹ Reporters could take this idea further by asking additional sources about how stable employment affects community safety (see Figure 3 for an example). Job growth and, conversely,

^c For a list of all of business themes we coded for, including those that did not appear in the sample, see Table 2.

unemployment — both of which have important implications for the economic success of a community — also appeared frequently in business stories.

Figure 3: Making community violence visible in education and business news



What would it look like in practice to connect community violence with education or business news? Education reporters can expand their reporting by pointing out the connection between stronger schools, higher graduation rates and improved public safety. The voices and perspectives of community health advocates can help make that connection, as can data and examples based on the real-life experiences of students and other affected community members.

In the business sector, communities are safer when residents have good, sustainable jobs. Journalists could help make the prevention link by expanding their sources beyond criminal justice representatives. Community health advocates and their allies can easily expand the frame to show the economic as well as social consequences of unstable jobs.

In the following business article, we added text in **bold** to illustrate how a reporter could add sources to make explicit connections with community violence.



Starbucks vows to change unpredictable barista work schedule

Original article

Starbucks is changing its scheduling policies to give baristas more "stability and consistency," following a New York Times report about the havoc created in a young mother's life by having to work unpredictable shifts determined by the company's scheduling software.

In an email to employees Thursday morning, senior executive Cliff Burrows said that Starbucks has "a responsibility to support" employees in balancing their home and work lives.

The company will upgrade its scheduling software in order to make work shifts more consistent, said Burrows. Employees will never be required to work back-to-back closing and opening shifts, and schedules will be posted a week in advance.

Moreover, the company will work to transfer employees who have to commute for more than an hour to stores closer to their home "as quickly as possible."

Starbucks prides itself on providing benefits that are rare in the services industry, such as stock options, health care and retirement plans for those working more than 20 hours a week.

The company recently announced a deal with Arizona State University to subsidize an online college degree for its legions of U.S. baristas.

Nevertheless, the ruckus about scheduling underscores the tensions between running a business "through the lens of humanity," as the company calls its workplace practices, and the need to keep its profit growth momentum through expansion and efficiency.

The news also comes in the midst of a growing debate about the quality of the bottom-tier of U.S. jobs and the strain they create among workers. Last month, a South Carolina fast-food worker was arrested for leaving her daughter to play alone in a park while she went to work.

Revised article

Starbucks is changing its scheduling policies to give baristas more "stability and consistency," following a New York Times report about the havoc created in a young mother's life by having to work unpredictable shifts determined by the company's scheduling software.

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The company will upgrade its scheduling software in order to make work shifts more consistent, said Burrows. Employees will never be required to work back-to-back closing and opening shifts, and schedules will be posted a week in advance.

Moreover, the company will work to transfer employees who have to commute for more than an hour to stores closer to their home "as quickly as possible."

Advocates praised Starbucks' new approach as one with potentially far-reaching impact. "Starbucks' latest move isn't just good for Starbucks employees — it's good for communities, said Annie Lyles, a program manager at Oakland's Prevention Institute. "Communities are safer when residents have good, sustainable jobs — by making sure that Starbucks employees can work and take care of their families, the company is making an investment in their community that benefits families, the community, and their bottom line."

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The news also comes in the midst of a growing debate about the quality of the bottom-tier of U.S. jobs and the strain they create among workers. Last month, a South Carolina fast-food worker was arrested for leaving her daughter to play alone in a park while she went to work.

"The economic benefits of the new policy will accrue beyond the workers as Starbucks contributes to better working and living conditions in all the communities across the country," Lyles said. "Thriving communities where families are safe require solid, sustainable employment."



Conclusions and next steps

Most studies of violence in the news evaluate what appears in crime reports. With this study, we broke new ground by examining not only what was in stories about community violence and safety but also what could have been included in news where violence doesn't usually appear.

Violence prevention could involve every sector of society; for this study we focused on news from education and business. We found that:

- Community violence rarely appears explicitly in education news, and never in business news;
- There are multiple themes in both business and education news that relate to community violence prevention; and
- Many of these themes easily connect to how the business and education sectors can prevent future community violence and build or sustain safe communities.

These findings suggest distinct opportunities for both prevention advocates and reporters to expand the discourse around community safety that can help policymakers and the public better understand what prevention policies and programs should be adopted or expanded.

Journalists can expand their sources to include business and education stakeholders who can explain the connection to community safety.

The education and business communities both have a vested interest in safety and important roles to play in building safe communities. Changing the discourse around violence will require making that role, and those connections, visible by including their perspective in the public dialogue about community safety.

Journalists might need training in the risk factors for violence and on the role for education and business in building safer communities. Researchers can work with journalists to suggest new angles for reporters to investigate when they cover business or education, based on the epidemiology of violence and on evaluations of promising interventions and prevention programs.

Advocates can build capacity among violence prevention leaders to connect their work with business and education perspectives.

There are many opportunities in the news for advocates, practitioners, public health leaders and reporters to connect business and education stories with community violence prevention and draw members of those sectors into the



conversation about building safe communities. Indeed, our research found that that conversation is beginning to happen, to a limited extent, in education news.

Since business and education leaders are not often part of violence prevention conversations and related work, it will be important to forge relationships with them to develop shared goals and communication priorities. Training and capacity building will be critical to inform advocates, practitioners and other community leaders about these opportunities and how they connect with work that is already happening at the community level around violence prevention. This training will shape their work to raise the profile of violence as a preventable issue in which the entire community, including the business and education sectors, has a stake. For example, if community members are advocating for specific violence prevention policies, they could explain how those policies will connect to business or education.

Community violence doesn't happen in a vacuum — and neither can the discourse around how to end it. As prevention advocates and journalists alike get better at including all the relevant stakeholders in reporting on community safety, we will see a shift in the discourse that will lead to more effective policies and programs and, finally, safer communities.

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