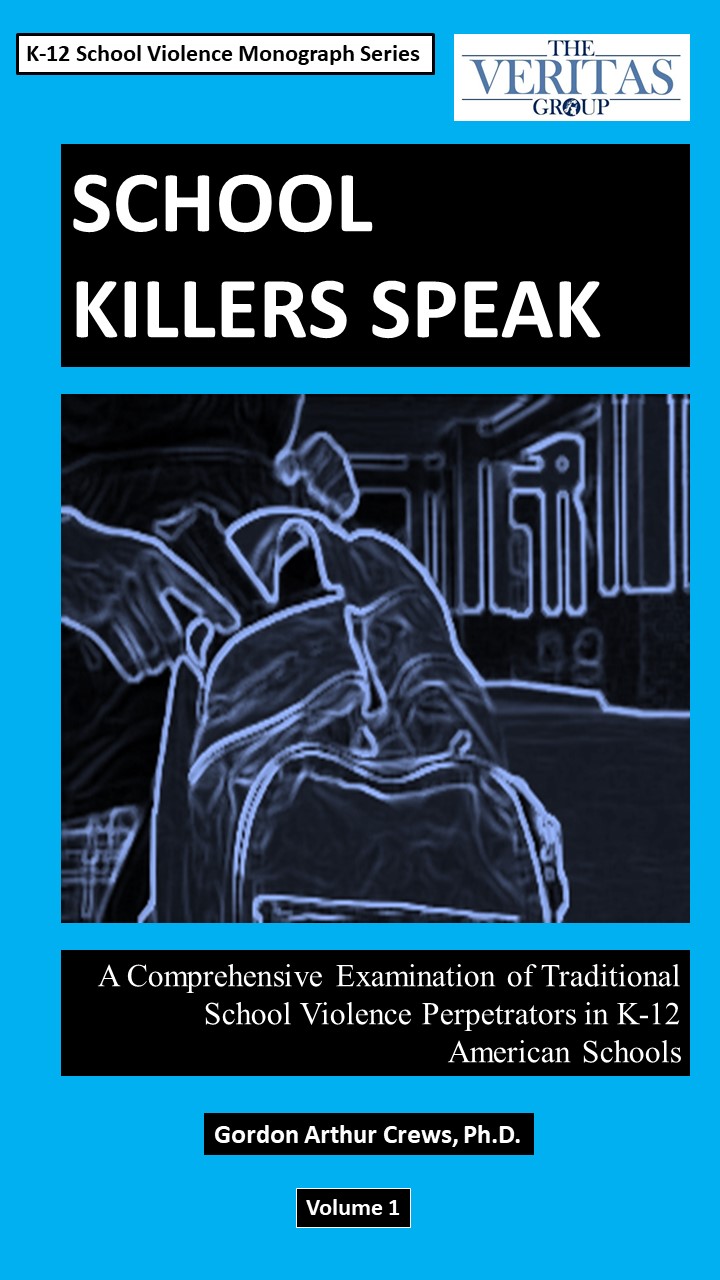
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**SCHOOL KILLERS SPEAK**

**A Comprehensive Examination of Traditional School Violence Perpetrators in K-12 American Schools**

**Gordon Arthur Crews, Ph.D.**



T H E V E R I T A S G R O U P, LLC

Huntington, West Virginia

Published by *The Veritas Group, LLC*

A wholly owned subsidiary of The Veritas Group, LLC

729 Ninth Avenue #138, Huntington, West Virginia 25701 [www.veritasgroupconsulting.com](http://www.veritasgroupconsulting.com/)

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

ISBN 13: 978-0-9979620-1-7

™ The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992.

Printed in the United States of America

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**PURPOSE OF SERIES**

The purpose of this work is to examine the perpetrators of acts of school violence in K–12 schools in the United States. It is hoped that this examination will offer new and unique insight into the extremely complex issues surrounding juvenile violence in general and school violence in particular. There have been myriad works categorizing, theorizing, and profiling the causes of these types of events and the offenders who commit them. The problem is that very few have actually sought answers where they lie, from those who actually know why an event happened—*the individuals who committed the act*.

With this work, I have sought to do just that, speak directly to those who can offer us the best information on *why some individuals decide to commit an act of violence at a K–12 American school*.

Since 2012, I have been interviewing, exchanging correspondence, and visiting face to face, with approximately 42 currently incarcerated men and women who committed their acts of violence in a K–12 school building, school bus, or school property. As discussed later in this work, my original sample was 78 individuals with 36 of that number participating in a survey which will also be discussed. In addition to the 36 who participated, another 6 have continued speaking with me and decided to contribute more in-depth to this work over the last four years. At all hours of the night, my cell phone often has messages left on it such as, “You are receiving this call from an inmate at XXXXXXX prison, press 1 if you are willing to accept the charges.” I have never purchased so many postage stamps in my life and am actually friends on *Facebook* with *JPay.com* (the Web site where one can send money to incarcerated offenders across the United States). I will probably be indicted for some type of fraud being on so many “inmate visitor lists” in so many states!

To start us off, I asked some of those I have been speaking with to send me a comment or two that they would like others to read and understand about school violence as they begin reading this work. I chose four comments to use in this work, one from each of the four types of school violence perpetrators discussed throughout this work. Their comments are below.

Comments from a *Traditional* School Violence Perpetrator who, at age 15, entered his high school’s main hallway and fatally shot his principal with a .22 caliber revolver:

*I’m XXX XXXX inmate #XXXXXX. I was the one behind the XXXXXXX, XX XXXX shooting in XXX County, XXXXXX. I write this for a few reasons, one to let people know how messed up the system is, and two how fragile and misunderstood the juvenile brain is. Us juveniles tend to hide what truly is serious in order to protect what we perceive to be serious. For example, I hid the fact that I was sexually assaulted by my victim for two years prior to shooting him. But I told no one of this till I was 18, because in my small idiotic juvenile brain I thought no one would believe me, or that it would prove what everyone thought about me, that I was homosexual. But what clammed me up even more was, what would my then girlfriend think. If I couldn’t protect myself then how was I to protect her. See that is how messed up the juvenile brain is, I should never have been worried about that, because I was facing life in prison, but instead of telling the truth I lied and was given life with the possibility for parole in XXXX.*

*I couldn’t fully digest how serious either situation was, be it what happened to me or what I did to XXXX. I knew I was in trouble but I couldn’t understand to what extent. I couldn’t even grasp what LIFE in prison meant. I was wrong to handle the situation the way that I did, because of my reckless actions a human life was lost and a family torn apart. Only when I got older was I able to understand what I had really done, though the result was not my intention. It taught me that things don’t always go as planned and that you should look at all the possibilities of what can happen. My only intent was to scare those who had emotionally hurt me for so many years, and to take XXXX’s manhood as he had taken mine, then to die by the cop’s hand. I never intended to kill any one. I had NO right to do what I did not matter how justified I believed I was.*

*I didn’t think about the emotional impact I was inflicting upon everyone, from the school to XXXX’s wife, kids, and family let alone the community as a whole. So I am at fault for my actions and should be held accountable for them. When it comes to the system handling juveniles they need better regulations on how to handle juveniles of ALL ages. Like a positive nurturing environment to make the juvenile feel secure where he can speak without being automatically judged by my acts. If I had been in a safe place and asked if I had been assaulted, and if so that it wasn’t my fault or shame then I would have opened up. They also need to learn to work with juveniles who have had or have drug additions. Because all these things play a factor in the chemistry of the juveniles brain. They also need to have the juvenile explain his rights the way he understands them back to the detectives so they are all on the same wave length. For example I was asked if I wanted a lawyer, I responded “I don’t have money for a lawyer” so they reread that right to me and asked again, and I responded the same.*

*I’m indicating that I want a lawyer, without saying I want a lawyer. The detectives done know I have a 2nd grade math level or a 3rd grade reading level, and can’t properly phrase my sentences. I was also very submissive and easily intimidated. Juveniles can’t and shouldn’t be tried as adults because they are neither physically nor mentally an adult, and their empathy and ability to feel for others is at a low, so when they are placed on trial and don’t cry like expected they are viewed as monsters or heartless humans that can be disposed of. What the public fails to realize is that the frontal cortex of the brain which helps control emotions such as empathy isn’t even fully developed till the ages of 21–26. Come that with drugs and physical abuse it takes even longer because it retards the growth of it. I didn’t feel empathy or regret for the citizen or my actions till I was in my 20s. At that time I felt bad knew what I had done was bad, but was unable to show it till my 20s.*

Comments from a *Gang-Related* School Violence Perpetrator who, at age 18, was involved in the shooting death of a 16-year-old gang rival in a school parking lot with three other men:

*As a youth, I was a resident of XXXXXXX. I grew up in a Southside neighborhood—XXXXX. I witness a lot of violence. And from my vantage point, the majority of the violent school incidents escalated from smaller incidents in our communities! Therefore, to elaborate on our communities and my experiences, I noticed how easy it was to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. On XXXX XX, XXXX, I was shot in the neck while inbounding a pass playing basketball; after my recovery I vowed to myself I would leave the streets alone. Growing up in my neighborhood criminal activity was everywhere. It was hardly avoidable. Even a causal walk to the grocery store or to church was suspect to an episode. My community seemed to contain only minds of ignorance so I always thought that life style was the only way of living.*

*Selling drugs, shootings, robberies, and other menacing tactics are the realities of young males in order to keep bills paid and food on their table. I ask this, can you imagine being young again, sitting in a classroom and witnessing a fellow student you’ve seen selling drugs on the streets dressed in the best of clothes pull out wads of cash?*

*Jealousy, curiosity, and temptation are overwhelming. Adolescent desires can be gratified nearly instantaneously by giving into the calling of the streets. Satisfaction can be found quicker then hailing a jitney (cab). This section is how I was trapped by the streets at the tender age of 14. For young males, the combination of the worldly materialistic desires and the adjusting to testosterone can be lethal. Aggression that is pent up from incidents from the streets spills over in schools and classrooms. Outbursts can be ignited by most from a minute occurrence such as a misinterpreted gaze or look, wrong choice of words, ego, reputation, or an image misled for.*

Comments from an *Associated and/or Mentally Ill* School Violence Perpetrator who, at the age 18, crashed through the security gate of his former high school, stepped out of his vehicle, set off several smoke bombs, and then proceeded to open gunfire toward the school shattering many windows in front of the school cafeteria injuring several students:

*As a child, I was always socially awkward. I was overweight, wore glasses, and bullied by a friend of mine. I grew up with some friends but was often the proverbial “loner.” I also do suffer from mental illness.*

*Because of bullying and my sensitivity to it, I became depressed. My father could sometimes be abusive and very strict to my family and I. I disliked being treated that way as anyone would. As a young child I liked violent movies and some violent video games. I had a strong interest in firearms and became desensitized to violent content. I later joined the military and basic training enforced and reinforced my feelings of low self-worth. Memoires of the past created in me more depression and suicidal thoughts.*

*As my depression increased, my thoughts became more erratic. I began to drown my frustration in work and violent content. Violent content can be a factor in these cases. Not all who view violence decide to commit a violent act but you do become desensitized after viewing it for so long. Individuals who take medicine for mental illness or who have had suicidal thoughts need to be watched because suicidal thoughts can later become homicidal as well. Those who have suicidal thoughts can extend them to include other people.*

*I was obsessed with violent shootings and believe that I was call to do one myself. I regret what happened with all my heart. When you have mental illness, you tend to act more compulsively and react differently than those who do not have it. You think all is well. Almost every day this happens. We are becoming more and more desensitized to extreme violence due to movies, television, video games, and prevalence of violence extremism. My choices were not the choices of a rational man.*

Comments from a *Non-Associated and/or Mentally Ill* School Violence Perpetrator who, at the age of 55, attacked 11 kindergarteners, two teachers and the principal of an elementary school with a machete. He later stated that the attack was because he was angry about his divorce and allegations he had molested his stepdaughters:

*Regarding school safety—I have no interest in the subject. I am 67, 55 when I got my wee bit o’revenge—therefore—most of these topics are not applicable to me—sorry! I was prepared for my act in that I stopped twice in XXXXX and XXXX to sharpen my machete on my way to that school! I also hope to be remembered in XXXX County forever! No mental illness here—just bored and one of the angriest persons on earth!! Anger and hatred really causes severe miserableness for those who experience those 2 emotions. Drugs/Meds/ Alcohol—ain’t solve it—you must get revenge—or commit suicide—to escape the TORMENT. Either/Both would be a “Blessing”!*

I could think of no better way to begin this examination of school violence and those who commit it then with these initial remarks from those I have “worked with” for over three years. Please read between the lines of what I write and what they say. There are many lessons in here for all of us to remember. I hope that the readers of this work will take away with them a great deal of “food for thought” and the desire to do what they can to help reduce this type of violence in our country.

It is hoped with this work that those in positions to make changes in policies that impact, and even control, the lives of young people in the K–12 schools across the United States will look beyond the old beliefs and stereotypes. Instead of seeking scapegoats, seek commonsense strategies which take into consideration potential impact on all factions of a school - students, teachers, staff, and administrators.

**BACKGROUND RESEARCH**

This work resulted as part of a comprehensive and ongoing research project investigating the causes of K–12 school violence and disturbance in America. Between 2008 and 2013, all publicly available lists and news reports were scoured to obtain a population of names of perpetrators who committed violence on kindergarten to 12th-grade school property or at a school function since the 1700s (approximately 500-plus incidents initially identified).

Then the deceased, released, un-adjudicated, and otherwise un-locatable individuals were eliminated from the sample (decreasing cases to approximately 120 incidents). Finally, state correctional systems were extensively searched to determine the number of these offenders who were still alive, incarcerated, and able to be contacted.

This resulted in a list of 78 school violence incidents and offenders who committed their acts of violence in 33 states across the United States between 1979 and 2011.

**PORTRAITS AND TYPOLOGIES**

Next, descriptive data from publicly available secondary sources (e.g., court transcripts, news reports, journal articles, etc.) related to the resulting 78 identified incarcerated perpetrators of school violence (mostly *school shooters*) were gathered. This was conducted to analyze their acts of school violence and the aftermaths of their acts to develop a comprehensive portrait of K–12 school violence in the United States. It was also to provide this profile through separation by “type” of school violence perpetrator for a more in-depth analysis. From extensive review of the cases, surveys, and interviews, four (4) types of offenders were identified:

*Traditional* School Violence Perpetrators (42 of the 78 offenders in this sample);

*Gang-Related* School Violence Perpetrators (24 of the 78 offenders in this sample);

*Associated School and/or Mentally Ill* School Violence Perpetrators (7 of the 78 offenders in this sample);

*Non-Associated and/or Mentally Ill* School Violence Perpetrators (5 of the 78 offenders in this sample).

*Traditional* school violence perpetrators are defined as those who were current students and essentially “striking back” at the students and school which they attended at the time of the violent act. *Gang-related* school violence perpetrators are defined as those who were identified (self and law enforcement identification) as involved in the gang lifestyle and committed their acts as part of such lifestyle on school grounds or at school functions.

In contrast, *Associated* or *Non-Associated and/or Mentally Ill* school violence perpetrators are identified as offenders who were generally older and targeted a school of which they may (*Associated*) or may not have (*Non-Associated*) any past or current involvement. These are either past students who returned to their former school to commit a violent act or targeted a school in which they had no association, but targeted it for other reasons (e.g., as a symbol of innocence or revenge against society as a whole).

**FROM THE MOUTHS OF THE PERPETRATORS**

Finally, a secondary part of the overall research project focused on the results of a 200-question scenario-based survey, entitled, “School Violence Prevention Questionnaire,” distributed in early 2013 to the 78 identified incarcerated school violence perpetrators who committed acts of violence across the United States between 1979 and 2011. This survey questionnaire was developed in late 2012 with assistance from Dr. Angela W. Crews of the *Themis Center for Justice Policy, Practice, and Research* (Huntington, West Virginia). Dr. Crews also established the initial structure of the planned database for this research in the fall of 2012. The database was restructured by Ms. Paige Heinrich in 2013 under the auspices of *The Veritas Group, LLC* (Huntington, West Virginia). This group also collected all surveys, entered all data, and analyzed all results.

It was determined early that a *projective technique* was the survey method to be used given the research population (i.e., incarcerated individuals, many facing the appellate process and/or denying their guilt). It was determined that this would be the most effective way to help the respondents’ *unconscious speak*, without directly commenting on their own criminal cases or culpability. Often, respondents are assumed to hold things back in order to protect their *self-image or potential culpability* in a research situation. When investigated by means of a projective technique, focus is moved away from the respondent and “projected” at hypothetical others or situations and scenarios. Therefore, respondents are supposed to *open up* to the survey purpose and actually reveal more about themselves than if asked directly. This is very often the case when conducting research about the criminal behavior of an individual. The “Prevention of School Violence Questionnaire” was constructed and administered in this fashion.

With this questionnaire, respondents were asked to put themselves *in the shoes of* John/Jane, a person similar to themselves at the time they committed their acts of violence and to answer questions about John’s/Jane’s thoughts, feelings, and experiences at four different time periods: (1) *prior to deciding to commit violence*; (2) *after the decision to commit violence and during the planning phase*; (3) *during the act of violence*; and (4) *immediately after the act of violence*. For each part of the survey, respondents were asked if this hypothetical person agreed or disagreed with a statement provided. The level of agreement with the statement posed was rated 0 to 4 with the following options for response:

John/Jane is *definitely not* thinking, feeling, or experiencing this.

John/Jane is *probably not* thinking, feeling, or experiencing this.

I am *not sure* whether John/Jane is thinking, feeling, or experiencing this.

John/Jane is *probably* thinking, feeling, or experiencing this.

John/Jane is *definitely* thinking, feeling, or experiencing this.

All 78 offenders received a survey with 36 of them agreeing to participate in this research and responding with their completed survey. This resulted in following final sample for survey responses:

*Traditional* School Violence Perpetrators (18 of the 36 offenders in this sample);

*Gang-Related* School Violence Perpetrators (13 of the 36 offenders in this sample);

*Associated* School Violence Perpetrators (4 of the 36 offenders in this sample);

*Non-Associated* School Violence Perpetrators (1 of the 36 offenders in this sample).

**EXAMINATION OF TYPES OF OFFENDERS**

The chapters in each part present information which offers an overview percentage of all perpetrators who fall into a particular category/ response/finding. As for the survey responses, responses of “probably thinking, feeling, or experiencing this” and “definitely thinking, feeling, or experiencing this” were combined and only used in the calculations. The information also divides the findings as they pertain to the four (4) different types of school violence perpetrators (i.e., *Traditional*, *Gang-Related*, *Associated and/or Mentally Ill*, and *Non-Associated and/or Mentally Ill* School Violence Perpetrators).

**PREFACE**

In the summer of 1987, at the age of 22, I was a field training officer and bloodhound handler at the Richland County Sheriff’s Department in Columbia, South Carolina. I had followed in the footsteps of both my parents who were also police officers at the time. My father was a homicide investigator at the City of Columbia Police Department and my mother was a sergeant at the Richland County Sheriff’s Department. While both tried their best to deter me from choosing this line of work, they were both extremely proud that I had.

During that summer, there had been a rash of break-ins in a small neighborhood off Polo Road (North East Columbia) which was hidden from the road by a thick pine forest. There were never any tire tracks from the “crime scenes” and only items which could be carried by hand were ever taken. Given the terrain of this location and these facts, I knew it was only a matter of time before a “tracker” was called to follow an exit trail.

One night a woman had come home to find her back door kicked in and her new VCR gone (we used those in 1987). The only evidence was a muddy size 11 tennis shoe print on the back door with matching prints throughout the house and heading down a path toward the woods. Being on call, me and my assigned bloodhound, “Red,” were dispatched to see if we could follow this trail to catch the “bad guy” and hopefully stop the break-ins in the area. We were able to pick up a scent and headed into the dark woods.

As we followed the scent of our “burglar” in the pitch blackness of night with only my bouncing flashlight for help, we happened upon what appeared to be an abandoned house. There were no doors or windows and the steps to the front door were rotten and falling off the porch. But, as fate would have it, the thief had apparently gone through the house in that Red was determined that he and I would as well. Even when you don’t want to go somewhere, if you have a 120-pound determined bloodhound pulling on that harness, you are going to follow no matter what danger may lie ahead. Every time we entered some dark place chasing who knows what, I always remembered being told by the other “trackers” that my bloodhound’s badge number was S20, while mine was S377. This meant that “ole’ Red” had been with the department much longer than I and, in turn, was therefore much more valuable.

As we entered this house I found that our areas of focus were no longer the same. While I was trying to not fall through the floors, his was to see how fast he could move from room to room; neither of us too concerned over what might be lurking in the dark. As we entered the last bedroom, things were completely different. The room’s floors had been repaired, windows replaced, and doors reattached. Even the walls and ceiling were painted and in good condition.

On the walls were some of the most elaborate paintings I had ever seen. A huge figure of *Satan* filled most of one wall with his hand reaching out toward another wall. His hand was reaching into the womb of a naked woman whose unborn fetus was painted with great detail. It was being pulled out by this figure of Satan. There were altars with candles and bowls at various points in the room and the floor had a 13-foot in diameter inverted pentagram painted in the center. While I wanted to stay and examine this room more closely, Red was not impressed and pulled me toward the nearby trailer park (consisting of three trailers) where we would find our 16-year- old male culprit. We ran right up to his trailer door and Red picked up one of the muddy size 11 tennis shoes on the front porch to make sure that I saw he was right.

As I placed this 16-year-old under arrest, I saw a small group of other juveniles gather across the parking area watching and talking among each other. As more officers arrived, this group quickly disappeared.

The next day I grabbed my camera and headed back to that house to get some pictures of what I had found and to explore it more. I was unable to do this in that my entrance back through the woods was blocked by two firetrucks and a police car. Apparently, after we all left the scene the night before, someone had gone to that abandoned house, poured kerosene everywhere, and set it on fire—it was completely destroyed.

After a few months keeping up with the arson investigator in regard to this fire, it was finally discovered what had occurred. Apparently the 16-year-old I had arrested was the “leader” of a small group of younger neighborhood kids who he was teaching to “worship Satan” as he did and join his “cult” of sorts. The abandoned house was their meeting place where they held their “rituals.” When the group saw their “leader” being arrested that night they assumed that it was due to his involvement with their group. He had instructed them that if he was ever arrested to “destroy all evidence” of their activities and burn the house. I was able to talk with two of the “members” later who told me that when the group saw the flashing blue lights and heard the cowbell and bellowing of the bloodhound they assumed they had been “discovered.” They also felt that their ritual site had been desecrated by me and Red, so it had to be “cleansed” through fire.

At that very moment I decided that my academic focus (I was in graduate school part-time while working as a cop to pay for it) would be juvenile delinquency and violence. Given the time period (1980s), juvenile involvement in the Occult and Satanic belief systems was a very hot topic. This small group of kids had no money, no parental supervision, no guidance, and no real hope for the future. They followed the only thing that showed interest in them and offered a family of sorts and care and concern—a 16-year-old high school drop-out who had a very significant drug habit which he supported through various burglaries. As my early efforts at research evolved, I naturally added to my interests’ school violence and disturbance, ultimately writing my dissertation on the subject as well as my first two books.

I have always remembered how much I learned about the complexities of juvenile behavior through those brief talks in a police interrogation room with those kids. By simply letting them talk I gained an appreciation for how lucky I was to have two loving parents who were always there no matter what. While they gave me all they had, the most precious gift was their love and support. These kids had none of that and it showed.

G. A. C., Huntington, WV, St. Patrick’s Day, 2015

**DEDICATIONS**

As with everything I have done, I dedicate this work to the love and support of my family.

To my mother, Joyce A. Crews, who instilled in me her hard work ethic and unbelievable strength; my son, Garrison A. Crews, who inherited all the bad traits of me and my father, and my daughter, Samantha L. Crews, who is much meaner than she appears! I also want to dedicate this to my beautiful and incredible wife, Sara Green Crews, who has been there through the toughest times! I love you all with all I am and will always be there for you.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this work to my father, Gordon Allen Crews, who passed away during its genesis. I learned so much from you about human nature and criminal behavior. Unfortunately, I see much of what you learned in 35 years of police work more and more every day. I love you and miss you; the world is not the same with you gone.

G. A. C.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The author would like to acknowledge and offer the most sincere appreciation to people without whom this work would not be possible.

First and foremost, a huge acknowledgment goes to Ms. Paige Ann Heinrich. While working as a research assistant for *The Veritas Group, LLC*, she developed the final database and completed all data entry of the information used in this work. She was also responsible for crunching the numbers used for analysis in this work. She came into the project at a time that I really needed her help. She was always there and a great partner in fighting against the many obstacles which were thrown in my way in three years of attempting to bring this work to life. As she moves on in her life, I wish her all the luck in the world and hope to continue researching, writing, and working with her in the future!

I would also like to acknowledge Ms. Kayla Riddleberger (Roman and Littlefield) who worked diligently as an outside editor for this work! The format turned out fantastic and it is because of her. I would also like to acknowledge Ms. Kathryn Knigge (Roman and Littlefield) and Ms. Beth Hall (Carolina Academic Press) for also for reviewing, editing, and offer suggestions about the format for this work!

I must acknowledge the incarcerated school violence perpetrators involved in this work. A special thank you goes out to the 36 who agreed to be surveyed, the 28 who agreed to interviews, and the additional 6 who contributed other pieces to this work. I remain in contact with many of these men and women and we have plans for more projects in the near future.

We always have people who help behind the scenes with any work of this type.

Fourth, a huge thank you goes to my administrative assistant Ms. Linda Good who has been a godsend in my life at Tiffin University. She is gravely underappreciated, but I want to send her a huge thank you for all of her help!

And, finally, a big shout out to Mr. Scott Maddox and his paralegal, Ms. Reggie Hill. As my attorney and paralegal, I taught them a great deal about school violence research and intellectual property rights and they taught me a great deal about the West Virginia Family Court System over the last few years.

**FOUR TYPES OF SCHOOL VIOLENCE PERPETRATORS**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Traditional School Violence Perpetrators** | **defined as those who were current students, generally younger teens, who commit acts that are essentially “striking back” at the students, rivals, and schools which they attended at the time of the violent act** |
| **Gang-Related School Violence Perpetrators** | **defined as those who were identified (self and law enforcement identification) as involved in the “gang lifestyle” and committed their acts as part of such lifestyle on school grounds or at school functions** |
| **Associated and/or Mentally Ill School Violence Perpetrators** | **defined as those offenders who were generally older and targeted a school of which they have had past or current involvement, very often past students who returned to their former school to commit a violent act** |
| **Non-Associated and/or Mentally Ill School Violence Perpetrators** | **defined as generally much older individuals who target a school of which they had no direct past or current involvement, many see the school as a “symbol of innocence” or something missing in their personal lives** |

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**INTRODUCTION TO VOLUME 1**

The work is divided into three (3) parts consisting of sixteen (15) chapters. Each chapter compares and contrasts the findings as they relate to the four (4) different types of school violence perpetrators.

**Part One: Characteristics of the Locations, Perpetrators, Acts, and Schools**

*Chapter 1: Location and Time of Events of Traditional School Violence Perpetrator Incidents*

This chapter examines the location and time of events of school violence incidents based on a detailed examination of 78 events. In addition to state and region of occurrence for these events, the type of developed area (i.e., urban, rural, or suburban) is examined. The dates of these events are examined from their month and year of occurrence to their day of week. The time of events are also explored as to their time of school day occurrence.

*Chapter 2: The Traditional School Violence Perpetrator School Environment*

The school environment is examined in this chapter as it pertains to the type and level of school and whether it was a private or public institution. The chapter also offers a comparison of the student and teacher populations of schools experiencing different types of school violence.

*Chapter 3: The Traditional School Violence Perpetrator School Violence Event*

The focus of this chapter is exploring details about the school violence event itself. Primarily, the examining of reasons for a particular school to be chosen and whether the perpetrator informed others of their plans. There is also an extensive review of the planning process and target selection for a school violence event.

*Chapter 4: Who Is the Traditional School Violence Perpetrator?*

Chapter 4 offers an overview of the characteristics of the school violence perpetrators involved in the 78 examined incidents. Details of demographic information and personal lives are the focus.

*Chapter 5: Traditional School Violence Perpetrator’s Traits and Issues*

The aim of this chapter is to offer a detailed overview of the school violence perpetrator’s traits and issues. Mental and physical health issues are examined as well as the home and family life of perpetrators. The personal relationships and drug and alcohol abuse are explored as is the possible influence of violent media on the actions of offenders.

*Chapter 6: Traditional School Violence Perpetrator Characteristics of Weapons Used and Injuries Incurred*

This chapter provides a detailed examination of the source, availability, and types of weapons used in school violence events. An overview of the injuries and deaths associated with these types of offenses are reviewed as well.

*Chapter 7: Traditional School Violence Perpetrator Charges, Trials, Pleas, Convictions, and Sentences*

The final chapter in part one explores the courts, charges, and types of trials which resulted from the violent incident. The chapter also offers an overview of the typical pleas entered, convictions occurring, and the sentences given to these types of offenders.

**Part Two: From the Mouths of School Violence Offenders**

*Chapter 8: Traditional School Violence Perpetrator: Before the Decision to Commit Act*

Chapter 8 begins the second and most unique part of this work. Utilizing the findings of surveys, writing, and interviews, the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of offenders *before* the actual act are examined. Views of self and the offender’s feelings and emotions prior to planning a school violence incident are explored. The chapter also offers information on the offenders abuse received and family situation at this stage of a violent event.

*Chapter 9: Traditional School Violence Perpetrator: Planning the Violence*

This chapter examines the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of an offender during the planning phase of their school violence act. The chapter offers an overview of the concerns the offenders had about their personal safety, their plans, and any second thoughts they may have had at this time in a violent act.

*Chapter 10: Traditional School Violence Perpetrator: During the Violence*

The thoughts, feelings, and experiences of offenders as an act is *being committed* are examined in this chapter. Their thoughts about death and negative feelings during the act are discussed. Whether they felt in control and what they were worried about is the focus of this chapter.

*Chapter 11: Traditional School Violence Perpetrator: The Aftermath*

The final chapter in this part examines the offenders’ thoughts, feelings, and experiences *after* the act. Topics such as who they blame for their behavior and feelings about the results of their act are explored. Views of self and thoughts of their future are also presented.

**Part Three: Findings, Analysis, and Recommendations**

*Chapter 12: Traditional School Violence Perpetrators: The Event*

This chapter focuses on the findings for Traditional school violence perpetrators as they pertain to the actual violent event.

*Chapter 13: Traditional School Violence Perpetrators: The Perpetrator*

This chapter focuses on the findings for Traditional school violence perpetrators as they pertain to the characteristics of the actual perpetrators.

*Chapter 14: Traditional School Violence Perpetrators: The Thoughts and Feelings*

This chapter focuses on the findings for Traditional school violence perpetrators as they pertain to their thoughts and feelings before, during and after their violent event.

*Chapter 15: Epilogue—Question: Has it always been like this? Answer: Yes, sort of. . . .*

The epilogue is a final in-depth analysis of all documented school violence incidents from 1700 to 2015. They are examined by typology, decade, and arrest rates.

**LIMITATIONS**

Conducting any type of research when it comes to school violence and disturbance is extremely difficult and whose findings can be misleading sometimes at best. There are many reasons for this:

* No system for recording and enumerating individual acts of crime existed until 1933, when the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s *Uniform Crime Report* was developed.
* Many forms of individual aggression, such as juvenile misbehavior, were not a matter of great public concern and attention until 1960s.
* Throughout history, even definitions of what constituted school disturbance have varied.
* Reporting procedures have varied, and continue to vary, among school districts.
* Not until the 1970s did many school districts keep comprehensive data on student criminality on their campuses.
* Local school administrators have historically played down their problems to give the impression that they controlled their school situation completely.
* Most early information on school disturbance and problems is primarily anecdotal or simply not available.
* Even the very definition of “school” has changed over time.
* Most researchers involved in this type of research only use and depend on the data and information gained from others and never do their own field research.

The potential limitation for this particular study is that various conclusions are drawn from a small sample of respondents. Seventy-eight incidents examined out of over 500 events, and 36 survey respondents out of 78 identified offenders. There could also be concerns over the timespan of 1979 to 2011 (i.e., no “recent” cases examined).

It is argued that these limitations are minimized due to several factors. First is the fact that as of mid-2016, no other study has surveyed or interviewed as many perpetrators or examined as many events. The Federal Bureau of Investigations’ Threat Assessment Team (O’Toole 1999**)** did not interview any actual perpetrators directly and only examined case studies of 14 schools where shootings had occurred following the Columbine High School shooting (Colorado) as the foundation for their extensively utilized report entitled, *The School Shooter: A Threat Assessment Perspective*.

This limitation is also minimized given the extensiveness of the survey instrument (involving 365 variables) and other face-to-face interviews and mailing contacts. As for the dates of events examined, incarcerated offenders are not generally a population which desires to discuss their past actions except to plead their innocence. This is very much the case for those who are involved in current types of appeals and post-conviction relief hearings. Due to these facts and ethical considerations, the most recent incarcerated individual whom it was felt was at a point to discuss these issues was incarcerated for acts committed in late 2011.

**One**

**CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LOCATIONS, PERPETRATORS, ACTS, AND SCHOOLS**

The following chapters examine the characteristics of *Traditional* School Violence Perpetrators’ school violence as it relates to the locations of events, types of perpetrators, types of acts, and schools in which it occurred. The total population of events and offenders examined was 78 incidents which occurred between 1979 and 2011 (42 of them have been classified as *Traditional* school violence perpetrators). Each of the findings is represented through the following four types of school violence perpetrators (the number and percentage by type of offender is also represented):

*Traditional* School Violence Perpetrators (42 of the 78 offenders in this sample);

*Gang-Related* School Violence Perpetrators (24 of the 78 offenders in this sample);

*Associated and/or Mentally Ill* School Violence Perpetrators (7 of the 78 offenders in this sample);

*Non-Associated and/or Mentally Ill* School Violence Perpetrators (5 of the 78 offenders in this sample).

This analysis resulted in the revelation of unique information pertaining to the location and time of events, details about the school violence event, and information on who the perpetrator was. Detailed findings on the school environment, perpetrator’s traits and issues, and characteristics of weapons used and injuries incurred are presented. Finally, information on the resulting criminal charges, trials, pleas, convictions, and sentences are examined.

**1**

**Location and Time of Events of Traditional School Violence Perpetrator Incidents**

**IN THEIR OWN WORDS**

**In Response to the Sandy Hook Elementary School Shooting on December 14, 2012**

*I think he chose the school because it was familiar to him, he went to school there so maybe something happened then. His mom was working at the school so it was a place that was always on his mind cause she would come home and talk about it. Maybe because of his Asperger’s syndrome he felt that his mother payed more attention to the kids at the school and that made him very angry with her and the kids and adults at the school and he thought he had to do something about it. It is very hard to put myself in his shoes, I’ve been raised that the children are the future and that they should be protected from evil like that. I also think he may have thought that it may have been an easy target because of its location and the fact that he was a little familiar with the school, people most of the time will pick a place their most comfortable at so that when they start to do such a thing like that they don’t get spooked and change their mind and have to pick a new target without having to plan anything out ahead of time. When I would do a robbery or when I was going to kill myself it was always at a place that I would go all the time.*

—WM/17/2007 (brought a gun to school and held a class hostage for four hours)

*I have no idea what the Newtown shooting was about. I’m about as far removed from the facts on the ground as anyone can get. And even those that have access to some of those facts (i.e., the media) can’t get it right. Aren’t they the ones who reported Lanza’s mother was a teacher at the school? People in this world, and the media particularly, have not learned that if you don’t know what’s going on, say nothing. Otherwise you create an air of confusion which later is hard to undo. This act may not have been so much one of anger towards his mother or those teachers and children. It is more likely his act was left as a burden for others to carry. That is, for perhaps his father, his brother, the “town”; or whatever person/entity (and it could be more than one . . . a confluence of motivations) that in his mind had wronged him, or neglected him, or failed him, or spurred him, or whatever. I, quite rationally, want to do something drastic and sacrificial which will bring even one of them back. I can feel hopeless about my future because when I think about this recent tragedy I don’t ever want to me a parole. So how could anyone else? And if I don’t have a chance to live in a community and have a family, then what hope do I have?*

—WM/14/1986 (failing a class, tried to kill the teacher, but shot and killed her substitute and injured a vice principal and two other students)

**Personal Comments to Author about School Violence**

*John might be a former student. John may have a fascination with death. John talks a lot about death. John may have an interest in tragedies such as school shootings or true crime stories. John spends a lot of time in his room, in isolation. John may feel remorse and talk a lot about a past event(s). John believes he is a follower. John may feel that others will hopefully understand. Majority of the time John thinks about this, like it’s the only thing to live for, the violent plans he has. John may desire help in his plan. John may feel like he has to tell someone. Hopes to kill as many as he can. Hopes to kill before he is stopped or killed. Wants to be quick in his plan. Worried he might be stopped. John may think of how many he hurt or killed. He may feel relief that it is over. John may feel confused that he is still alive, or disappointed/frustrated.*

—HM/18/2006 (crashed through security shack at the entrance to the student parking lot, stepped out of this van, set off three smoke bombs and then proceeded with gunfire toward the school, after killing father at family home)

**INTRODUCTION**

This chapter examines the characteristics of *Traditional* school violence perpetrators, their acts, and the schools in which they committed their violence. Descriptive data (165 variables) from publicly available secondary sources (e.g., news reports, journal articles, court transcripts, and case studies) were collected for 78 identified, currently incarcerated perpetrators and their events. In addition, demographics, state-level variables, characteristics of events, victims, prosecution, weapons, family, school, peers, and the like were also collected. This chapter, and chapters 2 through 7, was developed from the analysis of this data.

**LOCATION OF EVENTS**

The following is an overview of the time and location of school violence events which occurred between 1979 and 2011 in K–12 schools in the United States. These findings are derived from an in-depth examination of 78 incidents of various types of school violence.

**Location of Events (State of Occurrence)**

In order to clearly represent the location of a large number of events, the findings are presented by regions of the United States as designated by the U.S. Census Bureau. The following offers information on the states included in the nine (9) regions:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **New England (4)** | **Middle Atlantic (7)** | **East North Central (12)** | **West North Central (6)** | **South Atlantic (16)** |
| Connecticut (0)  Maine (1)  Massachusetts (2)  New Hampshire (0)  Rhode Island (0)  Vermont (1) | New Jersey (0)  New York (2)  Pennsylvania (5) | Indiana (3)  Illinois (5)  Michigan (1)  Ohio (1)  Wisconsin (2) | Iowa (1)  Nebraska (0)  Kansas (0)  North Dakota (0)  Minnesota (1)  South Dakota (0)  Missouri (4) | Delaware (0)  District of Columbia (0)  Florida (9)  Georgia (2)  Maryland (3)  North Carolina (1)  South Carolina (0)  Virginia (1)  West Virginia (0) |
| **East South Central (11)** | **West South Central (4)** | **Mountain (4)** | **Pacific (14)** |  |
| Alabama (1)  Kentucky (3)  Mississippi (1)  Tennessee (6) | Arkansas (1)  Louisiana (2)  Oklahoma (0)  Texas (1) | Arizona (1)  Colorado (1)  Idaho (0)  New Mexico (0)  Montana (1)  Utah (0)  Nevada (1)  Wyoming (0) | Alaska (1)  California (10)  Hawaii (0)  Oregon (1)  Washington (2) | (\*) number of incidents used in study |

**Table 1.1. Incidents by U.S. Census Bureau Regions**

*Overall*, the South Atlantic states (i.e., Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia) experienced the greatest percentage (21%) of school violence incidents. This may be misleading in that it is also the region of the country which encompasses the largest number of states as well. In contrast though, the region with the smallest percentage (4%) of events was the Mountain Region (i.e., Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming), which also consists of many states.

The region with the greatest percentage (25%) of *Traditional* school violence perpetrators is East South Central (i.e., Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Tennessee). The region with the smallest (2%) was the Middle Atlantic Region (i.e., New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania), but again, this is the region with the least number of states.

**Location of Events (Type of Developed Area)**

The following is another brief overview of the location of the school violence events. This is how the events relate to type of developed environment. Interesting treads reveal themselves when comparing the type of offender to the type of environment.

Chart 1.1. Type of Developed Environment

When examining school violence incidents *overall* it appears that approximately 40% of incidents occur in urban areas. Acts committed by *Traditional* school violence perpetrators were found to occur most often in rural areas (40%), but the other types of acts were almost evenly distributed between urban (26%) and suburban (33%).

**DATE OF EVENTS**

A number of interesting trends emerge when examining the date of school violence events. This is extremely true when comparing the four types of school violence perpetrators. Below the dates of the school violence events used in this study are explored and compared by year, month, and day of week.

**Date of Incident (Year)**

The year of incident of events is examined in the chart 1.2. The trends reveal the ebb and flow levels of juvenile-related crime during these same decades.

*Overall*, the mid-l990s (21%) and mid-2000s (20%) had the greatest number of school violence incidents. This finding coincides with the amount of juvenile violence experienced in the United States as a whole. The early and mid-1990s saw some of the highest rates of juvenile violence ever experienced.

As stated previously, 50% of the *Traditional* school violence perpetrators in this study committed their acts between 2006 and 2011. The second greatest occurrence for these types of offenders was, again, in the mid-to-late 1990s (31%).

Chart 1.2. Year of Incident

**Date of Incident (Month)**

The differences between the four types of school violence perpetrators become very apparent when examining the month of their violent act. The events are broken down by each month of occurrence with special focus on the traditionalschool terms.

Chart 1.3. Month of Incident

*Overall* in this study, school violence events occurred evenly across the traditionalspring term (i.e., January through May) and the fall terms (i.e., August through December). Almost all events greatly decreased during the summer months (i.e., June and July) when most schools are closed or have no students in attendance. Trends are not revealed until a comparison is made of the difference types of offenders.

*Traditional* school violence perpetrators seem to follow the *overall* trends of almost even occurrence throughout the school year. There is a relatively constant percentage range of 7% to 14% each month with an increase to 17% in March and May.

As will be discussed further in this work, there are many factors that come into play when attempting to understand why certain types of offenders commit their acts of school violence at different times.

**Date of Incident (Day of Week)**

As with month of occurrence, day of occurrence offers interesting trends for further discussion. There has been a great deal of research dealing with the various types of crime and the day of week and time of day of their occurrence. This school violence research can add to that knowledge as well.

**Chart 1.4. Day of Week**

In examining the *overall* number of school violence incidents, several interesting trends emerge. Generally any day of the week an incident can occur, but it appears that Mondays (27%) and Fridays (27%) are days which experience the greatest number of events in all categories of perpetrators.

*Traditional* school violence perpetrators seem to act almost equally on days throughout the week, but do have an increase in likelihood on Fridays (29%).

**TIME OF EVENTS**

The examination of the time of school violence events as they pertain to the various types of offenders can contribute greatly to decisions about proper security measures for K–12 schools. While concern over school safety is a constant before, during, and after school, knowing what potential threats are as they pertain to time of day can contribute greatly to security plans for schools.

**Time of Incident (Before Lunch Time)**

The following section compares and contrasts school violence incidents by type of offender and time of school day. The time periods utilized are before school to lunch time, lunch time to end of school day, and after school.

*Overall*, the morning and afternoon hours experience more school violence than the other hours of the school day (see Event before Noon/Lunch Time (chart 1.5). For some types of offenders this is especially true. *Traditional* school violence perpetrators certainly follow this trend with 40% of their violence occurring before the school day even begins and prior to 9:00 am.

**Chart 1.5. Event Before Noon/Lunch Time**

**Time of Incident (Lunch Time until End of School Day)**

The time period of lunch and immediately following lunch has traditionally been a time period which warranted increase attention to school safety. The events examined in this study offer more reasons for this increased attention.

While *overall* the most school violence occurs in the morning hours, a significant amount (19%) of violence occurs during and immediately following the traditional lunch hour (see Event during Lunch to End of School Day (chart 1.6).

*Traditional* school violence perpetrators follow this trend with 17% of their incidents occurring in this same time frame.

Chart 1.6. Event During lunch to End of School Day

**Time of Incident (After School)**

Often the hours after the school day are ignored as possible times for a school violence event on a K–12 school campus (Event after School Day (chart 1.7). This is definitely true for many campuses after the final school bus leaves or the last child is picked up in front of a school.

*Overall* the incidents of school violence decrease drastically after the school day, but a significant amount still occur, 10%. Of this violence, 5% occurs after 7:00 p.m. at many school-related functions (e.g., dances, pep rallies, and sports events).

**Chart 1.7. Event After School Day**

*Traditional* school violence perpetrators who do commit their violence after the school day usually do so at a school event as is seen in 2% of these events.

**SUMMARY**

While school safety should be a concern for K–12 schools all day and every day, various times of the day do present certain challenges. Challenges to school safety as it pertains to what type of violence event could occur at various points during the school day. *Overall*, an act of school violence can happen anytime of the school day including the hours before and after the classes begin and end. In efforts to keep children safe, various strategies or increased levels of security can be implemented at certain times to safe- guard against certain types of attacks.

The first months and last months of a school term are times where school violence incidents increase. This could be due to the increased stress of a term beginning or the work to finish one up. It could also be that in the minds of some offenders, old scores need to be settled as soon as school begins or before it ends for a summer vacation. Any day of the week could bring about a violent event, but Mondays and Fridays should be of special concern when the impacts of a weekend may be on the minds of some individuals.

The hours before and after school are obviously times where increased security is needed. All types of offenders are likely to strike before school or in the morning hours prior to lunch. Many children have to get to school an hour or more before classes start due to transportation issues (e.g., bus schedules, private rides to school) and find themselves alone for a significant amount of time. This is true after school when some children have to wait more than an hour for a ride to pick them up. Such time periods and situations make them vulnerable to many threats from other students, robberies, or external attacks by noncurrent students. It is obvious that lunch periods and immediately following them are also a time period of concern. Often there is a great deal of student movement when security is lax and offenders find opportunities to commit their acts of violence.

**2**

**The Traditional School Violence Perpetrator School Environment**

**IN THEIR OWN WORDS**

**In Response to the Sandy Hook Elementary School Shooting on December 14, 2012**

*Extremely horrific thing that took place at that school in Connecticut last month, and those 20 little children losing their lives in that shooting. But the shooter, Adam Lanza, committed suicide? If Adam was a Christian like me, he wouldn’t have done so atrocious of an entity as to do that shooting at that school in Connecticut. This is the result of (at least in my opinion and even though it was a long time ago) of, in the 1960s, taking BIBLES out of our public schools in this country. It’s crucial for the people of this country not to take BIBLES out of our public schools.*

—WM/21/1993 (former student who shot and killed assistant principle with a .44 caliber pistol)

**Personal Comments to Author about School Violence**

*Now, school-violence, that’s a problem of teachers. That’s a problem of teacher’s that only them as a whole could change. People may not know it, but, teachers is the imperfection that need to be corrected. Psychology skills and counseling skills is what this is all about. Teachers need to be implemented with the skills to get a student to divulge whatever it is that he, or she won’t divulge to their parents, or other outside family member or friends. Crack is taking over our teachers, and people don’t even much see it. These teachers may look up to standard from a outsider view of viewing them, but, with their good hearts; their minds and vision is impaired.*

—BM/18/2003 (one of two men who entered school property via gaps in the fence armed with an AK-47 and a semi-automatic pistol, then entered the school gym and shot a 15-year-old gang rival to death)

*Not sure if it consist of bullying. But due to my life style I grew upon I fell victim to getting jumped and shot at. I was defending myself. I was hoping people seen the other people pull out [their] [gun]. That why they would understand why I did /reacted in that manner. 1 victim was not the blame (XXXXX). But the victim who was caught with the gun who started all this I blame.*

—BM/16/2009 (opened fire on a crowd of students after a high school football game)

**INTRODUCTION**

As with all chapters in part one of this work, descriptive data (165 variables) from publicly available secondary sources (e.g., news reports, journal articles, court transcripts, and case studies) were collected for 78 identified currently incarcerated perpetrators and their events. In addition, demographics, state-level variables, characteristics of events, victims, prosecution, weapons, family, school, peers, and such, were also collected. This chapter was developed from the analysis of this data, as were all chapters in this part, and focuses on the school environment in which school violence acts occurred.

**LEVEL AND TYPE OF SCHOOL**

The first part of the examination of the environment of schools experiencing acts of school violence is the level of school. As stated earlier, acts of school violence can occur anywhere at any time, but there are trends that become obvious when examining the actions of the four different types of school violence perpetrators explored in this work.

**Level of School**

The following is an examination of the types of school violence incidents and the level of school in which they occur. While it is assumed, and confirmed by this study, that most of this type of violence occurs on high school campuses, certain types of violence seem to happen more often at certain types of schools.

Chart 2.1. Level of School

*Overall* the vast majority (74%) of school violence incidents occurred at the high school level, but significant levels occurred at other levels as well. As would be expected, most (78%) *Traditional* school violence perpetrators commit their acts in American high schools, but a growing trend is for these offenders to strike at middle schools (17%).

**Public versus Private School**

Another factor in the examination of school environments is public versus private schools. The following separates the four types of school violence events by public or private school (see chart 2.2).

As with all types of school violence events, the majority (92%) of them occurred in public schools in this study. Almost all types of offenders followed this trend heavily, with *Traditional* school violence perpetrators occurring at 93%.

Chart 2.2. Public Vs Private School

**SECURITY MEASURES PRESENT**

The topic of security measures at schools was not a primary focus of this work, but two types of security measures were considered. The following examines the percentage of schools where a school resource officer (SRO) was present.

**Was Security Resource Officer (SRO) Present at Incident?**

Whether police officers should be in schools remains, at best, a very controversial issue in discussions about school safety. The following is an overview of whether they were present at the schools studied at the time of the school violence incident. Given this type of research and subject, determining whether an armed officer was present during an event was very difficult.

*Overall*, 68% were found not to have these in place. This was true for schools at 73% for those experiencing violence from the *Traditional* school violence perpetrators.

Chart 2.3. Was SRO Present at Incident

**Were Metal Detectors Present at Time of Incident?**

As with determining the presence of school resource officers, accurately determining if metal detectors were present in a school at the time of a school violence incident is extremely difficult. The following is an attempt to examine the status of metal detectors at schools based on the four types of school violence perpetrators studied in this research.

Whether metal detectors should be in schools or not has been a controversial issue over the last two decades. Many argue that metal detectors should be standard protocol at the entrances to all schools, much like federal buildings and court houses. Others believe that this practice often gives students, parents, and teachers the feeling that there must be something to fear or, at best, gives a false sense of security. In this study it was found, *overall*, that the vast majority (86%) of schools experiencing these various types of violence did not have metal detectors present. Although, given the time range of 1979 to 2011, metal detectors were not in use much until the late 1990s and 2000s.

The finding that 89% (see chart 2.4) of the *Traditional* school violence perpetrators in this study committed their violence in schools without metal detectors could speak to the need for more use of these mechanisms.

Chart 2.4. Were Metal Detectors Present At Time of Incident?

**STUDENT AND TEACHER POPULATIONS**

Researching the student populations and student to teacher ratios was added to this research to add another dimension to the investigation into the type of school environment that might experience the most violence from the four types of school violence perpetrators in this study.

**Student Population**

Interesting trends are revealed by examining the student populations of schools that experience the various types of school violence. The following is a review of the size of the student populations as they relate to the various types of school violence experienced.

Chart 2.5. Student Population

As would be expected, *overall*, the largest schools experience the most school violence (29%). The majority of the events studied in this research occurred at schools with student populations above 800 students (45%). Of the *Traditional* school violence perpetrator, 72% committed their acts of violence at schools with 800 or more students.

**Faculty Student Ratio**

Another area where data was difficult to accurately locate was the faculty to student ratio. Given the timespan of events occurring between 1979 and 2011, data relative to this information for so many decades is difficult, but possible, to locate (see chart 2.6).

Given the amount of information available (information on 51 of the 78 schools at the time of the incident), *overall*, 37% occurred at traditional size student to teacher ratios at 12 to 20 students per teacher. Except for one type of offender (*Non-Associated*), most examined incidents occurred for all four types of offenders in this classroom size. The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators were at 60% for the average size classroom, but 32% did occur at larger ratios of 21 to 40 students per teacher.

Chart 2.6. Faculty Student Ratio

**RACIAL DEMOGRAPHICS FOR SCHOOLS THAT EXPERIENCED SCHOOL VIOLENCE INCIDENTS**

In additional to investigating student to teacher ratios, this research also examined the racial demographics for the schools experiencing various types of school violence.

**Percentage of White Students**

The following is a chart exploring the percentage of white students at schools which experienced the various types of school violence. As with all charts in this subject of investigation, a few interesting trends are discovered.

Chart 2.7. Percent of White Students

*Overall*, clear trends are immediately apparent in examining the racial demographics of the school and the type of school violence it may experience. While the amount of school violence, is almost evenly distributed (7% to 12%) across all racial demographics, certain types of offenders are more likely to commit their acts at certain schools. *Traditional* school violence perpetrators have the highest percentages at schools where the student population is 91 to 99% white, while *Gang-Related* school violence perpetrators are more likely to commit their acts at schools where only 0 to 10% (61%) of the student body is white.

**Percentage of Black Students**

The following is a chart exploring the percent of black students at schools which experience the various types of school violence. As with all charts in this subject of investigation, a few interesting trends are discovered.

Chart 2.8. Percent of Black Students

Attempting to examine the racial mixture of schools at the time of a violent event is just as difficult as determining the correct student populations and student to teacher ratios. Given that this information could only be determined for 45 of the 78 incidents studied, findings should be considered carefully, but they do support earlier and later findings. *Overall*, in this part of the study, the amount of school violence was almost evenly distributed upon all levels of black student population (0 to 10%). The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators were found to occur at 38% at schools with 2 to 10% black student populations and, as found earlier, *Gang-Related* school violence perpetrators were more likely to occur at schools with 91 to 99% black student populations.

**Percentage of Hispanic Students**

Chart 2.9 explores the percentage of Hispanic students at schools which experience the various types of school violence. As with all charts in this subject of investigation, a few interesting trends are discovered.

*Overall*, schools which had higher percentages of Hispanics had lower percentages of all types of school violence. Only 5% of the examined school violence incidents occurred at schools with 25 percent or more Hispanic student population. Of the *Traditional* school violence perpetrators, 64% committed their acts of violence where the population of Hispanic students was 10% or less.

Chart 2.9. Percent of Hispanic Students

**Percentage of Other Students**

The following is a chart exploring the percent of other students (i.e., Oriental, Native American, etc.) at schools which experience the various types of school violence. As with all charts in this subject of investigation, a few interesting trends are discovered.

Chart 2.10. Percent of Other Students

A couple of interesting trends are discovered in examining the percentage of other racial types at school experience school violence events. *Overall*, only 7% of incidents occur at schools having a significant percent (7% or more) of other types of racial student body populations. The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators had the highest percentage at 9% occurrence at schools with 11 to 24% other student population. The *Gang-Related* school violence perpetrators had a significant percentage of incidents occurring at schools with 7 to 10% other student population.

**SUMMARY**

Not surprisingly, most school violence happens at the high school level, but more and more is being experienced in the lower levels of school as well. Preschools and elementary schools seem to be the primary target for the *Non-Associated* types of school violence perpetrators since they target locations to do the most damage against children. Also, mostly public schools experience this type of violence, but, again, small private schools are targets of *Non-Associated* perpetrators.

While this research determined that the vast majority of school violence events occurred at schools without either school resource officers or metal detectors, which should be taken in the proper context. Given the years of this study, many schools did not even entertain the idea of armed officers in their schools or the use of metal detectors. Also, accurately determining if these were present was very difficult in most of the school violence events.

As would be expected, larger schools experience more school violence. This is true in all cases studied except the *Non-Associated* school violence perpetrators. These offenders targeted smaller schools and lower level schools such as preschools and elementary schools. Interestingly, the generally suggested classroom size of 12 to 20 maximum students per teacher is where the most school violence is found as well. Also, the *Non-Associated* type of school violence perpetrators target smaller schools with smaller class sizes.

Not surprisingly, schools with the highest rates of white students experienced the most *Traditional* type of offender while the schools with the lowest experienced more *Gang-Related* school violence. This is confirmed in all examinations of racial mixture and the types of school violence experienced. It is evident that schools with larger percentages of minority populations will experience more *Gang-Related* violence. It is also apparent that schools with lower percentages of minority population will experience more violence from *Traditional* school violence perpetrator types. Schools with very small or very large other (i.e., Oriental, Native American, etc.) student populations seemed to be most vulnerable to attacks by *Non-Associated* school violence perpetrators. Again, this may be simply because of the targeting of schools which were close and convenient for the offender.

**3**

**The Traditional School Violence Perpetrator School Violence Event**

**IN THEIR OWN WORDS**

**In Response to the Sandy Hook Elementary School Shooting on December 14, 2012**

*I did hear about what happened in Connecticut the day it happened; I just could not believe it. I want to help even more now to provide some insight and help to prevent these things from happening. I think that, and these are just opinions, but he might have been planning this before. He may have chosen and elementary school because the majority of the people were little children and they could do very little to stop him. Easier targets. If Adam Lanza had any anger toward anyone there, then that might be a reason why he went. If he was taking medication, that might have been a factor too. It has been proven and researched that when you have someone taking psychiatric medication, homicidal and suicidal thoughts can occur or increase. He knew how to use guns, they were available to him, and when you mix that with depression, frustration, or delusional thinking the results can be disastrous.*

—HM/18/2006 (crashed through security shack at the entrance to the student parking lots, stepped out of van, set off 3 smoke bombs and then proceeded with gunfire toward the school, after killing father at family home)

**Personal Comments to Author about School Violence**

*I thank back and have come to realize that all that has happen is to be blamed on me. I was trying very hard to [prove] to myself that I was someone that I knew deep down inside that wasn’t.*

—BM/15/1993 (shot another student in the back during a gang fight on school grounds)

*I often kept my mind on all the guys any of my girlfriends had sexual relationships with before they were with me and how much it made me 100% hate each guy for no other reason other than that. Feeling too deep in you’ve said you was doing it, now you have to do it. Hyping myself up, listening to violent music to drown out any thoughts of talking myself out of do it. Feeling stupid. Wishing I didn’t have my stupid pride.*

—WM/16/2006 (stabbed fellow classmate in the neck with the intent to kill him, permanently scarred and physically disabled the student)

**INTRODUCTION**

This chapter examines the school violence event itself: why the particular school or school function was chosen by the perpetrator, whether they informed others of their intentions, and if they stated a reason for the violent behavior. It will also examine the detailed characteristics of the violent event in location on school grounds and duration.

Descriptive data (165 variables) from publicly available secondary sources (e.g., news reports, journal articles, court transcripts, and case studies) were collected for 78 identified currently incarcerated perpetrators and their events. In addition, demographics, state-level variables, characteristics of events, victims, prosecution, weapons, family, school, peers, and such were also collected. This chapter was developed, as were all chapters in part one of this study, from the analysis of this data.

**SELECTION OF SCHOOL**

After an incident of school violence occurs, many wish to understand why their particular school was chosen for such an event. The following sections explore this topic in detail as to why the various types of school violence perpetrators selected a school and what reasons they gave for their violence.

**Why Was School Chosen?**

Many seek answers as to why a violent event occurred at their particular school. Chart 3.1 examines the reasons given by perpetrators as to why they chose the location that they did for their act.

Not surprisingly, *overall* (74%) the main reason for the selection of a certain location is that it was where the offender knew their targets would be located at a certain time. This was true for all groups except the *Non-Associated* and/or mentally ill school violence perpetrators. These types of offenders sought the school as either a symbol (60%) or simply incidental (40%) in the scheme of what they were trying to accomplish. The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators (83%), *Gang-Related* school violence perpetrators (79%), and even *Associated* and/or mentally ill school violence perpetrators (57%) to a slightly lesser extent sought identified targets at the school. In closer examinations of the incidents involving targets, it is revealed that targets may be an individual student, teacher, student group, or just fellow students in general.

Chart 3.1. Why Was School Chosen?

**Stated Reason for Incident**

Interestingly, the vast majority of school violence perpetrators are going to ultimately inform authorities and others of why they committed their act and why the school location in which to do it was chosen.

Chart 3.2. Stated Reason for Incident

It is fortunate in a way that most perpetrators ultimately give a reason for their violent act. This offers an opportunity to determine how a particular act could possibly have been avoided. *Overall* 83% of the offenders in this research gave a reason for their actions. Of all *Traditional* school violence perpetrators, 93% stated reasons for their actions, while 100% of *Associated* and/or mentally ill school violence perpetrators and *Non-Associated* and/or mentally ill school violence perpetrators stated reasons.

**Length of Planning Period**

An interesting, yet frightening, trend is revealed when examining the length of planning that many school violence perpetrators put into their acts of violence. The following explores the length of planning periods for the four types of school perpetrators involved in this study.

*Overall*, almost half (46%) of all school violence perpetrators plan their ultimate attacks for 24 hours or less (see chart 3.3). They may be thinking of getting revenge for years, but the time put into the actual plan is very short. *Traditional* school violence perpetrators are the one group whose length of planning is found to occur from no planning (3%) to four months (3%).

Chart 3.3. Length of Planning Period

**Was Event Gang Related?**

Given the amount of concern over the impact of *Gang-Related* crime on school violence rates, it is examined in various parts of this work. Below is the direct examination of whether each of the 78 school violence events researched were determined to be gang related or not.

*Overall*, and maybe surprisingly, 70% of the school violence incidents involved in this study were not gang related (see chart 3.4). Although a significant percentage of them were at 30%. Not surprisingly, 88% of the *Traditional* school violence perpetrators events were not gang related.

Chart 3.4. Was Event *Gang-Related*?

**CO-CONSPIRATORS AND LEAKAGE**

Given some of the larger school violence incidents, the general public seems to be expecting more co-conspirators involved in events. Most are also surprised at the same time how many events are never even suspected until they occur. The following is an overview of whether school violence perpetrators informed others of their intentions prior to acting and if they had actual co-conspirators.

**Informed Other of Intentions**

Chart 3.5 examines if the various types of school violence perpetrators informed others of their intent to commit an act of violence at a K–12 school.

Chart 3.5. Informed Other of Intentions

Interestingly, *overall*, approximately half (45%) of the offenders informed another of their intentions while the same percentage (45%) did not make others aware of their plans (see chart 3.5). This was true for all of the types of offenders. *Traditional* school violence perpetrators were 47% versus 53% in their reporting.

Obviously the impact of this is that there is more of a chance to deter an act of violence if its potential or plan is known. The more individuals who know about the plans of a person the more likely someone is to reveal those plans to others. It is hoped that the others are law enforcement, parents, or school officials, but even if they are peers, there is greater likelihood that plans will be revealed. The opposite is true as well, the less people that know about plans the less likely the plans are to be detected. This is extremely the case when an individual does not reveal plans to anyone.

**Did Shooter Have Co-Conspirators?**

Whether the school violence perpetrators had co-conspirators or not is another interesting topic. The following is a breakdown of this topic by type of perpetrator.

*Overall* the vast majority of school violence perpetrators of all types did not have any co-conspirators (78%) (see chart 3.6). The percentage that did (22%) were most involved in the securing of weapons which were eventually used in a school violence event. This was true for *Traditional* school violence perpetrators, where 81% did not have co-conspirators and only 19% did have co-conspirators.

Chart 3.6. Did Shooter Have Co-Conspirators?

**Number of Active Participants**

Along these same lines, most perpetrators acted alone in their acts of school violence. Chart 3.7 examines this for the four types of school violence perpetrators studied.

*Overall* the majority of offenders acted alone (76%). Although, 24% of the cases did involve between 1 to 4 perpetrators (see chart 3.7). 83% of *Traditional* school violence perpetrators acted alone, but 17% of their events involve 1 to 4 offenders.

Chart 3.7. Number of Active Participants

**TARGETS**

As been repeatedly supported in this research, most types of school violence perpetrators have targets. Those that have targets appear to do the most damage and cause the greatest loss of life. The following is a more detailed examination as to whether the various types of perpetrators had actual lists of targets. In this area, while it may be clear that an offender had a “list of targets,” it is very difficult to determine if this was an actual written list.

**Did Perpetrator Have a List of Targets?**

Chart 3.8 is an overview of the various types of offenders as to whether they had a list of targets. This included those admitted having a mental list of targets and those who actually had a written list on their person at the time of the event.

*Overall*, a little over half (54%) had a list of targets at least in mind at the time of their violent act (see chart 3.8). The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators had a specific list of targets in 60% of the time, but random targets in 40% of their acts.

Chart 3.8. Did Perpetrator Have List of Targets?

**Targets: Individual, Group, Multiple, or Random**

A few interesting trends become apparent when examining the type of targets the various types of school violence perpetrators selected in their acts of violence. Chart 3.9 examines the type of targets based on the type of offender.

*Overall*, the majority of offenders of almost all types had one target in mind (63%), although a significant percentage (21%) simply had random targets in mind (see chart 3.9). The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators had significant percentages of all types of targets from individual (64%) to group targets (5%).

Chart 3.9. Targets: Individual, Group, Multiple, or Random

**THE EVENT**

When attempting to makes plans in regards to school safety, knowing where events are most likely to occur is one of the primary foundations of any school safety plan. Below is a discussion of the locations where the school violence events originated in 78 school violence incidents. The findings are divided by location and type of perpetrator.

**Location of Incident in School**

The location of where school violence events originate can be examined by primary locations and secondary locations. The below charts examine these two issues.

***Primary Locations of Events Origination***

This first chart examined the primary location where the school violence events studied began.

Chart 3.10. Primary Locations of Incident in School

*Overall*, the largest percent of all incidents began in a school hallway (28%). The designations of inside school grounds (24%) and just outside of school grounds (10%) were added in order to offer more analysis of the school violence issue. *Traditional* school violence perpetrators began 33% of their incidents in a school hallway, but 10% began in the classroom and 13% in a commons area of the school.

***Lesser Locations of Events Origination***

Slightly fewer locations of school violence incident origination are areas on the K–12 school campus, but outside of classrooms. Chart 3.11 examines the percentage of school violence incidents which occurred in cafeterias, gyms, bathrooms, and even school buses.

Chart 3.11. Lesser Locations of Incident in School

*Overall*, 12% of the events examined occurred inside school buildings, but not in actual classrooms. Significant percentages (8%) of *Traditional* school violence perpetrators began their violent acts in K–12 school cafeterias and another 6% between school bathrooms and school buses.

**Length of Incident in Minutes**

While any length of time when one is involved in a violent event can seem like a lifetime, most school violence incidents are very short in duration. The following is an overview of the length of time in minutes for the 78 incidents studied.

Chart 3.12. Length of Incident in Minutes

*Overall*, 36% of the events studied lasted less than 3 minutes, with a very significant amount lasting less than one minute (15%) (see chart 3.12). The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators were found to have events that lasted 3 to 5 minutes for the most part (57%), but 2% lasted more than an hour. These events unusually involved the taking of other students hostage.

**Number of Shots Fired**

In another attempt at examining the full extent of school violence incidents, the actual number of shots fired during an event was collected. As with many aspects of this research, obtaining accurate data in this regard is difficult. The following gives an overview of this information.

Chart 3.13. Number of Shots Fired

While even one shot fired is too much, approximately half (48%) of the incidents studied resulted in only 1 to 5 shots being fired (see chart 3.13). Also a firearm was not used in 14% of the incidents. The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators fired between 1 and 5 shots in 53% of their incidents and used no firearm in 17% of their incidents.

**How Did Incident End?**

Several interesting trends are discovered in examining how the school violence incidents examined in the study ended. Chart 3.14 offers an overview of how the events studied ended in the cases of the four types of school violence perpetrators examined.

*Overall*, approximately half (49%) of all incidents ended with the perpetrators fleeing the scene of the crime and being apprehended by law enforcement at a later time. Other types of conclusions such as being apprehended or surrendering at the scene were almost evenly distributed from 4% to 14%.

Chart 3.14. How Did Incident End?

The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators were involved in all types of conclusions with 35% fleeing, but 20% surrendering peacefully after committing their act.

**SUMMARY**

Most violence events at schools are going to occur because the target or targets of the offender are there and can be easily located. This is true for all types of offenders except *Non-Associated* types. This group is different only because they see the entire school as a target for various reasons. Interestingly, the vast majority of school violence perpetrators are going to ultimately inform authorities and others of why they committed their act and why the school location in which to do it was chosen.

When it comes to planning periods, the majority of school violence perpetrators plan for less than 24 hours, but offender types such as *Non-Associated* may be considering attacking a school for over a year. Once they occur, 87% of all school violence incidents will be less than 10 minutes in duration, but a small percentage will last more than an hour if hostages are involved.

Most incidents involved the firing of 1 to 10 shots, but a significant percentage of incidents do not use a firearm at all, this is especially true for *Non-Associated* offenders who often attack schools with vehicles or other legal items such as baseball bats and propane tanks.

A school violence event can begin anywhere at any time, but security measures should be based on the various types of school violence perpetrators in that they all pose different types of threats. *Traditional* and *Gang-Related* offenders will already be in the school, but the *Associated* and *Non-Associated* will be seeking to enter the school. Certain types of offenders will often commit their violent acts in certain locations. The *Gang-Related* and *Associated* types of offenders seem to find many of their targets in school gymnasiums, while those with no targets will simply at- tack the entire school property.

A great deal of school violence is gang related, but much more is not. Obviously *Gang-Related* offenders are going to commit the majority of gang-related crime on a school campus. It is almost 50/50 whether a school violence perpetrator will inform others of their intent to commit an act prior to doing so. In many cases, juveniles often think classmates are just exaggerating their thoughts and older individuals may think that their counterparts are just letting off steam.

Most school violence perpetrators will not have any co-conspirators. If they do exist, they are most often involved in the aspect of assisting in the obtaining of weapons to be used. They will most often act alone, but *Gang-Related* offenders are more likely to involve more than one perpetrator in most of their events.

Most perpetrators will have at least one person as a target in their minds whether it is on an actual piece of paper or simply in their minds. This is the most true for *Associated* offenders. As would be expected, the *Non-Associated* did not have any particular individual in mind as a target. Most offenders are going to have at least one target in mind when they decide to commit a violent act on a K–12 school campus. A significant percentage will also have random targets in mind, this being the case with *Non-Associated* types of offenders.

Most school violence perpetrators flee the scene after the completion of their act of violence to be arrested at a later time. The gang members drive this percentage the most given their types of crime. The *Associated* and *Non-Associated* offenders are interesting in that they have the highest percentages in offenders who are captured at the scene of the offense by teachers, students, or bystanders.

**4**

**Who Is the Traditional School Violence Perpetrator?**

**IN THEIR OWN WORDS**

**Personal Comments to Author about School Violence**

*A lot of people seem to want to always put people in neat boxes and categories so they can easily demarcate acts in to various levels of stratification, such thinking is counterproductive, and useless.*

—BM/15/1988 (opened fire at several teachers with a semiautomatic pistol)

*With regards to bullying. I was not bullied in high school but in grade school. They were afraid of me. I had no outside group to associate with. It might of helped if I did. At the time I was not emotionally abused but was in the past and was scared of my father. I felt I was wronged by school officials for making me go to school. I did not have the option to quit school. I was often under the influence of over-the-counter pills (Max Alerts). With regards to consequences, I expected to be killed that day. I didn’t care about any consequences. Just to clarify, after I was arrested and on the way to jail, I knew my life was over and would spend the rest of my life in prison. It wasn’t until about an hour later after I was put into a cell and hearing about my crime on tv in the background that it really hit me what I had done. It was then I felt remorse and anguish over it.*

—WM/17/1995 (used .22 caliber rifles to shoot two students and fatally shoot a freshman student)

*Feeling that my sexuality was being questioned: And it wasn’t that I questioned my orientation. I felt confused because I had been sexually abused by a male. And I felt VERY, VERY, angry. The state of mind, once the decision is made, is quite calm. And since part of the reason for my act was reacting against overbearing and unfair authority, I had thrown out all such controls. It was a very “free” state, albeit at the same time out of control. And no thought at all for realistic consequences.*

—WM/14/1986 (failing a class, tried to kill the teacher, but shot and killed her substitute and injured a vice principal and two other students)

**INTRODUCTION**

This chapter examines the personal characteristics of the four types of school violence perpetrators discussed in this work. Their connection to the school involved and physical, environmental, and educational characteristics will be explored. As with all chapters in part one of this work, the information below was derived from descriptive data (165 variables) from publicly available secondary sources (e.g., news reports, journal articles, court transcripts, and case studies) that were collected for 78 identified currently incarcerated perpetrators and their events. In addition, demographics, state-level variables, characteristics of events, victims, prosecution, weapons, family, school, peers, and so forth were also collected.

**CONNECTION TO SCHOOL**

It is assumed by many that most school violence perpetrators are current students at the school in which they commit their acts, but in reality, offenders can have many different connections to a school. The following is an overview of the connection that the 78 offenders in this study had to the school in which their act of violence was committed.

**Relationship to School**

Chart 4.1 details the relationship, or lack thereof, between the perpetrators and the school violence events examined in this work. Interesting findings remind that schools and school property can be vulnerable to a multitude of types of offenders. This is yet another area which is difficult in obtaining accurate information—if the event was not carried out by a currently enrolled student, why a school was chosen can be very blurry in mixed police and media reports.

Chart 4.1. Relationship to School

Interestingly, *overall*, only 64% were current students who were involved in a school violence event. The remaining 36% were either outsiders with some past connection to the school or outsiders with absolutely no connection. As would be expected, the *Traditional* school violence perpetrators made up most of the current students, but that was only at 50%. The other 4% were *Traditional* type offenders who had been suspended or expelled and returned to their school for an act of violence.

**DEMOGRAPHICS**

The following is an overview of the physical, environmental, and educational characteristics of the offenders in this study. These characteristics are detailed by the four types of school violence perpetrators in this work.

**Physical Characteristics**

First is an overview of the physical characteristics of the school violence perpetrators. The physical characteristics of the offenders are examined in regards to age, sex, race, and body build.

***Age of Perpetrator***

As has been discovered in many areas, the age of the various types of school violence perpetrators coincide with what might be expected given the type of offender and their acts.

Chart 4.2. Age of Perpetrator

*Overall*, approximately half (47%) of the school violence incidents examined were committed by 15 to 17-year-olds, although a significant percent of schools (6%) were attacked by individuals that were 30 years old or older. The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators drove the percentages in the 15 to 17-year-old category and had 23% at the younger age of 13 to 14 years old. The gang related school violence perpetrators drove the 18 to 20-year-old group at 46%, but also had very significant percentages at 15 to 17 at 29%.

***Sex of Perpetrator***

The next demographic examined was the gender of the offenders reviewed. While the findings were generally what would be expected, one trend in regards to female offenders was interesting.

Chart 4.3. Sex of Perpetrator

*Overall*, as would be expected, 95% of the school violence perpetrators were male, but a significant percentage (5%) were female (see chart 4.3). The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators were at 93%, but did have 7% involving female perpetrators.

***Race of Perpetrator***

Next the racial makeup of the school violence perpetrator sample was examined to explore any potential trends.

Chart 4.4. Race of Perpetrator

*Overall*, half (50%) of the school violence perpetrators were white, while the other 50% were distributed over the other racial types. The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators were found to be white in 69% of the events and 31% were black in this sample.

***Body Build of Perpetrator***

While very difficult to determine in many cases, the body build of the offenders was included in this study to add to the other sections of the work discussing the physical appearance of school violence perpetrators.

As would be expected, the *overall* body type was found to be average at 45%, but there were significant percentages in the thin/slight category (23%) and overweight category (10%) (see chart 4.5). The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators were found to follow this trend with 43% being described as average build and 34% as being very thin/slight.

Chart 4.5. Body Build of Perpetrator

**Environmental Characteristics**

Second is an examination of the environmental characteristics of the perpetrators. This section was difficult to research as well given the various vague and subjective reports that were available.

***Birth Order of Perpetrator***

Chart 4.6. Birth Order of Perpetrator

Chart 4.6 is an overview of this type of break down for the types of school violence perpetrators examined.

It should be noted in the spirit of providing accurate analysis that this information could only be ascertained for 43 of the 78 incidents examined (see chart 4.6). Given what was confirmed, *overall*, 22% of the offenders were the youngest in their family and 13% were the oldest. Interestingly, the *Traditional* school violence perpetrators were found to be in all types of birth orders, with very significant percentages being an only child (22%).

***Number of Siblings Living with Perpetrator***

In addition to investigating the birth order of school violence perpetrators of the various types, the number of siblings living with the offender at the time of their offenses was explored. Again, this was a very difficult topic to investigate given the vague information that is often disseminated about the school violence offender after an event.

*Overall*, 24% of the offenders had no other siblings living with them at the time of their incident (see chart 4.7). Again, this is based on information confirmed on 53 of the 78 incidents identified. A close second at 19% did have one sibling in the same home. The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators led the group with 1 other sibling in their home at 39%. It should also be noted that 11% of this type of offender had 5 or more siblings in their homes as well.

Chart 4.7. Number of Siblings Living With Perpetrator

***Socioeconomic Status of Perpetrator***

The socioeconomic status of the various types of perpetrators was also examined. Obviously, this is a significant factor in the environmental characteristics of any type of criminal offender.

Not surprisingly, *overall* most offenders (56%) were living in lower-class socioeconomic circumstances. Although, very significant percentages of offenders were found to be from the middle (23%), upper middle (10%) and upper class (35%) levels. The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators were the highest at 47% in lower class situations but a very significant percentage was at the middle and upper-middle-class levels (46%).

Chart 4.8. Socioeconomic Status of Perpetrator

**Educational Characteristics**

Finally, a brief overview of the perpetrators’ educational characteristics is presented. The educational characteristics of the types of school violence perpetrators examined in this work are explored in many different ways in many different chapters. The following is a brief overview of the years of education completed or grade level for the various types of offenders at the time of the commission of their violent act.

***Years of Education Completed***

Given the variations in the sample involved in this study, years of education are examined in addition to the grade level of offenders at the time of their offense. Many of those who attack schools and K–12 students are not current students and possibly not in school at all.

*Overall*, as would he expected, the majority of the offenders had completed 8, 10, or 12 years of education at 21% (see chart 4.9). Although, 10% had only completed less than 7 years of formal education at the time of their act. The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators were almost evenly distributed between 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 years of education. Given the other findings about this type of offender, most were current students and committed acts in their own school.

Chart 4.9. Years of Education Completed

***Grade at Time of Incident***

As a way to confirm the above findings, the grade at the time of violence was ascertained for this population of school violence offenders. This percentage coincides with what was discussed above.

*Overall*, it is obvious that the 9th (19%) and 11th (18%) grades are periods in a person’s life where significant violence can occur. There are significant percentages at all grades in high school, even 10% occurring before high school in the 7th and 8th grades. The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators were the highest as freshman (28%), but very significant percentages before and all through the high school years.

Chart 4.10. Grade at Time of Incident

**SUMMARY**

Individuals who commit acts of violence in K–12 schools can have many different connections to that school. It can be where a fellow classmate one is having problems with is, or it can be a place for potential robbery victims in the parking lot. It can be the place of one’s first failures in life, or it can simply be a symbol which one resents. The relationship and reason a certain school is chosen for a violent attack can be a complicated issue. Ultimately, why the school was chosen will be in the mind of the offender, but schools provide attractive targets to some. Current students will know where their rivals or bullies are and *Gang-Related* students will know where rival gang members are. The *Associated* offenders will know where their former teacher or coach is and the *Non-Associated* will know there are many young lives in that building.

The ages of the individuals in this study ranged from 13 to 55 years of age. *Traditional* perpetrators are generally the *Traditional* school age, while *Gang-Related* offenders are often slightly older. The *Associated* and *Non-Associated* offenders are interesting in that they can be any age. Many individuals are forced out of the *Traditional* school setting by being expelled, suspended, or place in homed or alternative schooling situation. They sometimes see the original school as the source of their initial failure or mistakes and return for some type of revenge.

The vast majority of school violence perpetrators in this study were male, but a very significant percentage of *Non-Associated* type offenders were females. Approximately half of the perpetrators were white with the other half distributed across the other racial groups. It is often expected that the *Traditional* offenders will be almost always white, but a very significant percentage in this study were black. The *Non-Associated* individuals who attacked a school without provocation of any kind were 100% white.

Determining the body type of school violence perpetrators at the time of their offense is difficult at best. Descriptions are very vague and subjective in reports. As expected most were average in build, but significant percentages were thin/slight and overweight.

The offenders examined were found to be at all levels of birth order in their families. The most were the youngest in their families, but significant percentages were also found to be the oldest as well. Most offenders did not have any other siblings in their home at the time of their incident, but a significant percentage did have up to 5 or more. The *Gang-Related* offenders were the most likely to have a large number of siblings living with them at the time of their violence.

Not surprisingly, most school violence offenders are going to come from lower socioeconomic situations, but very significant percentages are found in the other classification as well as coming from the upper class in the case of *Traditional* shooters.

As would be expected, most of the school violence perpetrators examined had between 8 and 10 years of education completed at the time of their violence. Given that most were current students and freshmen, sophomores, or juniors, this would make sense. While all grades are important in a student’s life, the 9th and 11th grades seem to be extremely trying. These grades find the most violence by current students. Even those who return to harm someone at their former school appear to have dropped out or been forced out in the 11th grade.

**5**

**Traditional School Violence Perpetrator’s Traits and Issues**

**IN THEIR OWN WORDS**

**Personal Comments to Author about School Violence**

*Suffering some mental health problem but unaware of it himself. A bully, but doesn’t view himself that way. Geek, nerd, weirdo aren’t really “Negitive [sic] labels”: Everyone’s in a clique, but don’t consider it a gang. Every kids fighting with another student/group and they all feel punished unfairly by parents, usually just teen angst/drama.*

–WM/14/1998 (fatally shot a teacher and wounded another and two students at a school dance)

*I had been relentlessly picked on and bullied, both physically and mentally and I felt totally powerless. But when you discover that it’s nothing you can do to remove the spotlight from off you in their (the bullies) eyes then you get more perplexed, then later angry and confused, then frustrated. After a while of being frustrated, then anger returns like a brutal cold rain, which matetes [sic] to various levels of rage which can’t be contained in a cage for long before it’s transformed into some sort of action. If I had known or even contemplated my actions fully and the full ramifications of my actions (the stress and embarrassment and shame and pain and humiliation) caused to my mom and other families, I know I would not have done this crime nor would I have killed myself or anyone. I most likely would have found or discovered another route, or solution to solve my problems.*

—BM/15/1988 (opened fire at several teachers with a semi-automatic pistol)

*One thing I notice it never be the ones that have bad behavior in school that pull things like what John did, it always be a smart, quiet student that you think would not do that, so the teacher be looking at the wrong student for behavior problems.*

—BM/21/2005 (ambushed a rival 17-year-old gang member with three other males in a school parking lot)

**INTRODUCTION**

An enormous amount of research has been conducted in attempts to identify or profile a child who is most likely to commit an act of violence. This is no truer than in school violence and disturbance research. Many profiles have been developed over the years, but most of these simply become checklists or charts where people try to place another’s behavior into numbers on a sheet of paper. This practice has oversimplified the extremely complex nature of human behavior. Moreover, it has caused a great deal of damage to those who were inappropriately classified or profiled by another.

As with all chapters in part one, descriptive data (165 variables) from publicly available secondary sources (e.g., news reports, journal articles, court transcripts, and case studies) were collected for 78 identified currently incarcerated perpetrators and their events. In addition, demographics, state-level variables, characteristics of events, victims, prosecution, weapons, family, school, peers, and so forth were also collected. This information was used to develop the following overview of the school violence perpetrators’ traits and personal issues.

**PERSONAL TRAITS AND PHYSICAL ISSUES**

The following is an examination of the personal traits and physical issues of the offenders examined in this study. This examination offers interesting and unique findings when it comes to the mental and physical health issues of perpetrators. It will also offer insight into the home and family situations for these offenders at the time of their acts. The aspects of sexual, physical, and psychological abuse will be explored as well. The commonly associated causes of school violence and disturbance such as bullying, disciplinary problems at school, broken relationships, and drug and alcohol abuse are examined. The chapter concludes with an examination of the potential impact that violent music and media may have had upon an offender.

**Mental Health Issues**

Mental health issues of any type of criminal offender are going to be of utmost concern. When individuals commit serious acts of violence against others, it is natural to assume that some type of mental health problems must be the cause. The following is an overview of possible mental health issues in school violence perpetrators.

***Evidence of Prior Mental Health Issues***

One of the most current and controversial issues dealing with the potential causes of school violence is the impact of mental health issues and the medication, or lack thereof, being used by juveniles and adults.

Whether there was evidence of prior mental health issues is almost evenly distributed *overall* between yes (41%) and no (53%). The distinction becomes more evident when a more detailed examination of the types of offenders is conducted. The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators follow the *overall* trend with approximately half (54%) having been identified as having prior mental health issues.

Figure 5.1. Evidence of Prior Mental Health Issues

***Taking Medications for Mental Health***

Just because an individual has a mental health condition, that does not mean they will necessarily be taking prescribed medication to help them. The following revels a few interesting trends as to which types of offenders were and were not taking prescribed medication for mental health issues at the time of the offense.

Chart 5.2. Medications for Mental Health

In the majority of the incidents studied *overall*, 57% of the offenders were not taking any type of medication for mental health issues, but 19% were on some type of medication. This is interesting in that while 41% had some type of former mental health issue, only 19% were on medication at the time of their incident. This trend was the same for *Traditional* school violence perpetrators; 54% had prior issues but only 26% were currently taking medication.

**Physical Health Issues**

In addition to the impact of one’s mental health, physical health can be a major contributor to one’s positive or negative behavior.

***Evidence of Physical Health Issues***

Second only to concerns over mental health of school violence perpetrators, physical health issues are a major concern when examining the causes of this type of violence. Chart 5.3 explores this issue for the studied school violence perpetrators.

*Overall*, the vast majority of the offenders (85%) had no evidence of physical health issues. This trend held consistent across the types of offenders, with only 15% of the *Traditional* school violence perpetrators having any issues and gang related school violence perpetrators having none.

Chart 5.3. Evidence of Physical Health Issues

**Home and Family Life**

An area which receives enormous attention when an act of school violence occurs is the home and family life of the offender. Most expect that offenders will come from lower socioeconomic and broken homes. Many expect that the offenders will be in foster care or being raised in any environment except the traditional two married persons. The following is a review of the findings in these areas.

***Parental Situation at Time of Incident***

Chart 5.4 is an overview of the parental situations for the various types of offenders. Unlike other research findings, *overall* this study found that a slight majority of all types of offenders lived with two married parents at the time of their act (chart 5.4).

This was the case for *Traditional* school violence perpetrators (41%). Of these, 29% were living only with their mother, but only 19% were living in other types of family structures.

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Chart 5.4. Parental Situation at Time of Incident

***Evidence of Family Dysfunction***

It would be expected that there would be a great deal of dysfunction in the family life of those who result to acts of school violence. This is another area where research is difficult in that much of the information about the family lives of this type of criminal is vague or not reported. Chart 5.5 is an examination of what information was possible to be located for the 78 offenders in this study.

*Overall*, evidence of family dysfunction was split almost evenly between yes (47%) and no (42%). *Traditional* school violence perpetrators followed this trend finding that approximately half (53%) did have evidence of some type of family dysfunction, but another 47% did not.

Chart 5.5. Any Evidence of Family Dysfunction?

***Evidence of Physical Parental Abuse or Neglect***

Along the lines of dysfunction in the family setting for offenders, evidence of physical abuse or neglect was investigated as well.

*Overall*, only 27% of these offenders had evidence of being physically abused or neglected by a parent (see chart 5.6). This trend of a relatively small percentage was true for three of the four types of offenders in this study. *Traditional* school violence perpetrators had evidence of physical abuse or neglect by a parent and *Gang-Related* school violence perpetrators had it in only 27%.

Chart 5.6. Any Evidence of Physical Parental Abuse or Neglect?

***Evidence of Sexual Abuse***

As discussed and examined in several parts of this work, sexual abuse is a major factor in the negative behavior of individuals, this is especially true for juveniles. Chart 5.7 is an overview of information obtained in regards to the sexual abuse of the four types of school violence perpetrators examined.

As with physical abuse or neglect, *overall* most offenders (91%) had no evidence of sexual abuse in their past (see chart 5.7). This was true for *Traditional* school violence perpetrators at 97% and *Gang-Related* school violence perpetrators at 95%.

Chart 5.7. Any Evidence of Sexual Abuse?

***Marital Status of Perpetrator at Time of Incident***

Normally, considering the marital status of a school violence perpetrator would not be necessary and their being single would be assumed. Given this population of offenders, it was determined that this would be a viable subject to consider.

Chart 5.8. Marital Status of Perpetrator at Time of Incident

Given the population involved in this type of crime, it would be expected that very few individuals would be married (see chart 5.8). *Overall* 95% of the offenders were single with 100% of the *Traditional* school violence perpetrators being so.

***Perpetrator Involved Regularly in Religious Activities***

In that historically whether violent juveniles were involved in religious activities or not was studied, this subject was included in this study. Obviously, this is one of the most difficult areas in which to find accurate information. The confirmed findings are explored below.

Chart 5.9. Perpetrator Involved Regularly in Religious Activities?

It has been argued by some that taking prayer out of schools is what led to the first stages of violence entering American school houses. While most often hard to determine, there were some incidents where the offenders reported some type of religious activity in their lives at the time of their violent act. *Overall* the majority (83%) had no evidence of religious activity, but there was evidence of it in 15% of the incidents (see chart 5.9). Of the *Traditional* school violence perpetrators, 22% and 10% of the *Gang-Related* school violence perpetrators had some type of religious involvement.

**School Life**

Maybe only second to a child’s home life, their school life is going to have an enormous impact on their behavior and future.

***Evidence of School Disciplinary Problems***

Information relating to evidence of school disciplinary problems was easier to confirm given the media explorations of the issues the school violence perpetrator may have had at the time of the incident. The below chart is an overview of those findings.

Chart 5.10. Any Evidence of School Disciplinary Problems?

*Overall*, approximately half (45%) of all types of offenders had evidence of some type of school disciplinary problems at the time of their violence. *Traditional* school violence perpetrators had the greatest percentage in this area at 64%.

***Evidence of Recent School Difficulties***

Juveniles having problems in schools do not have to be only in the area of having disciplinary problems. These problems can involve myriad issues from learning problems to an inability to develop proper studying techniques. The follow is an overview of other types of school issues an individual may have been experiencing at the time of their offense.

Chart 5.11. Any Evidence of Recent School Difficulties?

Keeping in mind the percentage of the individuals examined in this study not being in school at all, the *overall* findings are interesting. *Overall*, approximately half (50%) of the offenders will be experiencing some type of school difficulty at the time of their violence. The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators will lead this with 69% having such issues, the *Gang-Related* school violence perpetrators may or may not (41% equally) have such issues.

***Evidence of Perpetrator Being Bullied***

The impact of bullying is of major concern to all who are interested in the well-being of students. The following chart examines whether there was evidence that the various types of offenders were bullied at or prior to the time of their offense.

Chart 5.12. Any Evidence of Perpetrator Being Bullied?

Interestingly, *overall* the majority of cases (65%) examined did not have signs of the offenders having been bullied, but 26% did have such evidence. The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators experienced being bullied at 58%.

***If Bullied, Why?***

In cases where bullying was suspected, the reason for it was investigated. The following chart examines the information in this regard.

Chart 5.13. If Bullied, Why?

This area of the research was one of the most difficult to conduct given the reluctance of individuals to divulge that they were such victims and conflicted accounts in the media in reviewing these incidents. It should be noted that this information could only be confirmed in 18 of the 78 offenders examined. *Overall*, at 10%, multiple reasons for such abuse were discovered for most offenders. The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators followed this trend, but 27% were bullied over questions about their masculinity or femininity.

**Personal Relationships**

For young people, the loss of a close relationship can be as devastating as the actual death of someone of importance in their lives. The following is an overview of the impact of recent broken relationships on the various types of school violence perpetrators.

***Evidence of Recent Broken Relationship***

The loss of a special relationship will often hurt anyone and encourage negative feelings. This is extremely true for juveniles.

Chart 5.14. Any Evidence of Recent Broken Relationship?

*Overall*, most did not have any evidence (59%) of a recent broken relationship, but 35% did (see chart 5.14). The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators were one of the highest (40%) to have a factor in their lives at the time of their violence.

**Alcohol and Drug Use**

Very interesting trends are discovered in examining whether offenders were under the influence, or even using or possessing, any type of alcohol or other drug at the time of the violent event. The following sections investigated this topic in relation to the various types of offenders.

***Perpetrator on Drugs/Alcohol at Arrest***

It is probably assumed by many that individuals being on alcohol or other types of drugs at the time of their violent act were a major catalyst for said violence. The following charts reveal that this may not be the case with school violence type offenders.

Chart 5.15. Perpetrator on Drugs/Alcohol at Act?

*Overall*, the majority (89%) of offenders are found to not be under the influence or using any type of alcohol or other drug at the time of their violent act. This could speak volumes to the fact that when an individual decides to commit such an act, they do so clean and sober. *Traditional* school violence perpetrators were found to be under the influence at 2% and *Gang-Related* school violence perpetrators at only 13%.

***Perpetrator Possessed Drugs at Arrest***

As with being under the influence, the majority of offenders are not going to even have any alcohol or other drugs in their possession at the time of their arrest. This arrest could come during the violent event, or in some types of attacks, a week later.

Chart 5.16. Perpetrator Possessed Drugs/Alcohol at Act?

*Overall*, very few (3%) will be found to have any type of drugs or alcohol in their possession at the time of arrest (see chart 5.16). This is important in that the majority of these types of offenders, except for maybe gang related offenders, are arrested at the scene of their crime. The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators follow this with only 3 being found in possession and matched by gang related school violence perpetrators at 4%.

***Evidence of Past Drug or Alcohol Use***

When examining evidence of past alcohol or other drug use, some trends in usage do develop. *Overall*, more significant numbers are going to be found in examining evidence of past alcohol or other drug abuse in an offender’s life (see chart 5.17). Of all school violence perpetrators, 30% were found to have such issues in the past. The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators experienced this at 24% and *Gang-Related* school violence perpetrators led the percentage of past abusers at 46%.

Chart 5.17. Any Evidence of Past Drug or Alcohol Use?

**Influence of Violent Media**

An area of research in the causes of violence in children is what impact violent content in various types of media might have. Findings in this regard range from the belief that exposure to violence in music and media will almost certainly negatively impact a juvenile. Other findings offered that it may be one of many catalysts in a child’s life which increases their likely to engage in criminal or antisocial behavior.

***Evidence Perpetrator Listened to Violent Music***

The following is the first in a series exploring the possible impact of violent media upon school violence perpetrators. *Overall* a small yet significant percentage (19%) of these types of offenders was believed to have listened to music with violent themes (see chart 5.18). It must be remembered that what is and is not considered “violent” is very subjective. The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators were the highest in this category at 26%.

Chart 5.18. Any Evidence Perpetrator Listened to Violent Music?

***Evidence Perpetrator Regularly Watched Violent Movies***

As with the interest in listening to violent music, watching violent movies may not have been much of an interest for these types of offenders.

*Overall* only 13% of offenders were viewed as having an interest in watching movies with violent content (see chart 5.19).

Chart 5.19. Any Evidence Perpetrator Regularly Watched Violent Movies?

The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators were at 12% in this regard and *Gang-Related* school violence perpetrators were at 14%.

***Any Evidence Perpetrator Played Violent Video Games?***

Second only to music and movies, violent video games have historically been attacked by many who feel that are responsible for much of the juvenile violence experienced in the United States.

Chart 5.20. Any Evidence Perpetrator Played Violent Video?

*Overall* similar trends as before are discovered, a significant percentage (15%) was found to have played what many would consider violent video games (see chart 5.20). The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators were tied with *Gang Related* school violence perpetrators at 19% in this regard.

***Any Evidence Perpetrator Read Works with Violent Themes?***

Violent or controversial works have always found their opponents who argue that children should not have access to them. The following is exploring the use of this medium by the various types of offenders. Interestingly, *overall*, only 10% of the cases involved this interest and all were by the *Traditional* school violence perpetrators (see chart 5.21). No evidence of this being an interest of any other type of offender was found.

Chart 5.21. Any Evidence Perpetrator Read Works With Violent?

***Evidence of Perpetrator Writing/Drawing Material with Violent Themes?***

Another historically investigated area of trying to identify potential violent juveniles is in the examination of their writings and drawings. As with the music and media, significant percentages were found in almost all types of offenders in this study.

*Overall* a significant percentage (19%) of the school violence perpetrators did exhibit signs of writings and drawing with somewhat violent themes (see chart 5.22). The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators, once again, were the highest in this regard at 24%, but the *Gang-Related* school violence perpetrators were the lowest at 10%.

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Chart 5.22. Any Evidence Perpetrator Writing/Drawing Material with Violent Themes?

**SUMMARY**

Evidence of prior mental health issues was found in approximately half (41%) of the offenders examined, but 53% were found to have no signs. Deeper examination revealed that certain types of offenders such as *Traditional* had very high levels of prior mental health issue, with the *Non- Associated* having the most at 80%. Just because someone has a mental health condition, it does not naturally follow that they will be taking proper medication for their medical issues. This can be for many different reasons, a major one is that maybe their mental illness condition has not been properly diagnosed nor treated. In this study 67% of the offenders were found not to be taking any type of mental health medication at the time of their violence, but 19% were. This was very true for *Associated* type offenders.

The vast majority of school violence perpetrators in this study were found to not have any significant physical health issues. The *Traditional* and *Non-Associated* were found to have some at 15% and 14%. Given the living environment and socioeconomic status of many of these offenders, it could be that they simply did not receive the proper medical attention to even diagnose a serious physical health issue.

Possibly surprising, 29% of the offenders studied came from homes where two married parents were present. A very close second though was living with a single mother. It is apparent that school violence perpetrators can come from all types of living arrangements.

There could or could not be significant family dysfunction in the homes of a school violence perpetrator. The information is vague often at best. It is obvious in many of the findings in this work that juveniles who are unhappy at home and at school are much more likely to resort to an act of school violence. This research study found significant percentages of physical abuse or neglect by parents in the lives of the school violence perpetrators. Most types were evenly distributed but the *Non-Associated* offenders appeared to have this issue the most.

There was no evidence in 81% of the cases investigated in this study, but that may have been simply due to the inherent lack of individuals being willing to report this as having occurred. The *Non-Associated* offenders in this study were found to have the greatest amount of abuse reported in this area.

As expected, the vast majority of school violence perpetrators were single at the time of their violence, although 4% of the *Gang-Related* offenders were married and very significant percentages of the *Associated* and *Non-Associated* offenders were divorced. Most offenders were found to have no evidence of significant religious involvement, but significant percentages did. This was mostly found for *Traditional* and *Non-Associated* type offenders.

Many types of offenders are going to be having some type of school disciplinary problems at the time of their violence, but many are not. It is often expected that the school violence perpetrator will be on some type of radar as having issues, but this may very well not be the case, or at least, not known. Moreover, most offenders are going to be exhibiting some type of school difficulty at the time of their violence. Although many times it may be overlooked by others or kept in secret by the offender.

Bullying is a major issue in K–12 education in America. Many of all types of perpetrators suffered from some type of bullying prior to their violent act. Offenders are going to be bullied often for many different reasons. Their masculinity or femininity will very often be subjects, but intelligence level and socioeconomic factors will also be reasons for others to abuse them.

A significant percentage of school violence perpetrators will have recently experienced the loss of a significant relationship in their lives at the time of their violent event. This is very much the case in *Associated* and *Non-Associated* type offenders.

Most school violence perpetrators will be totally clean and sober when they commit their act of violence. This is an extremely important fact to note in that it means that they are clear and certain for the most part on their act and do not need any other intoxicant to make the act easier to commit. Most school violence perpetrators will not even have alcohol or other drugs in their possession when they are arrested for their violence, whether it is at the scene or at some point later, although a large percentage of school violence perpetrators will have a past history of alcohol and other types of drug abuse. The highest in this group will be gang related.

While it is very difficult to confirm accurately, it appears that at least the vast majority of all types of school violence perpetrators will not show evidence of being significantly negatively impacted by violent music and media. They will not have had a past of playing violent video games or reading violent materials.

**6**

**Traditional School Violence Perpetrator Characteristics of Weapons Used and Injuries Incurred**

**IN THEIR OWN WORDS**

**In Response to the Sandy Hook Elementary School Shooting on December 14, 2012**

*My heart go out to those children and their families. I know that’s the worse feeling a parent could ever have. In-a-way I wish I could’ve been there to help save the kids. Now the politicians are involved, talking about more gun control laws. I’m not anti-government, but the government in my belief is full of it. Guns don’t kill people, people kill people! Everybody knows that with stricter gun control laws will only put more minorities in state and federal prisons. Instead of gun control laws the government needs to spend money on mental health programs for the youth. They promote violence but then grieve for it. I feel sorry for those kids, all I could say is this is a very cold and dark world. The person that· did that, I don’t think nobody pay attention to the signs. Because it’s always sign. That’s why I say we have to start with the youth in America. But with “Newtown” happening my hope is a little bit scattered. L feel as if when a school shooting happen rather, “Isolated” or “Mass” it hurts my case.*

—BM/16/1996 (shot another student during a fight with a group of students)

**Personal Comments to Author about School Violence**

*Before the shooting no one cared to listen to me. Now they want to listen for the wrong reasons which is why I have nothing to say. I will let XXXXXX (Victim 1) and XXXXX (Victim 2) speak for me.*

—WM/17/1993 (entered class, pulled revolver and killed teacher, then a janitor who entered classroom, held class hostage for two hours)

**INTRODUCTION**

While the vast majority of school violence and disturbances result from daily acts of bullying and mistreatment of children, sadly, only events in which weapons were used and physical harm was caused seem to bring about the most attention. Each of the 78 incidents examined in this study involved the use of some type of weapon (ranging from a .22 caliber pistol to a propane tank). This chapter examines the findings in regard to types of weapons used and the resulting harm.

**AVAILABILITY, SOURCE, AND TYPE OF WEAPONS**

The following is an overview of the availability, source, and type of weapon used in the school violence incidents studied. Many of the commonly held beliefs about these issues are questioned by the current findings.

**Availability of Weapons**

Many argue that if weapons were less available then there would be less violence. This has led to great debate about “gun control” in the United States. Each school-related shooting brings about renewed controversy about what should be done about the vast amount of weapons readily available to juveniles across the nation.

***Were Weapons Readily Available to Shooter?***

The following chart examines the findings as they relate to where the weapons used were obtained. A comparison of the *overall* findings and each of the four types of offenders is presented.

Chart 6.1. Were Weapons Readily Available To Shooter

Not surprisingly, *overall* 91% of those in this study reported that weapons were readily available to them. Almost all (98%) of the *Traditional* school violence perpetrators reported that they were able to obtain the weapon (whether handgun, long gun, knife, etc.) very easily. Most often the weapons they used were found in their own home, simply using a weapon which was a gift to them or stealing one or more from their parents. An interesting phenomena about parental behavior was found in examining these incidents. There was a small but significant percentage of offenders who had been given a handgun or rifle as a present by their parents in order to give them a “hobby” (such as target shooting or hunting). Some parents had been advised to choose a hobby that they could do together with their troubled child—some chose sharing firearms.

***Source of Weapons***

It is obvious and not surprising that weapons of all types are readily available in the United States. It is argued by many that only “criminals” have weapons and that they illegally enter the homes of “law abiding” individuals and steal them. The following is an overview of where the school violence perpetrators obtained the weapon which was used in their violent act.

***Where Was Gun/Weapon Obtained?***

As evident in the prior discussion, weapons are not difficult to obtain for those who wish to use them to cause violence. *Overall*, most weapons (27%) were stolen from parents, but many (17%) were reported to be provided by friends. Almost half (47%) of the *Traditional* school violence perpetrators obtained their weapons by stealing them from their parents.

Chart 6.2. Where Was Gun/Weapon Obtained?

**Number and Types of Weapons**

Incidents where large caliber or large numbers of weapons are used seem to receive the most attention and resulting headlines. While the number of weapons used in acts of school violence varies greatly, it becomes apparent that the variance is probably due to the various types of offenders and their intentions.

***Number of Weapons***

The following examines the number of weapons in possession of the various types of school violence perpetrators at the time of their violence. The vast majority (85%) used only one weapon during their act of violence (see chart 6.3). The great majority (88%) of the *Traditional* school violence perpetrators were found to have used one weapon, but 5% did have at least five weapons at their disposal during the commission of their act.

Chart 6.3. Number of Weapons

***Rounds of Ammunition Available***

The following is a seldom examined topic in school violence research: the actual number of rounds with and available to the offender. The chart below examines the number of rounds with the various types of school violence perpetrators at the time of their violence.

Chart 6.4. Rounds of Ammunition Available

Obviously, the number of weapons during an incident is important, but the amount of damage that weapon can do, will vary on the amount of ammunition available (see chart 6.4). An examination of these incidents found that, *overall*, 39% of the offenders had 1 to 10 rounds available to them, generally based on the capacity and number of bullets the particular weapon would hold. This was true for 54% of the *Traditional* school violence perpetrators, but another 38% had over 200 rounds with them at the time of their act.

***Types of Weapons Used: Pistols/Handguns***

There is a common perception that most school violence incidents involve semi-automatic high powered weapons. Chart 6.5 examines whether this is true in most cases. The type of weapons used by school violence perpetrators are examined as to the use of pistols and handguns.

Chart 6.5. Types of Weapons Used: Pistols/Handguns

Given the large number of different types of weapons used by offenders, the findings in this area have been divided by *overall* type of weapon: pistols/handguns, shotguns/rifles, multiple weapons, and other types (see chart 6.5). As for handguns, *overall*, 11% of offenders used a .22 caliber pistol. Although, a 9mm semi-automatic handgun was a very close second choice (10%) for offenders. The choice of handgun used by *Traditional* school violence perpetrators ranged from a .22 caliber pistol (15%) to the somewhat uncommon M-11 pistol (2%). This may be due to the fact that most of these weapons are obtained from their parents who may have a variety of interests in weapons.

***Types of Weapons Used: Shotguns/Rifles***

Type of weapon used in regard to shotguns and rifles is examined in the following (see chart 6.6). It is a common perception that in most school violence incidents a long gun, like the AK-47, is the weapon of choice. This is not the case for all types of school violence perpetrators.

Chart 6.6. Types of Weapons Used: Shotguns/Rifles

While not used as often *overall*, shotguns and rifles made up a significant percentage of the types of weapons used. In these incidents, 12% involved weapons ranging from a common 12-gauge shotgun to the less common AK-47. The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators used the .22 caliber rifle (7%) and 30-30 rifle use was a close second (5%).

***Types of Weapons Used: Other Weapons***

While the use of a knife in a school violence incident is neither surprising nor uncommon, there are many other types of weapons used as well. When examining certain types of offenders, interesting trends reveal themselves in the choice of other types of weapons (see chart 6.7).

It is assumed that a firearm, most often a handgun, is used in almost all school violence incidents. This study found that 15% of these incidents involved common household items being used as weapons. *Overall*, 10% of the incidents involved the use of a knife of some type. *Traditional* school violence perpetrators followed this trend with 21% using a knife of some type (sometimes being obtained from the school cafeteria).

Chart 6.7. Types of Weapons Used: Other Weapons

***Types of Weapons Used: Multiple Weapons***

While the vast majority of serious school violence incidents only use one weapon, some do involve multiple weapons. Chart 6.8 examines this as it pertains to type of weapons used and type of offenders.

Fortunately, the vast majority of the incidents (85%) only involved one weapon (see chart 6.8). *Overall*, only 5% of the incidents found the offender to have more than one weapon. *Traditional* school violence perpetrators averaged having more than one weapon approximately 2% of the time.

Chart 6.8. Types of Weapons Used: Multiple Weapons

**INJURIES AND DEATHS**

Much of the horror of a school violence or disturbance event becomes evident when examining the number and types of injuries and deaths. The following sections discuss the numbers injured and killed and the number of potential victims in school violence events.

**Potential Victims**

Trying to determine the number of potential victims for any type of violence is difficult. This is extremely true when studying school-related violence. The number of potential victims may be reported as only the students in a particular classroom or hallway (2 to 10) or, in some random shootings, the entire study body (1501 or more) might be at risk. Attempting to examine the number of potential victims is difficult given the myriad types of school violence incidents. Obviously, when a violent act occurs on or near a school’s property, all children are at risk.

Chart 6.9. Number of Potential Victims

*Overall*, 14% of the incidents had 2 to 10 potential victims and 4% had over 1,500 potential victims (see chart 6.9). *Traditional* school violence perpetrators committed acts almost evenly where 2 to 300 students were potential targets, but 21% committed acts which put an entire student body at risk (such as random shooting in schools).

**Injured and Killed**

In almost all of the school violence incidents reviewed in this study, some form of physical harm was incurred by one or more victims. All, of course, resulted in some type of mental or psychological harm to those involved. Some of incidents even involved others killed or injured prior to or after the school violence incident but not on school grounds. In a few cases offenders had killed a parent before coming to school and others while fleeing the scene of their crime.

***Killed or Injured Anyone outside School before or after School Incident***

In connection with some school violence incidents, others are injured or killed prior to or after the event at the school. The following chart exams this occurrence by type of school violence perpetrator.

Chart 6.10. Killed or Injured Anyone outside School before or After School Incident

*Overall*, the vast majority (91%) of offenders did not harm anyone else before or after their school-related episode, but some did (8%). This is true for *Traditional* school violence perpetrators (93%), but a small percentage (7%) did kill or injure a family member prior to arriving at the school to commit their violence there.

***Number Killed***

Unfortunately, many lose their lives each year to school violence incidents. The following chart examines this as it pertains to the various types of school violence events.

Chart 6.11. Number Killed

*Overall*, in at least 22% of the incidents researched, no one lost their lives, but 78% of the events ended with at least one life lost. *Traditional* school violence perpetrators did not cause death in 17% of the incidents examined, but did in over half (59%) of the incidents.

***Number Injured***

While everyone involved in a school violence event can be considered a victim, many receive injuries in which they must receive medical attention. The following chart examines the number injured in the various types of school violence incidents.

Chart 6.12. Number Injured

Chart 6.12 examines the findings related to the number injured during the events researched. This does not include the number of individuals who lost their lives, which was examined in the prior discussion. *Overall*, 47% of the incidents experienced no injuries, but 42% did have at least one individual injured. Over half (57%) of the *Traditional* school violence perpetrators incidents found no injuries, but 35% did have at least one person injured.

**SUMMARY**

It appears that in the vast majority of incidents, weapons were readily available to the perpetrator. This was true for all four types of school violence offenders. These weapons were more than likely obtained from the offender’s home or given to them by a family member or friend. In the case of *Traditional* and *Gang-Related* perpetrators they were most often stolen. Fortunately, most offenders of all types used only one weapon, but those who were older and targeted the school for other reasons (as a symbol or place of innocence) often attacked the schools with multiple weapons including vehicles and propane tanks.

The typical offender will commit their act of violence with only one weapon, but may have up to 200 rounds of ammunition with which to do so. They will most often use a small caliber handgun, but some do use up to and above the power of an assault weapon. It must be noted that some offenders who target schools for other than rational targets reasons such as the *Non-Associated* type offenders, will attack schools with vehicles and other incendiary devices.

The number of potential victims will be determined by the location of the event. There is a vast difference between an event on a school bus holding 20 students and a cafeteria holding 100 students. There are also the incidents in which a drive-by type of shooting occurs across the front windows of a school. In these cases all 500 students in the affected class rooms could be at risk.

When examining the characteristics of victims several interesting trends are discovered. In some incidents the offender takes the life of a family member before they commit their act at a school, but very often this occurs immediately prior to their arrival at the school. This does not generally allow the initial violence to be discovered prior to the school event occurring.

Unfortunately, in the vast majority of school violence incidents at least one person is going to be injured—75% of the time someone will die. In *Traditional* school violence acts, random people will be injured most of the time, but in *Gang-Related* incidents their target will be the only one injured.

This is true in *Associated* and *Non-Associated* incidents, too. Those who have identified individual targets will most often injure or take the life of that individual, but no other. On the other hand, those who wish to do as much damage as possible to a certain group or institution will often hurt anyone they encounter as they carry out their act of violence.

**7**

**Traditional School Violence Perpetrator Charges, Trials, Pleas, Convictions, and Sentences**

**IN THEIR OWN WORDS**

**Personal Comments to Author about School Violence**

*I agree that it has been understudied in serious circles, and “over-studied” in the forum of talk shows and media sound bites. In addition to my own experience I have followed the phenomenon in the latter instance and, preferably, in the former. (Serious avenues such as Frontlines “The Killer at XXXXXXX High” and the work Columbine). It has given me a fair amount of insight. I believe there are commonalities in most of the school shootings (at least the student vs. student and/or teacher variety) which are confoundingly overlooked. And which, if understood better and more widely, would be a great tool in prevention.*

—WM/14/1986 (failing a class, tried to kill the teacher, but shot and killed her substitute and injured a vice principal and two other students)

*I do take full responsibility of my actions, though. Being incarcerated this long I have educated myself. And I’m more in-tone with what I consider the reasons and why’s incidents occurred, but to be honest I could only speak for myself My upbringing and surroundings of growing up in a inner-city like XXXXXXX I was basically born into gang life. Not only that but drugs, guns, violence, unstable households was sort of a way of life. I did make bad choices however, in-a-way I never had a chance to grow due to my surroundings. I don’t know if I’m a victim of circumstances, or product of my environment. But it’s a fact that I’ve victimized so many by what happened with the case I’m in here for: Yes I was crucified by the local media, and the victim was looked at as an angel when we both were known gang-members. However, we both were trying to just go to school, hoping to strive for our dreams. I know I was!*

—BM/16/1996 (shot another student during a fight with a group of students)

*I grew up playing sports, which is how I got my nickname “XXXX” from the legendary XXXXY XXXX. Sports became secondary once the street’s got a stranglehold of my heart, mind, body, and my soul would be latter confiscated by the commonwealth of XXXXXXXXXXX.*

—BM/16/2004 (shot and killed another student in a group fight a few minutes after their high school graduation)

**INTRODUCTION**

Examining the charges, trials, pleas, convictions, and sentences of any type of criminal offender is difficult, but extremely so in researching school violence perpetrators. Given the age of most offenders and the ensuing massive media attention, facts often become blurred with assumptions and misreporting, and are convoluted at best. Moreover, what the person actually did versus what they are charged with versus what they are eventually convicted of can be very different. Most states require a juvenile court hearing before a juvenile can be charged and tried as an adult. Some states, though, allow prosecutors to immediately charge a juvenile as an adult if they are at a minimum age (e.g., 14) and commit a violent felony (e.g., homicide).

As stated previously, descriptive data (165 variables) from publicly available secondary sources (e.g., news reports, journal articles, court transcripts, and case studies) were collected for 78 identified currently incarcerated perpetrators of school violence and their events. In addition, demographics, state-level variables, characteristics of events, victims, prosecution, weapons, family, school, peers, and so forth, were also collected. This chapter, like all the chapters in part one, was developed from the analysis of this data.

**CHARGES AND TYPES OF TRIALS**

This chapter examines the charges and types of trials the four types of school violence perpetrators faced. Their charges and defenses as well as type of trial are presented. Offender’s pleas, convictions, and sentences are also explored.

**Charges and Defenses**

In examining the charges, types of trial, and defenses of school violence perpetrators, various interesting findings present themselves. While these offenders commit common acts of violence, committing them on school grounds or at school events make them unique in many ways. An offender who uses a firearm in the commission of a crime can receive additional charges and eventual years of punishment in most states. But if this firearm is used on school grounds then, in most states, the offender can actually be charged with each bullet in that firearm as separate charges. Thus the firearm possession is a charge, the number of bullets in the possession of the offender are separate charges, and then, separately, any another crimes committed.

**Number of Different Charges**

The following chart examines the number of different charges the various types of school violence perpetrators experienced. In the cases examined in this research, the number of different charges mirrored what most offenders experience in the criminal justice system in America.

Chart 7.1. Number of Different Charges

It is not uncommon in prosecutions to “stack” charges against certain types of offenders. That is, filing as many charges as possible against a person in hopes that it may lead to a plea bargain or guilty plea if the more serious charges are dropped or reduced. *Overall*, this does not seem to be the case in the incidents studied. Of these incidents, 91% resulted in 1 to 5 charges, while only 6% brought about more than 6 to 7 charges.

This trend was the same in all types of offenders with *Traditional* school violence perpetrators at 95%, *Gang-Related* school violence perpetrators at 93%, and *Associated* and/or mentally school violence perpetrators at 84%, although *Associated* offenders did receive more than 5 charges in 17% of the cases.

**Type of Trial**

Unlike most other type of criminal prosecutions, ones related to school violence result in more jury trials. This is due to the fact that many of these individuals involved in this study were juveniles (under the age of 17) and were either charged initially as adults or waived to adult court. In many states individuals as young as the age of 14 can be charged initially as an adult if they are charged with certain violent offenses. Also, these types of offenders are more likely to offer defenses of being mentally ill at the time of their act or under some type of duress.

Chart 7.2 is an overview of the type of trial that the offenders in this study experienced. At this point different trends emerge which are very different than what is found in studying the trials of other types of offenders.

Chart 7.2. Type of Trial

*Overall*, only 28% of these incidents resulted in a plea bargain (i.e., agreements between defendants and prosecutors where defendants agree to plead guilty to some or all of the charges against them in exchange for concessions from the prosecutors). Of these incidents, 54% resulted in defendants pleading not guilty and requesting a jury trial. An interesting trend is found in studying these incidents closer.

The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators sought a jury trial in 46% of the incidents; their pleas focused heavily on mentally ill or under duress defenses.

The *Gang-Related* school violence perpetrators, on the other hand, most often (71%) pled not guilty in that most were not readily identified at the time of the incident, while almost all *Traditional* offenders were. It can also be offered that many of these types of incidents occurred in schools and cities with extreme gang violence crime rates. Many school officials and public leaders wished to make an example of any offender who was apprehended. Therefore, it was probably true that fewer prosecutors were willing to offer plea deals instead of wishing to “prosecute to the fullest extent of the law.”

**Pleas**

Another interesting trend is revealed by examining the pleas that school violence perpetrators initially enter. There is also an interesting difference in considering the number which do and do not accept plea bargains.

***Was There a Plea Bargain?***

Chart 7.3 examines whether a plea bargain was accepted by the various types of school violence perpetrators. While plea bargains are extremely common in most criminal prosecutions and convictions, this is not the case in school violence perpetrators.

Chart 7.3. Was There a Plea Bargain?

The immediately apparent trend for school violence perpetrators is that, *overall*, over half (60%) do not accept a plea bargain and decide to face a trial (see chart 7.3). As will be examined further in this chapter, many offer various types of defenses for various other reasons. *Traditional* school violence perpetrators at 49% versus 51% are the one type of school violence perpetrator which does not contribute greatly to this trend. All other types of offenders do contribute heavily to the number who do not accept a plea bargain.

***Not Guilty by Reason of Insanity as Defense at Trial or in Plea Agreement***

In most cases, a defendant claiming insanity is pleading “not guilty by reason of insanity” (NGRI) or “guilty but insane/mentally ill” in some jurisdictions. If successful, the verdict/sentence may result in the defendant being committed to a psychiatric facility for an indeterminate period. Chart 7.4 is an examination of how many and what type of school violence perpetrators chose this as an option in their defense.

*Overall*, most (78%) do not use this plea, but a significant number of certain types of school violence perpetrator do make this plea. Most (83%) of the *Traditional* school violence perpetrators did not use this plea and almost all (96%) of the *Gang-Related* school violence perpetrators did not either.

Chart 7.4. Not Guilty By Reason of Insanity as Defense at Trial or in Plea

***Guilty but Mentally Ill as Defense at Trial or in Plea Agreement***

Guilty but mentally ill is a verdict available in some jurisdictions in cases involving an insanity defense. In these verdicts the defendant is considered as if having been found guilty, but is committed to a mental hospital rather than imprisoned. This is most often decided if a court ordered mental health examination shows a need for psychiatric treatment.

Chart 7.5. Guilty but Mentally Ill as Defense at Trial or in Plea Agreement

*Overall*, this type of plea was used less (12%) than the not guilty by rea- son of insanity plea for all four types of offenders. One factor that may have had an impact on this finding is the limited number of states which allow this as a choice in a plea agreement. A significant number (17%) of *Traditional* school violence perpetrators did use this plea, but no *Gang-Related* school violence perpetrators did.

**Convictions**

As with most criminal charges, defendants in school violence events are almost always convicted. Given the acts and the individuals involved, most offenders are captured at the scene of the crime or surrender at the time of the event. Only the *Gang-Related* types of offenders flee the scene often, to be arrested at a later time.

***Conviction Counts***

Below is an overview of the various charges that the school violence perpetrators in this study received. Not surprisingly, a number of different types of charges are placed upon individuals who commit criminal offenses on K–12 school grounds.

Chart 7.6. Dominant Conviction Counts

Interesting trends are discovered in examining the primary charges against school violence perpetrators. Approximately half (53%) are charged with first-degree murder and one-third (33%) are charged with attempted murder and various other offenses, including extra charges of having and using a firearm on school property. The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators received murder charges in 59% of the cases examined. Their other charges vary depending on the actions they took while committing their crime.

*Overall*, a few interesting findings occur in looking at the lesser charges placed against school violence perpetrator (see chart 7.7). *Traditional* school violence perpetrators are charged at a significant level (7%) with kidnapping. These charges most often come in the cases where fellow classmates were held hostage or forced to move from one location to another in a classroom. Often the conspiracy charges (2%) are in relation to obtaining of the weapon used.

Chart 7.7. Lesser Conviction Counts

***Number of Conviction Counts***

In conjunction with examining the number and types of criminal charges received by school violence perpetrators, exploring the number of actual conviction is illuminating as well. Chart 7.8 is an overview of the number of conviction counts the various types of school violence perpetrators received in this study.

*Overall*, 39% were convicted of 2 to 4 different offense (see chart 7.8). A very close second were convicted of only one offense, at 33%. The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators followed this trend with 37% being convicted of 2 to 4 charges and the same percentage being convicted of only 1 charge.

Chart 7.8. Number of Conviction Counts

**Sentences**

In examining the sentences received by the school violence perpetrators, the expected trends are revealed. The following is an overview of the original sentences of the offenders reviewed in this research.

***Original Sentence Received***

As with all types of criminal offenders, it is difficult to track their original sentence to the sentence that they may be currently serving. For this research, it was determined that examining the original sentence of these types of offenders for comparison might be interesting. Chart 7.9 is an overview of those findings.

Chart 7.9. Original Sentence Received

*Overall*, over half (55%) received a term of years. Below is an overview of how these terms of years were distributed between the various types of offenders reviewed in this research. This was the primary initial sentence for all types of offenders. The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators were at 58% and none were given the death penalty, but 29% were given life without the possibility of parole.

***Minimum Number of Years Sentenced***

Any examination of sentences given to a group of offenders from across the United States is very difficult at best. Given the varying statutes and sentencing structures, myriad sentences are discovered. Also, when examining individuals who have multiple charges, each mandating a sentence, the confusion increases greatly. The following section attempts to examine the minimum number of years that these types of criminal offenders received.

Chart 7.10. Minimum Number of Years Sentenced

As in many areas of this part of the examination of school violence perpetrators, there is great variation in regards to the minimum number of years these offenders received (see chart 7.10). *Overall* a very slight majority received a minimum of 21 to 25 years at 13%. The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators received a minimum of 21 to 25 years, at 30%.

***Maximum Number of Years Sentenced***

The following is an examination for comparison in the maximum number of years these types of offender receive. Given the varying characteristics of crimes which occur on K–12 campuses, the sentences vary greatly as well.

*Overall* the maximum number of years received vary greatly given the various types of offenses committed on school property across the United States (see chart 7.11). On average 12% to 9% receive significant numbers of years, at 21 to 75 years. The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators were around 32% to 30% in the range of 21 to 75 years, but 6% did only receive a maximum of 3 to 9 years.

Chart 7.11. Maximum Number of Years Sentenced

***Eligible for Parole***

Chart 7.12 offers a comparison of the types of offenders as to whether they are eligible for parole. The eligibility is examined as it pertains to the four types of school violence perpetrators.

Finally, in regards to the percentage of offenders eligible for parole, a little over half (53%) may one day be paroled (see chart 7.12). *Traditional* school violence perpetrators follow this trend at 58%.

Chart 7.12. Eligible for Parole

**SUMMARY**

The average school violence incident will result in from one to five different charges against the offender. Some of these charges are unique given that the criminal act occurred on school property which bring about a number of additional criminal charges. In contrast to many other types of offenders, school violence perpetrators appear to seek jury trials and do not accept plea bargains as readily. Again, this is probably due to the age of the offenders and the various defenses they offer given the uniqueness of their crime and choice of location to commit it.

Over half of the school violence perpetrators examined in this study did not accept a plea bargain and sought a jury trial instead. The *Traditional* type of offender did accept a plea bargain in half of their incidents, but this was, again, probably due to their young age and having sought some type of eventual release date so they could have some type of future life. Most school violence perpetrators do not use the not guiltily by reason of insanity plea or seek the guilty by reason of insanity verdict. This is somewhat surprising given the crimes committed, but may also be that these are the most difficult pleas and verdicts to seek in a criminal trial.

Given this form of violence and the targeting of a certain individual(s) at a school, there are very high rates of deaths encountered. In that many of these deaths involve premeditation, many result in juveniles being charged as adults and receiving first degree murder charges. The *Non-Associated* types of offender receive the highest number of charges given their random targeting of children.

In that most school violence events involve one person targeting specific individuals, most offenders receive various types of murder and attempted murder charges. Sometimes when classmates are held hostage the additional charge of kidnapping will be given. The *Gang-Related* type of offender and others do sometimes receive conspiracy charges, but this is most often in regards to how they obtained the weapon used in the event. The number of convictions varied greatly among the various types of school violence perpetrators. Given the varying type of crimes they committed on school property this would make sense.

Any comparison of sentences given to a group of offenders from across the United States is very difficult at best. Given the varying statutes and sentencing structures, myriad sentences are discovered. Also, when examining individuals who have multiple charges, each mandating a sentence, the confusion increases greatly. As in many areas of this part of the examination of school violence perpetrators, there is great variation in regards to the minimum number of years these offenders received.

*Overall* the maximum number of years received vary greatly given the various types of offences committed on school property across the United States. Sentencing structures across the country vary greatly and may explain the varying sentences given to these types of offenders. And, *overall*, over half (55%) received a term of years. This was the primary initial sentence for all types of offenders.

As with most convicted of crimes, even extremely violent crimes, many school violence perpetrators could one day be released on parole. This parole may not be even considered for many of these types of offenders until after 30 and 40 years, but it is a possibility.

**Two**

**FROM THE MOUTHS OF SCHOOL VIOLENCE OFFENDERS**

The following chapters examine results of a second part of the *overall* research project, which focused on the results of a 200-question scenario-based survey, entitled “School Violence Prevention Questionnaire.” The survey was distributed in 2013 to the identified incarcerated school violence perpetrators who committed acts of violence across the United States between 1979 and 2011. This section will focus on the findings of the results of the 18 identified *Traditional* school violence perpetrators.

Each of the findings is represented through the following four types of school violence perpetrators (the number and percentage by type of offender is also represented):

*Traditional* School Violence Perpetrators (18 of the 36 offenders in this sample);

*Gang-Related* School Violence Perpetrators (13 of the 36 offenders in this sample);

*Associated and/or Mentally Ill* School Violence Perpetrators (4 of the 36 offenders in this sample);

*Non-Associated and/or Mentally Ill* School Violence Perpetrators (1 of the 36 offenders in this sample).

This analysis resulted in the revelation of unique information dealing with the projected thoughts, feelings, and experiences of a hypothetical offender (John/Jane) by the four types of school violence perpetrators. These projected feelings and thoughts are examined in four time periods: *before* the decision to commit violence, while *planning* the violence, *during* the violence, and during the *aftermath* of the violent event.

**8**

**Traditional School Violence Perpetrator: Before the Decision to Commit Violence**

**IN THEIR OWN WORDS**

**Personal Comments to Author about School Violence**

*Even with me living the life that I live and me being in the circumstances that I’m in, I still disbelieve in using violence as a form of communication. When tragedies hit most people male or female we respond in a haste manner without thinking for others as well as the consequences of our actions which will only lead to years or decade of decadence. No quick fix can help our nation heal from its losses or the pain that we suffered over the last couple years, months, weeks etc. . . . It’s time for rational thinking in unionism so different minds can give different opinions on the issues at hand. Making guns illegal in my opinion will only increase crime rate in my opinion solely for the fact that people already have existing problems and they need some type of artillery to protect their self and others.*

—BM/16/2004 (shot and killed another student in a group fight a few minutes after their high school graduation)

*Mostly EVERYONE had their own CLICKS who were SOMEHOW “outside” the REST of the students. Well, I’ll say at least HALF of the school was made up of different CLICKS, NEIGHBORHOODS, GANGS of SOME sort. So, it really wasn’t something considered “OUT” of the NORM. (That is in the minds of many young kids such as myself.) YES, I believe my parents depended on “corporal punishment” WAY too much and took things WAY too FAR. Before the “BUS DRIVER” started giving me problems and siding with the victim who was CLEARLY the AGGRESSOR in the BEGINNING, I cant say that I was seeking any REVENGE against any school officials or teachers. I mean, I was ANGRY with her but it hadn’t crossed my mind to go as far as THREATENING her in anyway. Being judged UNFAIRLY had simply become “a part of LIFE”–a part of the new WORLD I lived in (being BLACK in an all WHITE NEIGHBORHOOD). . . . You could say the community looked AFTER its OWN. HOW? . . . Good enough to accomplish WHAT? I SAY this because I never PLANNED to KILL anyone. I just wanted the victim and his cohorts a LESSON. I wanted to HUMILIATE them and make them APOLOGIZE for threatening to harm my FAMILY, KILL ME and for all the RACIAL SLURS that they’d made towards me. There were 2 OTHER guys with him a few days EARLIER (ages 19 and 24) waiting on me at my “Bus stop,” after following BEHIND the bus and driving BESIDE it, yelling out THREATS of bodily HARM, calling me niggars, porch monkeys, etc. (ALL of which the Bus Driver Ms. XXX WITNESSED, but never said ANYTHING ABOUT!) I don’t recall the guys’ NAMES as of now, but I can STILL see their FACES!—ANYWAYZ, in SHORT, I always KNEW I was going to JAIL AFTERWARDS. I just never thought it would be for MURDER . . . (ASSAULT or even BATTERY perhaps, but it never OCCURRED to me that something would go WRONG and I’d end up taking a LIFE! EVENTUALLY, I DID think these things, but not immediately AFTER. When I think back to that TIME, I felt “BURDENED DOWN,” kind of like having the weight of the WORLD on my SHOULDERS. I never even received ANY kind of “PSYCHOLOGICAL EVALUATION.” I was just walking around like an empty SHELL; Day after DAY, FEARFUL and WONDERING if I’d ever WAKE up from the most TERRIFYING, long-drawn OUT NIGHTMARE of my young 14 year old LIFE! . . .*

—BM/14/1996 (shot another student 6 times with a 22 caliber pistol on a school bus after a verbal feud)

**INTRODUCTION**

It can be argued that the most crucial point in a violent act is *before one chooses to commit one*. Undoubtedly, the reasons for the eventual act will be found in the minutes, days, weeks, and years of an individual’s life and mind before they choose to commit a violent act. This is especially true for juvenile delinquency and school violence. This chapter attempts to examine the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of school violence perpetrators before they decided to commit their act of violence. The topics of past views of self, feelings and emotions, abuse received, and influences are explored. The results are examined as they pertain to the four types of school violence perpetrators discussed in this work.

As stated in the introduction, a secondary part of the overall research project focused on the results of a 200-question scenario-based survey, entitled “School Violence Prevention Questionnaire.” Using a projective technique, respondents were asked to put themselves in the shoes of John/ Jane, a person similar to themselves at the time they committed their acts of violence and to answer questions about John’s/Jane’s thoughts, feelings, and experiences at four different time periods. The following are the results of findings of the first time period, before the decision to commit violence.

**THOUGHTS, FEELINGS, AND EXPERIENCES BEFORE ACT**

The following sections examine the projected thought, feelings, and experiences of the various types of school violence perpetrators during the period before a person begins to plan their actual violent act. The views of self, feelings and emotions, and abuse received are examined as to the possible level of their impact. Also, the external influences and factors of one’s current situation are explored.

**Views of Self**

Most individuals desire to have a positive view of themselves and hope that it is shared by others in their lives. There is a great deal of research which discusses the potential dangers of a lack of a positive view of self. Chart 8.1 examines the projected views by those surveyed as it pertains to the various ways a pre-offender may see themselves and their world.

The traditional causes of escalated violence in an individual are supported in this part of the study. Offenders surveyed projected all forms of conflict with and negative views of others. *Overall*, 72% projected that these individuals will have issues with conflict with others with very close second and third issues of being anti-authority (69%) and frustrated easily (67%) (see chart 8.2).

Chart 8.1. Most Significant Views of Self

*Traditional* school violence perpetrators follow these findings at 42% for having issues with conflict in general and 37% as being anti-authority.

Chart 8.2. Lesser Significant Views of Self

The slightly lesser projected issues *overall* seemed to deal with views of self in regards to feelings and views of the surrounding world in general. *Overall*, having little concern (39%) and being overly bored most of the time (39%) were tied in level of significance. The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators had the greatest percentage projected in the areas of lack of concern or compassion for others (25%).

***Lack of Self-Confidence***

Another very interesting area to investigate is the level, or lack thereof, of confidence in those who begin planning acts of school violence. The following chart examines this concept in regard to confidence issues with fellow students, family members, friends, and romantic interests. Issues in school performance are also explored.

Chart 8.3. Lack of Self Confidence

Chart 8.3 reveals and confirms the areas where most school violence perpetrators probably fall in regards to lack of self-confidence. *Overall* the survey respondents projected that lack of confidence with fellow students (54%) and in school performance (53%) would be the major factors. For the *Traditional* school violence perpetrators they project that all areas of one’s life will be areas where they will experience lack of self-confidence.

***Unsure of Role***

A major cause of one lacking self-confidence is that they may be unsure of their role in a given situation with others. The following is an examination of what impact being unsure with family, friends, and peers might have.

Chart 8.4. Unsure of Role

As would be expected with most juveniles, school violence perpetrators are probably very unsure of their role in most aspects of their lives. *Overall* those surveyed projected that being unsure of one’s role in peer group (48%), with friends (43%), and in one’s family (37%) will probably have a major impact upon one’s eventual violent behavior. *Traditional* school violence perpetrators follow this trend with significant percentage projections in all three areas (30%, 25%, and 20%).

***Perceived as a Leader***

A strong impact on the positive view of one’s self can be if they are viewed as a leader by people in their lives. The reverse is true as well; lack of being seen as a leader can have a very negative impact on one’s self-image.

Chart 8.5. Perceived as a Leader

Very interesting trends begin to evolve when examining the projected views of the various types of school violence perpetrators in regard to how they believe they are seen by others (see chart 8.5). *Overall* relatively low percentages of each type of offender projected that the offender was probably seen as a leader by friends (34%), teachers (23%), and fellow students (18%). The differences become apparent immediately when examining *Traditional* school violence perpetrators. This group was only a third of each category: 11% friends, 9% teachers, and 6% with fellow students.

***Perceived Importance and Role Model***

Along the same lines as being seen as a leader by others, being perceived as being important to at least one other person is extremely important to the development of an individual. Feeling as if one is a role model to another is also a strong contributor to one’s ego and positive view of self.

Chart 8.6. Perceived Importance and Role Model

*Overall* the percentage of those school violence perpetrators who projected feelings of being important (44%) or a role model (28%) to at least one other individual are rather low (see chart 8.6). A closer examination of the findings reveals other areas of concern when it comes to the various types of offenders projected views of self. The lowest in this group are the *Traditional* school violence perpetrators. Only 13% projected feelings of being important and only 8% projected feelings of being a role model. This speaks a great deal to the self-perception of this type of offender.

**Feelings and Emotions**

Attempting to examine the feelings and emotions of school violence perpetrators before they become an actual offender is very difficult. Often the research that occurs in this area is based on interviews with friends and families of an offender or the reviewing of court papers and psychological reports. What follows are the projected feelings and emotions of convicted school violence perpetrators in the areas of being threatened, being ignored, being ridiculed, and not being valued by others.

There are also parts which address projected feelings of issues of suffering and views of parents.

***Feelings of Being Threatened***

Chart 8.7 offers an overview of the projected feelings of the four types of school violence perpetrators in this study in regards to possible areas where perceived threats can occur. The traditional areas of attacks upon one’s physical being, reputation, and masculinity/sexuality are examined.

Chart 8.7. Feelings of Being Threatened

*Overall*, the majority of all types of offenders (61%) projected that the fictitious school violence offender would have fears for their physical safety. The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators projected feelings of being threatened in all areas, but their highest (25%) was in the area of physical safety and a very close second and third were masculinity (22%) and reputation (20%).

***Feelings of Being Ignored***

Most do not like the feeling that they are being ignored by others. This is extremely true when it comes to children. Being totally ignored by people who the child sees as important can result in drastic acting out and/or negative behavior to draw at least some type of attention from another source. Chart 8.8 examines the projected feelings of the surveyed offenders in regards to feeling ignored by others.

*Overall*, disturbing percentages are projected by all types of school violence perpetrators when it comes to feelings of being ignored (see chart 8.8). Fifty percent projected feelings of being ignored by family and a very close seconds in regards to being ignored by friends (42%) and teachers (42%). *Traditional* school violence perpetrators follow this trend and make up the greatest percentage of these finds in their projections of 25% to 22% across the board in these three areas.

Chart 8.8. Feelings of Being Ignored

***Needs Ignored***

One of the ways that feelings of hopelessness begin is very often when one feels that their needs are being ignored. Chart 8.9 gives an overview of projected feelings of whether the fictitious individual felt that their needs were being ignored by teachers, family, and friends.

As with feeling of being ignored as an individual, having one’s perceived needs ignored will have a significant impact on the attitude and self-perception of an individual. *Overall*, 44% of the school violence perpetrators projected feelings that one’s needs being ignored by teachers would have a significant impact, with needs being ignored by parents a very close second at 42%. *Traditional* school violence perpetrators’ projections were almost half of these projections with feelings of being ignored by teachers at 23% and being ignored by family a close second at 20%.

Chart 8.9. Needs Ignored

***Feelings of Being Ridiculed***

It could be argued that an individual might prefer to be ignored than to be constantly ridiculed for things that may very well be totally out of their control. The areas could be one’s physical appearance, family status, or intelligence level. In regards to the issues of intelligence level, this could be being perceived as being very ignorant or very smart. Chart 8.10 explores the school violence perpetrators’ projected views in this regard.

*Overall*, it is obvious that being ridiculed is a significant factor. Physical appearance was the leading projected reason for ridicule at 42%. Family status at 25% and intelligence level at 22% were distant seconds. The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators projected that physical appearance (30%) was the main factor and intelligence level (13%) was the second.

Chart 8.10. Feelings of Being Ridiculed

***Feelings of Not Being Valued***

In addition to feeling one’s needs are being ignored, feeling that one is not valued by anyone in one’s life will have a significant negative impact upon their perception of self. Feelings of not being valued as projected by the four types of school violence perpetrators in this study are examined in chart 8.11.

Chart 8.11. Feelings of Not Being Valued

*Overall*, not feeling valued by family, teachers, and friends was a significant area of projection by all four types of school violence perpetrators (44% and 30%). Once again, the *Traditional* school violence perpetrators led the percentages in these projections with 24% projecting these feelings upon teachers and a close 21% toward family.

**Issues in Suffering**

Individuals suffer in many ways. The vast majority suffer in silence and attempt to self-medicate or cope in various ways (i.e., alcohol, drugs, sex). Those who ultimately commit a violent act are no different, but for some reason or trigger, they resort to violence as a form of answer or response. Below is an examination of the projected thoughts in regard to areas in which the fictitious offender may have been suffering prior to the decision to begin planning a school violence incident.

Chart 8.12. Issues in Suffering

*Overall*, the majority of the surveyed school violence perpetrators projected feelings of depression (69%) and feelings of being alone (61%) as the main factors in suffering. The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators shared this trend and had the highest percentages in all areas of suffering, except for sharing equal projections of hearing voices (8%) with others types of offenders.

***Isolation***

Feelings of being isolated will have a significant impact on an individual as will all other negative feelings. The following is an examination of the projected feelings of the four types of school violence perpetrators as they pertain to feelings of being isolated from family and friends.

Chart 8.13. Isolation

Over half of the respondents projected feelings of being isolated from family, at 53%. A slightly lesser percentage projected feeling of being isolated from friends as well, at 36%. Once again, the *Traditional* school violence perpetrators’ projections in these area were the highest percentages, with 30% for isolation from family and 24% isolation from friends.

***Disrespect***

No one appreciates being disrespected by others. Adults can often remove themselves from situations where they are habitually disrespected by others.

This is very often not the case for juveniles. They cannot simply leave their schools and family to find more agreeable circumstances. They are forced to remain and endure whatever abuse they are receiving, whether real or perceived. Projected feelings of disrespect are explored below as it pertains to treatment by family, friends, fellow students, and other teachers.

Chart 8.14. Disrespect

*Overall*, all types of school violence perpetrators projected feelings of being disrespected by others in their lives. Disrespect by fellow students was the highest at 55% followed closely by disrespect from teachers at 42%. *Traditional* school violence perpetrators’ projections drove these high percentages in all four areas. Their percentages were almost evenly distributed between feelings of disrespect from fellow students (29%), teachers (25%), and their own families (24%).

***Feeling Labeled***

Many forms of disrespect come in the form of labeling others with negative attributes. Below is a brief overview of projected feelings about being labeled as being different, a troublemaker, or an outsider in general.

Chart 8.15. Feeling Labeled

It is obvious that being labeled is a significant issue in the mind of school violence perpetrators. *Overall*, 61% projected that being labeled as a geek or weirdo would be an issue and approximately half (53% and 50%) projected that being labeled as a troublemaker and outsider would be significant as well in the mind of the fictitious offender. As has become a trend, the *Traditional* school violence perpetrators led the projections with an almost even distribution across the three types of labels examined (35% to 25%).

***Feelings about Parents***

The commonly accepted belief that the views of one’s parents will have a major impact on an individual's behavior is confirmed repeatedly in this study. Negative views of a person’s parents can have an extremely negative impact on their future behavior. The following is an overview of the projected feelings of the surveyed school violence perpetrators as they pertain to the view of the fictitious offender about their parents.

Chart 8.16. Feelings about Parents

Over half (58%) of the *overall* projected feelings of those surveyed dealt with feeling unsupported by parents. All areas of parental neglect received very significant projected percentages (44% to 39%). The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators projected the highest feelings in this topic at an almost even distribution (30% to 28%) of feeling unsupported, neglected, dominated, and not well supervised by parents.

**Abuse Received**

Obviously, abuse of individuals comes in many forms. The following section examines the projected feelings of incarcerated school violence perpetrators when it comes to the abuse received by the fictitious offender. Bullying, being punished unfairly, and all types of other abuse (physical, sexual, and emotional) are examined.

***Bullying***

The impact of bullying has become one of the largest concerns in K–12 American education and rightfully so. The following offers an interesting overview of the projected impact that the school violence perpetrators had in regard to the impact of bullying.

*Overall*, only 28% projected the experience of being bullied. While this is a significant percentage, it would be expected to be much higher. Only 6% projected being a bully themselves. *Traditional* school violence perpetrators do provide a significant percentage in their projections about being bullied at 17%. Interestingly, a small percentage (6%) projected being a bully themselves.

Chart 8.17. Bullying

***Punished Unfairly***

In the area of mistreatment by others, no one likes to be punished unfairly, even if the unfairness is only in their own perception and not actually accurate. Chart 8.18 examines the projected feelings of the school violence perpetrators in regards to three areas where perceived unfair punishment may be derived: parents, teachers, and the denial of a deserved reward in general.

*Overall*, significant percentages were projected in the areas of being punished unfairly by others. Parents were projected to be responsible for this at 39% and teachers equally at 39%. The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators projected the highest percentages in being punished unfairly by teachers at 16% and parents second at 14%.

Chart 8.18. Punished Unfairly

***Physical Abuse***

Any type of abuse is extremely harmful, but physical abuse is probably one of the worst impacts when it comes to juveniles. It often leads to marks and bruises they have to hide from others and, if discovered, can lead to them being removed from their homes and lives and placed in foster care. Below is an overview of projected feelings in regard to physical abuse.

Chart 8.19. Physical Abuse

As with bullying, it would be expected that *overall* the percentages projected in chart 8.19 would be much higher. The physical abuse percent of 33% is very significant and a relatively close second (20%) of physical abuse by a stranger. The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators projected feelings almost equally between physical abuse received from a family member (13%) and strangers (9%).

***Sexual Abuse***

Sexual abuse of an individual is something that can affect them for the rest of their lives with extremely negative reoccurring aspects. When this is committed by someone who is close to the child it can have the greatest negative impact. Below is an exploration of the projected feelings of the surveyed offenders in the area of sexual abuse.

Chart 8.20. Sexual Abuse

*Overall*, significant projections are found in the area of sexual abuse. Its distribution is almost even across the types of molester such as family member (15%), stranger (14%), and family friend (9%) (see chart 8.20). The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators projections were almost evenly distributed between these three types as well as 6%, 5%, and 6%.

***Emotional Abuse***

The long-lasting effects of emotional abuse remain a major factor in the lives of many. Below is an overview of the surveyed offenders’ projected views on the impact of emotional abuse from others on a school violence perpetrator.

Chart 8.21. Emotional Abuse

*Overall*, almost half (42%) of those surveyed projected feelings in the area of emotional abuse by a family member and a close second (39%) of it occurring by a stranger (see chart 8.21). Interestingly, the *Traditional* school violence perpetrators projected the most in the area of emotional abuse by a stranger.

**Influences**

There is a great deal of research in the literature over the impact of various influences in a person’s life which may lead to them to an eventual violent act. This is definitely true when it comes to juvenile delinquency and violence research. The following examines the projected feelings of those surveyed in regards to the influences of media, alcohol and other drugs, and the availability of weapons.

***Influenced by Media***

One of the major areas of research in juvenile delinquency and violence is the influence that the various forms of violent media can have on the thought process and eventual actions of an individual. Below is a brief overview of the projected feelings in this area by those surveyed.

Chart 8.22. Influences

*Overall*, 50% of those surveyed projected that violent media would have an impact on the thoughts and actions of the fictitious offender (see chart 8.22). Half of this percentage (50%) was projected by the *Traditional* school violence perpetrators.

***Under the Influence of Alcohol or Other Drugs***

An ongoing problem in American K–12 schools is the number of students abusing alcohol and other drugs. Given the amount of prescription medicine being prescribed to these children, there is a growing problem of them abusing each other’s medicine as well. The following is an overview of the projected thoughts of those surveyed in this area.

Chart 8.23. Under the Influence of Alcohol and/or other Drugs

*Overall*, 54% projected marijuana would be a factor with alcohol a second at 31% (see chart 8.23). It might be expected that these percentages would be higher, but it should be pointed out that significant percentages are projected in all areas of substance abuse, from hard drugs (29%) (i.e., cocaine, methamphetamine, and heroin) to using others’ prescriptions (17%). *Traditional* school violence perpetrators were not the highest in any area except for the abuse of one’s own prescriptions (11%).

**Comfortable with Weapons**

One’s comfortableness with and availability of weapons, especially firearms, in their life and the impact it may have had on their eventual violent act is addressed in many sections of the work. Chart 8.24 is an exploration of the various types of school violence perpetrators’ projections in the areas of being able to obtain weapons and being comfortable in their use once obtained.

As would be expected given American culture, the vast majority (72%) projected that weapons would be easily obtained and the fictitious offender would more than likely (50%) be comfortable with their use. The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators echoed this trend with 41% and 35%.

Chart 8.24. Availability and Comfortable with a Weapon

**Current Situation**

This section attempts to explore the current situations that school violence perpetrators may have found themselves in given the time prior to their moving into plans to commit an act of violence. The focus is on issues such as dealing with loss of someone important, conflict with others, gang involvement, and *overall* anger and unhappiness issues in a person’s life.

***Dealing with Loss***

The loss of a loved one can be devastating to anyone, especially to young people. At this age, a broken romantic relationship can be just as devastating as the actual death of someone important; the following chart examines the projected impact of loss of someone special in an offender’s life prior to the first steps they take in the planning of a violent event.

Chart 8.25. Dealing with Loss

*Overall*, it appears that the loss of a special relationship (42%) may have more of an impact than the loss of a family member for some types of perpetrators (see chart 8.25). *Traditional* school violence perpetrators projected that loss of a special relationship (19%) would have the largest impact on a person than loss of a family member (8%).

***Fighting***

Conflict with others is a very common catalyst for one escalating into acts of violence. This section sought to examine the impact of conflict in regards to “fighting with” others in a perpetrator’s life prior to the decision to commit an act of violence.

Chart 8.26 examines the projected feelings about the impact of fighting and conflict with others prior to one committing a more serious act of violence, in this case, school violence. *Overall*, 58% projected that fighting with a fellow student or students was the primary issue (see chart 8.26). This was followed closely by conflict at home (44%). Almost all types of perpetrators in this study reported that some type of conflict would be present.

Chart 8.26. Fighting

*Traditional* school violence perpetrators reported conflict in all areas, but slightly more at home (27%). A very close secondary conflict area was conflict with other students (24%). Conflict with others across the board was also reported by

***Seeking Revenge***

Most assume that any type of school violence is chosen in order to obtain revenge against someone, even if it is just society as a whole. This study confirms this assumption for certain types of offender in certain regards.

Chart 8.27. Revenge

*Overall*, a little over half (58%) of the offenders in this study identified that revenge may have been sought over the harm received by a fellow student (see chart 8.27). This trend followed the other perpetrators, but some to much lower levels. Almost half (41%) of the *Traditional* school violence perpetrators identified harm received by a fellow student as a cause of revenge, but also had the harm to and from close friends as a secondary cause (11% and 19%).

***Seeking Personal Respect***

While everyone wishes to be respected by others and society, this is a major factor in the lives of young people. Given their position in the world as having a great deal of responsibility but little authority, a great deal of pressure upon one’s self-image is found. When the school environment is added these pressures and impact increase greatly. The following chart examines the projected views of these offenders as to what type, if any, of respect was an issue in the pre-violence stage.

Chart 8.28. Seeking Personal Respect

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*Overall*, and not surprisingly, the respect of fellow students was identified by almost half (40%) of those surveyed (see chart 8.28). The areas of friend respect, family respect, and teacher respect gradually decrease (40% to 23%), but are still significant. A significant percent of *Traditional* school violence perpetrators follow this trend, but their focus is dearly on the issue of respect of other students (23%).

***Gang Involvement***

Given the amount of gang violence in American K–12 schools, and society as a whole, the topic of gang involvement and influence was one of the focuses in this study. In various sections of this work, this topic is examined in various ways. Chart 8.29 attempts to examine the projected views of the gang life in the minds of these offenders prior to their decision to commit an act of school violence.

*Overall*, it was discovered that the gang life had a significant impact given its ranges of 26% to 14% in the areas of gang member getting revenge for another gang member (see chart 8.29). But, these percentages are driven by the number of *Gang-Related* offenders in this study. The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators, as expected, have a much lower percentage in the gang life area. Their percentages range only from 6% to 3%.

Chart 8.29. Gang Involvement and Influence

***Happiness Issues***

The section of this part of the study attempted to gain insight to the unhappiness and anger issues that may be in the heart and minds of the school violence perpetrators. Given the types and amounts of violence, this would be expected.

*Overall*, there is obvious evidence that the surveyed offenders are projecting feelings of unhappiness and anger into, essentially, every part of their lives. The largest percentage (66%) involved feelings about society in general, but very close seconds are found in one’s home life (58%) and with other students (55%). *Traditional* school violence perpetrators follow this trend with percentages ranging from 40% to 26% in regards to views of society and their personal relationships.

Chart 8.30. Happiness and Anger Issues

**SUMMARY**

In summary, the significant views projected by the surveyed offenders seemed to focus on their having major issues with conflict and authority. These issues were probably exacerbated by being easily frustrated and impulsive in their behavior. In addition, the vast majority projects no concern or compassion for others and, at best, they were overly bored.

The lack of confidence is a major factor for school violence perpetrators. This is greatly exacerbated when the lack of confidence is in all areas of a person’s life. All offender types projected that lack of self-confidence is probably going to impact one and help them in their move toward a violent act. In addition, all type of school violence perpetrators probably have issues of being very unsure of their role in all aspects of their lives.

Interestingly, *Gang-Related* perpetrators projected being seen as a leader by others at twice the percentage of any other type of offender. Not feeling as if one is a leader or role model seems to be an issue in school violence perpetrators. The only group which projected any significant positive feelings in this regard were the *Gang-Related* individuals. This brings the question as to whether the gang lifestyle actually increase one’s self-confidence and idea of self worth, albeit in a negative manner.

It is not surprising that all types of school violence perpetrators would project feelings of being threatened in almost all areas of their lives. Obviously physical safety is a concern, but having one’s reputation and masculinity/sexuality questioned are also very significant factors.

Feelings of being ignored were a significant percentage in the projections of all types of school violence perpetrators. It is obvious that feelings of being ignored by others and especially significant others will have a negative impact upon an individual. Once again, feelings of having one’s needs ignored can have a negative impact on the behavior of an individual. The projections by the perpetrators in this study confirm that feeling that one’s needs are ignored by teachers and family is the most negative feelings that can occur.

Obviously constant ridicule by others will have a significant negative impact on an individual. This is even more severe when the ridicule is over something that an individual cannot change such as their physical appearance, family status, or their intelligence level.

While very obvious, it is definitely confirmed in this study that the combination of feeling not valued at home or school will be a major catalyst for potential future violence. This also confirms the massive impact that teachers have upon the perceptions that their students have of themselves.

The projections of *Traditional* school violence perpetrators in regards to suffering in all areas of their mental health speaks volumes about why they might result to violence. All types of offenders projected significant percentages of feelings in all of these areas as well. Feelings of isolation combined with other feelings of being ignored will obviously be a contributing factor to the potential level of violence in an individual. Being ignored is bad enough, but combined with isolation, the groundwork for future negative behavior is probably set. Once active disrespect is added to this it is not surprising that violence would soon ensue.

A major form of disrespect for another is to give them some type of negative label. Again, adults can often avoid those who would negatively label and insult them, but juveniles very often cannot and must endure the treatment. It cannot be overstated the impact that parents have upon their children. Often this treatment will dictate how the child perceives their parent. This perception can deter the desire for negative behavior or it can facilitate it in many ways.

Bullying is a major factor in school violence, but it must be remembered that it comes into a child’s life in many different ways. People can be bullied by anyone at any time and even by life itself. Being punished unfairly is going to have a significant impact on the views juveniles have of those in authority positions. When giving punishment to an individual, it is important to give them an explanation, whether they agree with it or not.

While types of abuse are harmful to individuals, physical abuse often produces bruises and broken bones which must be hidden and are constant reminders of the physical abuse received from another. Significant impacts on the perceptions individuals have about others on the world are impacted by this type of abuse. Sexual abuse of a person is a tragic event and one which will stay with that person for the rest of their lives. This is also a subject which many victims do not wish to discuss or admit; therefore the percentages of its occurrence in the lives of children is probably much higher and more devastating than known.

As with all forms of abuse, emotional abuse is going to have a long-lasting negative impact on individuals. It is interesting to note the number of school violence perpetrators who projected that this emotional abuse is received from strangers. It would be expected from family and family friends, but by total strangers is another area which may warrant more research.

While not a major focus of this research, the impact of violent media upon individuals should continue to be researched, but in rational terms. Abuse of any type of legal or illegal drug is obviously going to have the potential to negatively impact one’s life and their eventual behavior. There is a growing problem with children abusing the prescription drugs of their parents, themselves, and their friends.

The debate on gun control and the availability of weapons will continue. Given the information presented in this work, there is no doubt that the availability of weapons is a significant factor in school violence incidents. It is true that an individual wishing to commit an act of violence will use their hands if there are no other weapons available, but the ease of finding a weapon in one’s own home must contribute greatly.

The impact of the loss of a family member or a romantic interest was projected as being a possible factor for offenders by all except *Non-Associated* offenders. Also, conflict with others obviously was projected as an issue in the time period before a person decided to commit a violent act. The *Traditional* areas of conflict with other students and one’s home life were the highest percentages, but conflict with teachers, friends, and romantic interests were significant as well.

In regards to revenge, almost all perpetrators (except *Non-Associated*) projected that revenge could be a factor in the time period before an individual decides to commit an act of violence. It is not surprising that when revenge was a factor, it was in the areas of harm received by a fellow student or harm experienced by a friend.

In regards to the concept of desired respect, a few interesting trends reveal themselves. *Traditional* school violence perpetrators seem the most concerned with respect from all in their lives; *Gang-Related* ones are a close second. The associated and *Non-Associated* seem much less concerned if concerned at all.

Almost all of those offenders identified as primarily involved in the gang lifestyle projected that all aspects of this involvement would affect the life of the fictional person prior to their deciding to commit a violence act. This ranged from actually being a gang member to seeking the attention and respect of another gang member.

It is obvious that all types of school violence perpetrators have a great deal of anger in their lives which leads to a great deal of unhappiness. This anger and unhappiness is with essentially every aspect of one’s life (e.g., society, home life, students, teachers, and personal relationships).

**9**

**Traditional School Violence Perpetrator: Planning the Violence**

**IN THEIR OWN WORDS**

**In Response to the Sandy Hook Elementary School Shooting on December 14, 2012**

*Him [i.e., Adam Lanza] victimizing his mother, who for all outward appearances was a good mother, coupled with the facts that he was socially withdrawn and he victimized children specifically, leads me to suspect that he had issues identifying and understanding true emotions. For some reason I believe that even before the suicide he had given up hope. Hope of being a father, friend, son, and being in a romantic relationship. I imagine him as being a person who could witness joy, love and pleasure, but couldn’t connect to, or experience them himself so he thought these things were fabricated, and ultimately offensive to him.*

—BM/16/2005 (shot and killed another student outside their school as classes recessed for the afternoon)

**Personal Comments to Author about School Violence**

*My parents divorced when I was only four years old. I’ve always felt ignored because I was the youngest and couldn’t understand. This lead to a lot of frustration, especially thinking I was left out of things because of my age. Around the age of five or six I was sexually molested several times. I didn’t tell anyone because I didn’t know it was wrong, and it was someone I’m related to so I trusted him. My life went on as normal until I was thirteen and realized what had really happened to me. I stopped playing sports, my grades began to drop, and I started drinking and smoking marijuana. I just wanted the memories to go away and to numb the pain. I attempted suicide and also cut my wrists. I was on meds for depression, then anxiety (Xanax), then sleeping pills. The following school year started so-so for me, and quickly went under. In February ’04, there was a moment when something happened and I felt people didn’t trust me. I was worried I would always be seen as a nut case and my life would never amount to anything anyway. I thought if I couldn’t be like everyone else, I’ll make them miserable like me. I had no solid plans, and once I showed up, the fantasy turned to reality. I tried to stop myself, wanted to leave before it started, but was scared of getting caught and I told myself nothing would change anyway. My life would go on miserably because I wouldn’t do anything to get the help I knew I needed.*

—WM/16/2004 (fired three rounds with a 12-gauge shotgun in a classroom and held class hostage for 4 hours)

*When I got the letter and read it I couldn’t believe what I just read. I was like a zombie it was me but I wasn’t in my body. It took me about an hour to realize that the love of my life just broke my heart into a million parts, that’s when I started to cry. I took the gun to school with me the next day. The night before I couldn’t sleep the only thing I could think about was XXXX and how my life didn’t matter anymore. When I got off the bus that morning I seen XXXX walking towards me, but I couldn’t bring myself to do what I wanted to do which was shoot myself in front of her. I was headed to kill myself when I seen the security guard coming my way. So I took out the gun and lighted a smoke and headed for the band room which I thought was empty at that time. I would have never brought the gun to school. I would have talked to an adult about my problems.*

—WM/17/2007 (brought a gun to school and held a class hostage for four hours)

**INTRODUCTION**

Extensive empirical research exists offering myriad explanations as to why an individual transitions from thoughts about a criminal or violent act to planning the act. It is true that many who plan harm never continue with their plans and, for whatever reason, acts do not occur. The incidents involved in this examination did occur, were crimes of violence, and their results are known. Therefore, some evidence is offered and some considerations can be made and findings discussed.

This chapter attempts to examine the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of school violence perpetrators during the planning stage. The focus is upon *Traditiona*l school violence perpetrators. Thus, it is an examination of the point in time where they have decided to commit their act of violence and move toward that end. The topics of concerns and worry during the planning phase are explored. The results are examined as they pertain to the four types of school violence perpetrators discussed in this work.

As stated in the introduction, a secondary part of the *overall* research project focused on the results of a 200-question scenario-based survey, entitled “School Violence Prevention Questionnaire.” Using a projective technique, respondents were asked to put themselves in the shoes of John/ Jane, a person similar to themselves at the time they committed their acts of violence and to answer questions about John’s/Jane’s thoughts, feelings, and experiences at four different time periods. The following are the results of findings as they pertain to the second time period, the planning phase.

**THOUGHTS, FEELINGS, AND EXPERIENCES DURING PLANNING PHASE**

Little research exists where the feelings and emotions of an offender are considered after they have made their decision to commit a criminal act and just before its occurrence. This is especially true in school violence and juvenile justice research. The following is an overview of the projected concerns that the different types of school violence perpetrators may have as a violent act was decided upon and planned.

**Concerns during Planning Stage**

Interesting trends become immediately apparent when examining who the offender may or may not have had concern about during their planning phase. Chart 9.1 is an examination of the projected concerns that the various types of offenders may have during the planning phase of a violent act. The confidence level and fears that may be present are the focus.

Chart 9.1. Concerned about during Planning Stage

*Overall* the majority (36%) of respondents projected that the largest concern of the offender would be concern for loved ones, with concern over self being a close secondary concern (28%). The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators projected a much lower level of concern in these areas, which might be expected. While there was no concern projected for the community and little for the school, there was significant concern (19% to 11%) for their loved ones and friends.

**Thoughts about Plans**

A potentially frightening phenomenon was discovered in examining the projections of the various types of offenders about the potential thoughts one might have during the planning phase of a violent act. While second thoughts and fears would be the hoped-for feeling, that is not the case for many school violence perpetrators.

Chart 9.2. Thoughts about Plans

The above chart examines the projected thoughts about their acts that a school violence perpetrator might have when planning their violence. *Overall*, 66% of the offenders projected that *getting revenge* would be the biggest thought while believing it *must be done* a close second at 64%. Almost half (46%) projected that the offender would be *totally certain* of their planned act. This may speak to the belief that once an individual gets to the point of actually planning a violent event that there is not much that can be done to change their minds unless they are caught at this stage.

*Traditional* school violence perpetrators were the most significant group which supported these findings with the projections matching at 37% and 34%. To a slightly lesser extent, the projections of *Gang-Related* school violence perpetrators matched this finding.

**Second Thoughts about Plans**

While it is impossible to know, it is hoped that the vast majority of potential offenders have second thoughts about their plans to commit an act of violence. It is greatly hoped that this is the case when it comes to those who wish to commit violence upon or around schoolchildren. Chart 9.3 is an examination of those surveyed projections about what, if any, second thoughts offenders may have during the planning phase of their eventual school violence act.

Chart 9.3 gives an overview of the projected second thoughts a school violence offender may have as they begin to plan their act of violence.

Chart 9.3. Second Thoughts about Plans

*Overall* it was projected that the majority (69%) would be extremely nervous and feel afraid (60%). Unfortunately, at the same time, approximately half (49%) projected that the offender would be very excited about the act as well. A much lesser percent were projected to be unsure of act (39%) and having fear for themselves (28%). Only 22% projected that the offender would be reconsidering their planned act.

The projections for the *Traditional* school violence perpetrators follow this trend with feeling nervous and afraid tied at 34%, but only 2% reconsidering their planned act.

**SUMMARY**

The findings in this chapter would suggest heavily that once an individual transitions from the thoughts of committing a crime or violent act to serious planning, the situation has gone too far. If the projected thoughts of those surveyed are accurate, it would appear that most who get to this point, while being nervous and afraid, are certain of their pending act and plan to carry it out. Even though this decision is made, there are some interesting trends as to concerns and second thoughts by pending offenders.

*Gang-Related* offenders projected more concern for others and their community than any other type of offender. In turn, the *Non-Associated* type of offenders projected the least, if any.

A trend is immediately apparent when examining the thoughts of school violence perpetrators at the planning stage. For the vast majority, when they get to the point where they have decided to commit an act of school violence, their only concerns are getting revenge and whether their plans are good enough. Once a person gets to this level it may be almost impossible to stop and act unless it is discovered and an action is taken immediately against that offender.

A frightening trend begins to also unfold when examining the projected thoughts of school violence offenders. This trend begins when examining projected thoughts during the planning phase for a violent act. It appears that once a decision is made to commit a violent act and actual planning begins, there is very little that can be done to stop its occurrence. Very few types of offender surveys projected that once plans for a violent act began that there would be any second thoughts.

**10**

**Traditional School Violence Perpetrator: During the Violence**

**IN THEIR OWN WORDS**

**Personal Comments to Author about School Violence**

*I wanted to HUMILIATE them and make them APOLOGIZE for threatening to harm my FAMILY, KILL ME and for all the RACIAL SLURS that they’d made towards me. They were waiting on me at my “Bus stop,” after following BEHIND the bus and driving BESIDE it, yelling out THREATS of bodily HARM, calling me niggar, porch monkey, etc. (ALL of which the Bus Driver Ms. XXX WITNESSED, but never said ANYTHING ABOUT!). I always KNEW I was going to JAIL AFTERWARDS. I just never thought it would be for MURDER . . . (ASSAULT or even BATTERY perhaps, but it never OCCURRED to me that something would go WRONG and I’d end up taking a LIFE! This 20 year old young MAN, had threatened to KILL me, RAPE my MOTHER and SEXUALLY ASSAULT in HIS words, “stick his PENIS” in the MOUTHS of my kid brother and sister (who were 8 6·9 year of age at the time.) I was DEVASTATED, ANGRY, and AFRAID for my LIFE BEFORE. But, NOW, although I was blessed to be ALIVE, I felt only ALONE and left to WONDER where and how it all (my life) went WRONG!*

—BM/14/1996 (shot another student 6 times with a .22 caliber pistol on a school bus after a verbal feud)

*On my Behalf—I don’t think I had time to think—it was more like a Blackout and I think I just snapped out. However I think it was about 11 of us that snapped out me, the victim, his friends and two of my friend. It was Originally an Brawl! It’s a lot of “O” in this Section for me Because it wasn’t Plan B/C I was Used to Carrying Guns to school and in my hood.*

—BM/16/1996 (shot another student during a fight with a group of students)

*I point this out for accuracy’s sake, not to minimize. I endangered the life of every person in the school by firing a weapon in the first place. I still struggle with many issues of depression and guilt. But if you get to know my story better you’ll realize I’ve been to the darkest spot possible (I hope) and survived it. As long as I can find meaning and hope I will endure and achieve.*

—WM/14/1986 (failing a class, tried to kill the teacher, but shot and killed her substitute and injured a vice principal and two other students)

**INTRODUCTION**

Very unique findings are discovered when the thoughts, feelings, and experiences are examined of offenders during the violent act. This chapter attempts to examine these for *Traditional* school violence perpetrators while they committed their acts of violence. The results are examined as they pertain to the four types of school violence perpetrators discussed in this work.

As stated in the introduction, a secondary part of the overall research project focused on the results of a 200-question scenario-based survey, entitled “School Violence Prevention Questionnaire.” Using a projective technique, respondents were asked to put themselves in the shoes of John/ Jane, a person similar to themselves at the time they committed their acts of violence and to answer questions about John’s/Jane’s thoughts, feelings, and experiences at four different time periods. The following are the results of findings of the third period, during the violence.

**THOUGHTS, FEELINGS, AND EXPERIENCES AS ACT IS BEING COMMITTED**

The projected thoughts, feelings, and experiences of school violence perpetrators are interesting in terms of their thoughts about death, views of their actions, whether they felt in control, and their worries at the point of violence.

**Thoughts about Death**

Given their acts of violence, expecting these types of offenders to have unique thoughts about death at the time of their act is probably a safe assumption. Chart 10.1 compares the four types of school violence perpetrators and what thoughts, if any, they may have had about death at the time of their criminal act.

*Overall*, almost half (47%) of the school violence perpetrators surveyed projected feelings of wanting to die during the act upon the fictitious offender. In addition, 59% projected thoughts of suicide or forcing another to kill them during the commission of the act.

Chart 10.1. Thoughts about Death

*Traditional* school violence perpetrators projected fearing death at 12%, but sought death at 69%. This group had the highest projected percentage of hoping to be killed (13%) as they were committing their school violence act.

**Negative Feelings**

Those surveyed were asked to project their mindset about the negative feelings that a school violence perpetrator may be having during the commission of their act of violence. The following is an overview of those findings. The negative views were defined as those dealing with the offender feeling powerful, wanting to cause great fear and panic, and hoping to finish their act before caught.

***Negative Feelings about Act***

First, the projected negative feelings about the school violence act itself are examined. The findings are divided by the type of offender.

*Overall*, more than half projected the feeling of being powerful (55%) during the act. A close second was the intent to cause fear and panic (40%) in others. Significant percentages were discovered in the projected feelings of hoping to finish the act (25%) and striking back (25%) at others. *Traditional* school violence perpetrators followed this in their projections. Interestingly, they were the highest in the areas of hoping to finish the act (17%), feelings others will be safer after their act (17%), and that the offender would feel as if they were striking back (11%).

Chart 10.2. Negative Feelings about Act

***Negative Feelings about Self***

Next, the projected negative feelings about the offenders themselves are examined. These focus on the views of how the offender may be viewed after the violent act is completed.

Chart 10.3 reveals some insightful, yet frightening, aspects into why school violence offenders commit their acts of violence. *Overall*, projected feelings of the offender considering whether their plans were good enough and how they would positively be viewed after their act of violence was completed was evenly distributed across the board at 17%. This is a very significant percentage of all types of school violence.

Chart 10.3. Negative Feelings about Self

The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators had the highest projected percentage at 11% for thinking that they will be famous after their act.

**Not in Control**

Another interesting area to examine in regard to the commission of a violent act is whether the offender felt “in control” or not. The following two sections examine the major and lesser issues relating to feelings of whether an offender felt in control or not.

***Major Feelings of Having No Control***

Many of the types of offenders state that they had many times where they felt like they were not in control of their actions and that they felt out of control.

*Overall*, the most common feeling projected on the fictitious offender was that the experience was unreal (58%) or that the offender was not even thinking at all (51%). *Traditional* school violence perpetrators followed this trend, but also projected that the offender would be feeling massive panic (22%) and would not feel as they were in control (21%).

Chart 10.4. Major feelings of Not in Control

***Lesser Feelings of Having No Control***

The following chart examines the slightly lesser projected feeling of having little or no control during a violent event.

Chart 10.5. Lesser Feelings of Not in Control

A significant percentage of offenders projected that in the mind of the fictitious offender, the violent event was being committed by someone else (31%) or not really occurring at all (26%). The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators projected the most that the offender would have a feeling that someone else was committing the act (14%).

**Concerns/Worries**

The next section of this chapter examines the concerns and worries that the school violence perpetrators may have during the commission of their violent act. These concerns are broken down into major worries and minor worries.

***Major Worries***

Interestingly, the major worries identified in this part of the study focused on concerns the various types of school violence perpetrators projected on the fictitious offender in regards to that person’s worry about friends and family.

Chart 10.6. Major Worries

*Overall*, 36% of all types of perpetrators projected that the offender would be most concerned and worried about their loved ones (36%), then themselves second (28%) (see chart 10.6). The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators projected these same feelings of concern for loved ones (11%) and themselves (11%).

***Minor Worries***

The final part of this chapter examines the minor worries that the school violence perpetrators projected upon the fictitious offender. An extremely interesting trend becomes immediately apparent in examining the responses of the four types of perpetrators surveyed in this study.

Chart 10.7. Minor Worries

The minor worries projected by all types of school violence perpetrators revolved around feelings for others, the school, and the community in general. *Overall*, only 9% projected worries over the school, 8% about the impact on others, and the lowest (6%) for their community (see chart 10.7). The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators projected only 6% for concerns about school and only 2% for others. They projected no worry about their communities.

**SUMMARY**

This chapter dealing with the thoughts and feelings of school violence perpetrators during the commission of their act of violence reveals several interesting trends. When examining the offenders projected thoughts about death during the commission of a crime it is apparent that a significant percentage of each group wished to die during the commission of the act. Fear of death was present most often in *Gang-Related* offenders and did not exist in *Non-Associated* offender’s projections.

It becomes apparent that the causes of a school violence event are often to feel powerful and to cause great fear and panic in others. There is also the secondary feeling that the act will be striking back at those who have harmed the offender or others and that said others will be safer after the act is completed. Combined with this is the obvious fact that many school violence perpetrators may have unrealistic views of the results of their violent act. Although, it could be argued that *Gang-Related* offenders, given their lifestyle, may actually be praised or famous in the eyes of other gang members.

There is a significant percentage of school violence perpetrators who feel panic and lack of control during a violent event, but, sadly, approximately half do still feel in control. Again, there is a strong trend of school violence perpetrators not feeling as if they were in control during a violent act. Unfortunately, very small percentages projected that the offender would wish to be stopped before they could complete their act of violence.

Unfortunately, only about a third or less of the surveyed school violence perpetrators projected that there would be any concerns over an offender’s loved ones, other, or themselves during the commission of a violent act.

This may be due to the time period involved. It is obviously difficult for one to consider too many other issues when in the middle of the commission of a crime. Still, it is obvious that most school violence perpetrators have very little concern for their school, others, or their community during the commission of a violent act at or upon a school. Very little concern for any of these three was projected by the offenders surveyed.

**11**

**Traditional School Violence Perpetrator: The Aftermath**

**IN THEIR OWN WORDS**

**In Response to the Sandy Hook Elementary School Shooting on December 14, 2012**

*In the aftermath of the SENSELESS acts of VIOLENCE that occurred at the Newtown, CT Elementary School, my earnest PRAYER is that these few words will find you more DETERMINED and RESOLUTE than EVER! There has been much talk about the incident here behind the prison walls (as I am sure it must be out there in society). I WISH there was more that I could do to express sincere concern for the lives of those innocent young children, and the suffering of their FAMILIES, FRIENDS, and COMMUNITIES.*

—BM/14/1996 (shot another student 6 times with a .22 caliber pistol on a school bus after a verbal feud)

*I saw what just happen in Connecticut the tragedy of all those sweet innocent children. their lives cut short broke my heart when I saw it in the news, I hope this study can bring this madness to a stop once and for all. Or at least that we can recognize the people that might be thinking of doing something so disturbed like what just happen. My prayers go to the families and victims.*

—HM/18/1999 (shot two rival gang members in parking lot after school)

**Personal Comments to Author about School Violence**

Although I didn’t kill anyone or seriously injure anyone physically, the trauma was done. I terrorized my classmates, teachers and community. I’ve become a part of the worst trend in our society, and I hope you can help me speak out against it and encourage others to get the help they need instead of following in my footsteps, and the footsteps of too many others.

—WM/16/2004 (fired three rounds with a 12-gauge shotgun in a classroom)

**INTRODUCTION**

Many times the victims and offenders involved in violent acts seem to fade from memory quickly. Often the only ones who remember are those who were intimately involved as victims or offenders or their families. Once the headlines pass and trials are concluded, very often violent acts are replaced with new acts. This is true with acts of school violence as well. Although, given that some of these acts involve such great amounts of violence and involve so many young victims, some do remain strong in the collective memory of American society (e.g., Columbine High School in Colorado and Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut).

This chapter attempts to examine the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of *Traditional* school violence perpetrators after their violent act is completed and upon their incarceration. The topics of who they blame for their act, feelings about reality, and what thoughts they may have about the future are examined. The issues of views of self, negative feelings about the act, and negative feelings about self are explored as well.

As stated in the introduction, a secondary part of the overall research project focused on the results of a 200-question scenario-based survey, entitled “School Violence Prevention Questionnaire.” Using a projective technique, respondents were asked to put themselves in the shoes of John/ Jane, a person similar to themselves at the time they committed their acts of violence, and to answer questions about John’s/Jane’s thoughts, feelings, and experiences at four different time periods. The following are the results of findings of the fourth and final time period, the aftermath.

**THOUGHTS, FEELINGS, AND EXPERIENCES AFTER THE ACT**

The following is an examination of the findings of this research pertaining to the school violence perpetrator’s projected thoughts, feelings, and experiences after an act of school violence. 36 of the 78 offenders in this study completed the aforementioned survey. Part 4 of this survey dealt with a variety of issues dealing with everything from where they would project the blame for violent behavior to projected thoughts about a convicted offender’s current and future situations.

They also had the opportunity to offer projected insight into the views they currently have of themselves and positive and negative feelings about themselves and their act. Given the population of this study, some of the offenders had reflections after many years (36) and some only a few (4).

**Placing of Blame for Act**

When a violent act occurs in society many want to understand why; this is especially true when it comes to the killing of children. Chart 11.1 offers findings as to whom the offenders themselves might feel the blame belongs to for their act.

The projected blame for the act varied almost evenly between being placed upon others, family, friends, teachers, victims, violent media, and alcohol. *Overall*, the perpetrators projected the blame equally (34%) on others and on the actual victim of the crime (34%). It should be noted that between 14% and 34% of the sample projected blame for actions upon someone or something other than the offender themselves.

Chart 11.1. Placing of Blame for Act

This trend continued for *Traditional* school violence perpetrators in that they most often projected blamed upon others (20%). A very close second percentage (16% and 11%) projected blame on family, friends, and victims.

**Feelings about Reality**

Those surveyed also had the opportunity to project their feelings on what might concern an offender after their violent event and immediately following conviction and incarceration. As would be expected, the major projected concern for most was coming to terms with the reality of what happened and the ensuing consequences.

Chart 11.2. Feelings about Reality

Not surprisingly, the vast majority (77%) projected the primary concern was realizing the consequences of one’s actions. Encouragingly, 66% projected that an offender might be contemplating their past and how they ended up where they were at that time. The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators projected that the offender would almost equally be trying to accept the reality of their actions, thinking of their past, and having a great sense of regret or remorse (34% and 31%).

**Thoughts about Future**

Examining the thoughts of convicted and incarcerated offenders is interesting and potentially the most truthful in that most have been forced to accept their fate and can reflect upon their past, present, and future with some sense of clarity. The following is an overview of the projected views on the possible thoughts of an offender at this point in a violent act.

*Overall*, the major projected thoughts are in regards to whether the offender will ever be released (68%). Given the sentences given to these various types of school violence perpetrators, whether they will be given parole one day would be of major concern. The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators projected concerns in all areas of their futures from whether they would ever be released (33%) to how they would be portrayed in the media (16%).

Chart 11.3. Major Thoughts about Future

***Lesser Thoughts about Future***

Given the sentence of many of these incarcerated offenders, the hopes of future marriage and children are very remote. *Overall* at 34% and 33% offenders projected thoughts of whether they would ever be able to get married and have children. Finishing high school (17%) and finding a job (26%) were secondary but significant projected concerns.

Chart 11.4. Lesser Thoughts about Future

*Traditional* school violence perpetrators projected the same concerns over whether they would be able to have a family one day and obtain employment. They did have the lowest (5%) projected concern about what friends might think at this point in life.

**Views of Self and Act**

As discussed in various parts of this work, the view that one has of themselves can have a significant impact on their current and future behavior.

Chart 11.5. Views of Self after Incarceration

Chart 11.5 explores the projected views that the surveyed convicted offenders had in regard to their current thoughts of self.

*Overall*, all types of offenders projected that the offender would feel that their act of violence was all a dream (60%) and one which had left them numb (59%). A significant percentage also projected that there would be a sense of relief (36%). Unfortunately, a very significant number projected that the offender thought that they would be appreciated for their act (29%) and would have more respect (28%) and have a better reputation (25%) since they had committed the act of school violence.

*Traditional* school violence perpetrators projected the most of simply feeling numb (41%) and that all of their actions were just a dream (31%).

**Negative Feelings about Act**

In addition to negative projected thoughts about how the school violence perpetrator sees an offender like him or her, there are many concerns about the act itself as well.

Chart 11.6. Negative Feelings about Act

Chart 11.6 examines the projected feelings an incarcerated school violence perpetrator may continue to have even into their punishment phase. *Overall* there are a significant percentage of projections which suggest that those who get to this point had major issues which led them to this point. An unsettling percentage of projections from all types of school violence perpetrators (30% and 29%) projected that the offender would be upset that they did not accomplish their violent goals and actually missed an intended victim. This continues when examining the projected views on how the offender would still believe that they needed to act (28%) and were excited and proud (22%) of their actions and actually wished they could have continued (21%).

The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators projected the highest percentage in these areas except for being excited and proud (5%). They still projected that the act simply needed to occur (17%) and there was no other choice.

**Negative Feelings about Self**

This research also examined the negative feelings that the various types of school violence perpetrators might still have even upon their incarceration. The following gives an overview of their projected thoughts about what an incarcerated school violence perpetrator might still have as they serve their time for their act of violence.

*Overall*, over half (60%) projected ongoing fears of being sent to prison and how long they would have to remain (see chart 11.7). Given that all of these offenders surveyed are currently incarcerated this is not surprising. A great percentage of all offenders projected feelings that the hypothetical school violence offender would have significant thoughts about their own death (81%), either causing it themselves or for another to have done so. The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators projected the greatest percentages in regard to wishing for death (25% and 23%). As with all projections, fear of prison was strong (26%) as well.

Chart 11.7. Negative Feelings about Self

**SUMMARY**

In summary, regarding the placing of blame for a violent act, all types of school violence perpetrators did so to someone or something else beyond themselves. There were almost none who projected the sole fault of the violence event upon the perpetrator alone. It also appears that almost all types of school violence perpetrators projected the same areas and feelings about the period after the act and when the punishment for the act begins. Most projected that offenders would begin to realize what had occurred and how they got to where they currently were. A significant percentage did project regret and remorse and concern for others involved.

Except for *Non-Associated* offenders, all types of offenders projected significant concern and thoughts by the offender about if they would ever be released, if family and friends would stand by them, and how they would be portrayed by the media. In contrast, a significant percentage of all types of offenders projected that the incarcerated offender would not be thinking about anything at all.

As far as projected lesser concerns for offenders, almost all were concerned over whether they would have the opportunity for a family at some point in the future. *Traditional* offenders projected the most concern in these areas, while *Non-Associated* offenders projected no thoughts in these areas at all.

An interesting trend revealed itself in examining the projected thoughts of the various types of school violence perpetrators when it comes to the views of their situation and life upon incarceration. The vast majority still have feelings of the entire act being a dream and a lingering sense of being numb, while some do have a sense of relief. Unfortunately, very significant percentages still feel that they will be appreciated, respected more by others, and have a better reputation since their violence act was completed.

Continuing frightening trends, almost all types of school violence perpetrators projected feelings that the incarcerated offender would have feelings that they did not accomplish their goals and actually missed intended victims. The feeling that the act of violence needed to occur continues for many from the planning stage to even the punishment phase.

Interesting divisions are found in reviewing the projected feelings of the various school violence perpetrators when it comes to their personal thoughts once incarcerated. The *Traditional*, associated, and *Non-Associated* offenders projected strong feelings about death, while the *Gang-Related* ones focused more on wishing they had gotten away with the crime and hoping to receive special treatment from the court system.

**Three**

**FINDINGS, ANALYSIS,** **AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The final chapters of this work resulted from an *overall* review of findings of this research. Analysis and recommendations were made of each type of school violence event and offender type.

These chapters are not intended to serve as “profiles” of the school violence perpetrators examined or a simple “checklist of danger signs.” It is hoped to be much more and used as some way to point to the next juvenile who will commit a violent act on a K–12 school campus. Attempts to develop such “tools” are very often knee-jerk reactions of those who receive massive pressure to take some type of action after an act of school violence occurs. Trying to do this is a very shortsighted “preventive” measure and one which can do more harm than good.

The use of profiles and checklists are very dangerous as well. They often lead to individuals who are not violent, nor will ever be, being labeled as such and inevitably being treated as such. A great deal of empirical research exists confirming the extremely negative impact of “labeling” and “stereotyping” individuals. This is exponentially dangerous in labeling of juveniles. It is human nature to sometimes succumb to the mistreatment and abuse by others and simply take on the traits and behaviors that are being projected upon one. This is extremely true with children. If a child is told they are “nothing” and “worthless” long enough, they may start believing it and, in turn, confirming it by future behavior.

Instead, it is hoped that this work can be used to confirm areas that are already known to negatively impact students and young people. It is also believed that many new areas of concern were discovered in this work as well.

The findings, analysis, and recommendations pertaining to *Traditional*, *Gang-Related*, *Associated* and/or mentally ill, and *Non-Associated* and/or mentally school violence perpetrators are presented.

**12**

**TRADITIONAL SCHOOL VIOLENCE PERPETRATORS:**

**The Event**

**IN THEIR OWN WORDS**

**Personal Comments to Author about School Violence**

*I’ve spent a lot of time trying to answer the question I saw in the eyes of my classmates and teachers. I wish I had a clear cut answer. I wish I could make better sense of a senseless tragedy, but I can’t. All I had to do was open up and face my own pain, but instead I spread that pain to others. I was even going to therapy, but dealt only with superficial issues. I felt better for a while, but without really opening up it was a temporary fix. Hopefully a greater discussion on mental health can alleviate the stigma against it. Hopefully then more people will open up. Hopefully safer medications will be developed, or alternative therapies and more people will be successfully treated. And hopefully then we’ll have fewer senseless tragedies.*

—WM/16/2004 (brought a 12-gauge shotgun to school and started firing it randomly in a school hallway, wounded one teacher and was wrestled to the ground and stopped by another)

*I was only fifteen years old when I went to the lengths of taking a gun to school and came very close to taking the life of another student. Because unlike most cases or at least how the news portrays it the shooter is being bullied and wake up one day and can’t handle it any more so they steal a gun and try to cause as much harm to the one that are bullying them as they can. I was the bully in my situation I gave the victim in my case problems every time I seen him whether we was in school or not with me it wasn’t a size thing like I’m bigger, stronger then this person so he’s an easy target. To be honest I don’t know why I committed the shooting, it had something to do with care to me and said the victim in the situation was giving her problems so I used that as a reason to get a trouble prompted and stated, it was to prove a point cause we hadn’t got along for the past two years of me shooting him. I also seen it go on with other students and I didn’t want him to feel like he could just pick on anyone so I threw it all back at him to let him know it can happen to him just as easy.*

—WM/16/2011 (brought a handgun to school to confront a high school rival, during a confrontation at the entrance of the school he fired twice killing the rival)

**INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this chapter is to offer a review of the findings in relation to the first type of school violence perpetrator examined, the *Traditional* school violence perpetrator. This type of offender, again, was identified as those who were current students and essentially “striking back” at the students, rivals, and schools that they attended at the time of the violent act.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Historical Examples of this type of School Violence Perpetrator** | | | | | |
| November 2, 1853,  Wednesday | Matthew Ward, male, 13, Caucasian | Louisville High School; Louisville, Kentucky | Pistol | 1 killed | Matthew Ward brought a pistol to school and shot the principal for excessively  punishing his brother the day before. |
| May 24,  1879,  Saturday | Frank Shugart, male, Caucasian | Reform School; Lancaster, New York | Revolver | 1 injured | While a carriage of female students were pulling out of the school’s stables, Shugart shot and severely injured Mr. Carr, the superintendent of the stables when Carr told Shugart he could not enter the carriage because it was already full. |
| December 21, 1898,  Wednesday | Samuel Jacobson, male, 8, Caucasian | Grammar School 85; New York City, New York | Knife | 1 injured | Jacobson, stabbed 8-year-old Han Pietze with a pocket knife. It was said that the two often quarreled. |

**FINDINGS**

The following is an overview of the findings of this research as it relates to the *Traditional* school violence perpetrators and their incidents of violence. The findings are in order as presented in the earlier parts of the work in parts one and two.

**The School**

The first part of the overview deals with the factors involved in this type of school violence as it relates to this type of perpetrator.

***Location and Time of Events of School Violence Incident***

While a school violence event can happen anywhere at any time, the *Traditional* school violence perpetrator incidents examined in this study occurred the most in the East: South Central East Region (i.e., Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Tennessee) of the United States.

**Table 12.1. Location and Time of Events of School Violence Incident**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Incidents by U.S. Census Bureau Regions** | East: South Central East Region (i.e., Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Tennessee) |
| **Type of Developed Environment** | Rural and Suburban |
| **Month of Incident** | March and May |
| **Day of Week** | Friday |
| **Time of School Day** | Equally likely throughout the school day |

They occurred most often in rural or suburban areas and more often in the months of March and May. Interestingly, the vast majority occurred on Fridays during the school week, but happened equally throughout the school day.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Historical Examples of this type of School Violence Perpetrator** | | | | | |
| September 12, 1905,  Tuesday | Ernest Powers, 15, male | Athens, Tennessee | Knife | 1 killed | Powers killed his teacher Elbert Wattanbarger when he attempted to whip him for throwing stones. |
| September 11, 1909,  Saturday | A.T. Kelly, male | Bear Hollow School; Gravette, Arkansas | Gun | 1 killed | John Butram, a student, announced to the students school was cancelled. When the teacher said the lesson was not over, Butram drew a knife on the teacher, and the teacher killed him. |
| May 28,  1931,  Thursday | James Merriman, 16, male, Caucasian | Duluth, Minnesota | Revolver | 1 killed | Katherine McMillen was accidently shot by a pupil and killed instantly. The gun was given to Merriman by another student for a school play; he was under the impression that the gun was not loaded. |

***The School Environment in which They Occur***

Most *Traditional* offenders committed their acts at the high school level and in public schools.

**Table 12.2. The School Environment in which They Occur**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Level of School.** | High School |
| **Public vs. Private School** | Public |
| **Was SRO Present at Incident?** | No |
| **Were Metal Detectors Present at Time of Incident?** | No |
| **Student Population** | 800+ students |
| **Faculty Student Ratio** | 12 to 20 students per teacher |
| **% of White Students** | 91 to 99o/o |
| **% of Black Students** | Only 2 to 10% |
| **% of Hispanic Students** | Only 0 to 1% |
| **% of Other Students** | Only 0 to 1% |

Given this sample, there were no school resource officers or metal detectors at the vast majority of the schools involved. Their violence occurred at larger schools with student populations at 800 or above, but with *Traditional* student to teacher ratios of 12 to 20 students per teacher. Interestingly, these events occurred at schools with predominately large percentages of white students and very few, if any, minorities.

***The School Violence Event***

Most of the offenders in this study will choose to commit their act of violence at the school where they know a specific target will be located.

**Table 12.3. The School Violence Event**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Why Was School Chosen?** | Specific target(s) at school |
| **Stated Reason for Incident** | Yes |
| **Length of Planning Period** | 24 hours or less |
| **Was Event *Gang-Related*?** | No |
| **Informed Other of Intentions** | May or may not have informed others |
| **Did Shooter Have Co-Conspirators?** | No |
| **Did Perpetrator Have List of Targets?** | May or may not have a list of targets |
| **If List Existed, How Many on List?** | 1 |
| **Targets: Individual, Group, Multiple, or Random** | Individual target |
| **Location of Incident in School** | Hallway |
| **Length of Incident in Minutes** | 3 to 5 minutes |
| **Number of Shots Fired** | 1 to 5 |
| **How Did Incident End?** | May temporarily flee or surrender at scene |

This will be confirmed in that the vast majority will ultimately offer to authorities why they did what they did. Most often this type of offender will plan their act for 24 hours or less. Reasons for their violence will not be gang related and they may or may not inform others of their plans, even jokingly. They will always act alone and have no co-conspirators. Their act will generally begin in a school hallway lasting 3 to 5 minutes and, if a firearm is used, will fire between 1 to 5 shots. A few may temporarily flee to be arrested later that same day, but most will peacefully surrender at the scene after their act is completed.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Historical Examples of this type of School Violence Perpetrator** | | | | | |
| May, 9,  1944,  Tuesday | Madeline Kirkland, female, 11, African- American and Eileen Foster, female, 13, African- American | PS 119 in  Harlem; New York | Letter- cutter | 1 killed | One girl held down Margaret Patton’s arms, while the other stabbed her repeatedly in the chest because Patton told a teacher the girls had stolen report cards and school materials. |
| July 22,  1950,  Saturday | Patrick McCabe, 16, male | Public School 141 | Gun (not specified) | 1 killed | At a school dance, Patrick McCabe and Jack Harren were having an argument about Harren having his shirt collar popped up. Following the argument, McCabe shot Harren in the wrist and abdomen. |
| April 8,  1952,  Tuesday | Fred R McCall, 15, male | Rabun Gap School; Clayton, Georgia | Pistol | 2 killed | Fred R McCall, 15, and Randolph Fugate, 15, had negatives of pictures of three girl students  in bathing suits. Dean of boys,  J. T. Stukes, attempted to make the boys turn in the negatives, and rather than doing so, McCall shot him twice. A student,  Alvin Dowling, was also hit by a glancing shot. |

**ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators offer the most complete overview of the issues facing young people in America. A great deal can be learned by simply reading the quotes used in this work. It is almost as if one’s school can be bad or one’s home can be bad and the young person can survive, but when both fail a child then violence can occur. It could be offered that the *Traditional* students facing these issues today could be the *Associated* and *Non-Associated* people in the future.

It appears that school officials need to be a little more vigilant on Mondays and Fridays during the typical school week. Mondays, in that they follow the weekend, may be the first time that students who had recent issues with each other get to meet again. There may have been significant events in a child’s life over a typical weekend that they bring to the school on Monday morning. Fridays may be stressful days in that the student is stressed about what is coming at home or in their neighborhoods over the upcoming weekend.

*Traditional* offenders are significant internal threats to K–12 schools. Gang members may be able to be identified and external individuals can be monitored, but the *Traditional* type of offender is one that is difficult to see coming since they usually fit in well. Moreover, they can strike at any time and may just fall into a situation and not have an actual plan at all.

High schools will experience more of these type offenders than anyone but they are appearing more and more in middle schools. Larger high schools will see the most and predominantly white student populations seem to be very vulnerable.

It is very apparent that conflict between students need to be monitored more closely. In almost all the incidents examined, growing conflict between two students was the catalyst for the eventual violence. School officials need to get to know their students, albeit a very difficult thing in a very large high school. These offenders are going to have a target in mind, and need help in conflict resolution and counseling to minimize such violence.

**13**

**TRADITIONAL SCHOOL VIOLENCE PERPETRATORS:**

**The Perpetrator**

**INTRODUCTION**

An analysis of this type of offender is also offered in order to make some final comments on possible recommendations about this type of threat to K–12 schools in the United States. As discussed repeatedly in this work, not all school violence perpetrators are the same, not all violent acts are the same and not all causes are the same. The resulting harm or death can be the same, but the road leading to it can come from many different directions.

**The Perpetrator**

The next section examines in more detail this particular type of offender.

***Who Is the Perpetrator?***

The *Traditional* offender will be a current student at the school where the violence occurs and will very often be as young as 14 or 15 years of age.

**Table 12.4. Who Is the Perpetrator?**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Relationship to School** | Current student at school |
| **Age of Perpetrator** | 14 to 15 |
| **Sex of Perpetrator** | Male |
| **Race of Perpetrator** | White |
| **Socioeconomic Status of Perpetrator** | Lower |
| **Grade at Time of Incident** | 9th Grade |
| **Body Build of Perpetrator** | Average to Slight |
| **Birth Order of Perpetrator** | Youngest |
| **Number of Siblings Living with Perpetrator** | 1 |

They will be male, white, and coming from a lower socioeconomic level. They will be 9th graders, living with one other sibling, average to slight build and be the youngest child in their family.

***Perpetrator’s Traits and Issues***

The typical *Traditional* offender will have evidence of past mental health issues, but will not be taking any prescribed medicines at the time of their violence.

**Table 12.5. Perpetrator’s Traits and Issues**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Evidence of Prior Mental Health Issues** | Yes |
| **Taking Medications for Mental Health** | Not at time of incident |
| **Evidence of Physical Health Issues** | No |
| **Parental Situation at Time of Incident** | Two married parents |
| **Any Evidence of Family Dysfunction** | Yes |
| **Any Evidence of Physical Parental Abuse or Neglect** | No |
| **Any Evidence of Sexual Abuse** | No |
| **Marital Status of Perpetrator at Time of Incident** | Single |
| **Perpetrator Involved Regularly in Religious Activities** | No |
| **Evidence of School Disciplinary Problems** | Yes |
| **Any Evidence of Recent School Difficulties** | Yes |
| **Any Evidence. of Perpetrator Being Bullied** | May or may not have been bullied |
| **If Bullied, Why?** | Multiple reasons |
| **Any Evidence of Recent Broken Relationship** | May or may not have a recent broken relationship |
| **Perpetrator on Drugs/Alcohol at Arrest** | No |
| **Perpetrator Possessed Drugs at Arrest** | No |
| **Any Evidence of Past Drug or Alcohol**  **Use** | No |
| **Any Evidence Perpetrator Regularly**  **Watched Violent Movies** | No |
| **Any Evidence Perpetrator Read Works with Violent Themes** | No |
| **Any Evidence Perpetrator Played Violent**  **Video Games** | No |
| **Any evidence Perpetrator Writing/Drawing Material with Violent Themes** | No |

They will probably have no diagnosed physical health issues and will have been living in the traditional two-parent home. There will more than likely be evidence of dysfunction at home, but no direct evidence of parental physical abuse or neglect. They will be single with little or no interest in religious activities. They will probably have problems at school including school disciplinary problems. They may or may not have been severely bullied in their lives and if so for many different reasons. The loss of an important relationship may or may not have recently occurred. Interestingly, there will be little or no evidence of current or past alcohol or other drug use and abuse. They will more than likely not be overly interested in violent music or media and will not offer any insight into their thoughts through writings or drawings.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Historical Examples of this type of School Violence Perpetrator** | | | | | |
| April 17,  1956,  Tuesday | Randolph Lawrence, 16, male, African American | Bronx Vocational High School; Bronx, New York | Knife | 1 killed | Randolph Lawrence, 16, and Henry Smith, 18, had an argument about a basketball game at the recreation center.  Smith attempted to start a physical fight with Lawrence multiple times after. When the fight took place, Lawrence stabbed Smith to death. |
| October 2, 1957,  Wednesday | Joseph Young, 15, male | Metropolitan Vocational High School | .32  caliber revolver | 1 injured | Joseph Young brought the .32 caliber revolver to school to show it off. When he took it from his pocket, the gun discharged, hitting  classmate, Silas Brown, in the leg. |
| May 1,  1958,  Thursday | Bruce Zator, 15, male, Caucasian | Massapequa High School; Massapequa, New York | .12  gauge, sawed-off shotgun | 1 killed | Bruce Zator, 15, waited for Timothy Wall in the school washroom. When Wall walked into the washroom, Zator said, “This is for you, Timmy. You creep,” before fatally shooting him. This incident followed three weeks of fist fighting and name calling. |

**Characteristics of Weapons Used and Injuries Incurred**

As with all types of offenders, weapons will be readily available, most often found in their own homes, and stolen from parents.

**Table 12.6. Characteristics of Weapons Used and Injuries Incurred**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Were Weapons Readily Available to Shooter?** | Yes |
| **Where Was Gun/Weapon Obtained1** | Stolen from parents |
| **Number of Weapons** | 1 |
| **Rounds of Ammunition Available** | 1 to 10 |
| **Types of Weapons Used** | .22 caliber pistol |
| **Number of Potential Victims** | 900+ |
| **Killed or Injured Anyone outside School before or After School Incident** | No |
| **Number Killed** | 1 |
| **Number Injured** | 0 |

They will most often use one weapon, and if a firearm it will be a .22 caliber pistol with 1 to 10 rounds of ammunition in their possession. Again, these events most often happen at larger schools which inherently offer larger numbers of potential victims. They will generally not kill or injure anyone before their violence act on the K–12 campus, but will most often take at least one life during their attack.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Historical Examples of this type of School Violence Perpetrator** | | | | | |
| April 27,  1966,  Wednesday | James Arthur Frampton, 16, Male | Bay Shore Senior High School, Bay Shore, New York | Shotgun | 1 killed | Teacher was shot and fatally wounded when he tried to stop Frampton, who was walking through the halls of Bay Shore Senior High School with a shotgun, searching for some boys with whom he had an argument earlier that day. Lane dies of his wounds on June 13, 1966 |
| January 30,  1968,  Tuesday | Blanche Ward, 16, Female | Miami Jackson High School, Miami, Florida | .22 caliber pistol | 1 killed | 16-year-old Blanche Ward shot and killed fellow student Linda Lipscomb, 16, with a .22 caliber pistol at Miami Jackson High School. According to Ward, she was threatened with a razor by Lipscomb during an argument over a fountain pen, and in the ensuing struggle the gun went off. |
| January 23,  1969,  Thursday | Ronald Joyner, 18, Male | Cardozo Senior High School, Washington D.C. | Gun | 1 killed | Assistant principal Herman Clifford, 45 was shot to death in a school’s hallway by Ronald Joyner, 18, while scuffling with three youths who robbed the school’s bank |

**Charges, Trials, Pleas, Convictions, and Sentences**

In regards to ultimate criminal charges and trials, most will receive 1 to 5 criminal charges and have a jury trial.

**Table 12.7. Charges, Trials, Pleas, Convictions, and Sentences**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Number of Different Charges** | 1 to 5 |
| **Type of Trial** | Jury Trial |
| **Was There a Plea Bargain?** | May or may not ultimately take a plea agreement |
| **Not Guilty by Reason of Insanity as Defense at Trial or in Plea Agreement** | No |
| **Guilty but Mentally 111 as Defense at Trial or in Plea Agreement** | No |
| **Conviction Counts** | 1st Degree Murder |
| **Number of Conviction Counts** | Most often I |
| **Original Sentence Received** | Term of years |
| **Minimum Number of Years Sentenced** | 21 to 25 |
| **Maximum Number of Years Sentenced** | 21 to 35 |
| **Eligible for Parole** | Yes |

They may or may not accept a plea bargain, but will generally not use the “not guilty by reason of insanity” plea or, if available in their jurisdiction, the “guilty by reason of insanity” plea. Most often they will initially be charged with 1st degree murder and receive a term of years from a minimum of 21 years to a maximum of 35 years, but will most likely be eligible for parole at some point.

**ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is also obvious that once a *Traditional* student begins the actual planning of a violent act the game is lost. These students must be reached before the violence is planned. Much of this needs to occur in the younger ages of fourteen and fifteen and when they begin high school. Also, for this type of offender, officials cannot simply try to reach only lower socio-economic class students from broken homes. All need help and guidance. Many of the most well-known school shooters came from wealthy families.

This type of offender is one most likely to keep things to themselves until violence occurs. They cannot be readily identified nor do they act out too much until their violent act in many cases. This type of offender might not even be on anyone’s radar in that they are probably not in trouble, not in counseling, and not in therapy. One day they will reach their final straw and commit their violent act. Sadly, if they decide to use a weapon it will probably be from their own home or the home of a friend.

**14**

**TRADITIONAL SCHOOL VIOLENCE PERPETRATORS:**

**The Thoughts and Feelings**

**INTRODUCTION**

This chapter seeks to examine the thoughts and feelings of the Traditional school violence perpetrator. Thieir projected thoughts are examine, prior, during and after their act of school violence.

**The Thoughts**

The final section is an overview of this type of offender’s thoughts and feelings before, during, and after their act of school violence.

***Before the Decision to Commit Violence***

Before the *Traditional* school violence perpetrator escalates to the planning stage, they will have many internal and external issues going on in their lives. They will be experiencing difficulty in handling conflicts with others and have little or no concern for others.

**Table 12.8. Before the Decision to Commit Violence**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **View of Self** | Issue with handling conflict |
| **Lack of Self Confidence** | Feels very little compassion or concern for others |
| **Unsure of Role** | Unsure of role with other students |
| **Perceived as a Leader** | Does not feel anyone sees them as a leader |
| **Perceived Importance** | Does not feel important to others |
| **Feelings of Being Threatened** | Feels threatened physically by others |
| **Feelings of Being Ignored** | Feels like they are ignored by everyone |
| **Needs Ignored** | Feels like their needs are ignored by everyone |
| **Feelings of Being Ridiculed** | Feels ridiculed for physical appearance |
| **Feelings of Not Being Valued** | Feels not valued by anyone |
| **Issues in Suffering** | Reports they are suffering from depression |
| **Isolation** | Feels isolated from everyone |
| **Disrespect** | Feels disrespected by everyone |
| **Feeling Labeled** | Reports being labeled in many ways by others |
| **Feelings about Parents** | Feels parents are not supported and neglects them |
| **Bullying** | Many report being bullied, but not being a bully themselves |
| **Punished Unfairly** | Feels punished unfairly by everyone |
| **Physical Abuse** | May have been abused by a family member |
| **Sexual Abuse** | Most are not sexually abused |
| **Emotional Abuse** | Most are not emotionally abused |
| **Influences** | Most not influenced by violent media |
| **Under the Influence** | Not under the influence at time of event |
| **Dealing with Loss** | May be dealing with recent loss of important relationship |
| **Fighting** | Fighting with people at home and at school |
| **Seeking Revenge** | Most seeking revenge for harm received by another student |
| **Seeking Personal Respect** | Seeking respect from other students |
| **Gang Involvement** | No gang involvement |
| **Happiness Issues** | Not happy with home or school life |

Being unsure with other students will be a major internal conflict combined with not feeling as if anyone values them as a leader or role model. This is combined with intense feelings of being ignored by almost everyone in their lives, especially those of importance. This will result in deep feelings of depression and further isolation from others. Real or perceived disrespect from others will most often be combined with being labeled by others as being different. This neglect and abuse will be confounded by feelings of being neglected and not supported by parents at home.

This type of offender may or may not have been bullied, but will feel punished in many ways unfairly by others. Some are physically abused at home, but most are not sexually abused. Emotional abuse from all areas will be a factor, but probably will not lead, most of the time, to excessive abuse of alcohol or other drugs. The clear majority will be involved in fights or conflict with people at school and home and will ultimately begin the planning phase in efforts to seek revenge for harm they have received or have seen received by close friends by others. A general sense of unhappiness and anger will be the underlying catalyst for their future behavior.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Historical Examples of this type of School Violence Perpetrator** | | | | | |
| February 2, 1971,  Tuesday | Kevin Simmons, 14, male | Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Morris E. Leeds Junior High School | Gun; .45-  caliber pistol | 1 killed | Freedman had suspended Simmons earlier in the day for cursing in the hallway.  Kevin was charged as an adult, but plea bargained his way to a lesser charge. He served nine **years** of a 20-year sentence. |
| January 24, 1972,  Monday | 16 | Stow, Ohio | Gun | 1 wounded | A 16-year-old student at Stow High School shot and wounded his  chemistry teacher during an argument. |
| September 1976 | James Cox, 14 | Jacob Junior High School; Norfolk, Virginia | Knife (pocket knife) | 1 killed | 14-year-old James Cox ended the argument he was having with 15-year- old James Turner by plunging a pocket knife into his neck. James Turner died from the stab wound. James Cox was tried as a juvenile. |

***Planning the Violence***

An extremely important phase of any violent act is when the potential offender is planning what they are about to do and considering possible ramifications.

**Table 12.9. Planning the Violence**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Concerned about during Planning Stage** | Very few concerned about consequences for others |
| **Thoughts about Plans** | Getting revenge and act must be done |
| **Second Thoughts about Plans** | Feeling very nervous and afraid |

For the *Traditional* offender, very few are concerned at that point about the consequences for themselves or others. They will be certain that they must get revenge and that their planned act of violence must happen. As with most types of offenders, they will be feeling very nervous and afraid, but for a multitude or reasons.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Historical Examples of this type of School Violence Perpetrator** | | | | | |
| October 2, 1981,  Thursday |  | Greenville High School; Greenville, South Carolina | Unknown | Killed:1 | 18 year old Greenville High School student stabbed 30 year old social studies teacher Henry Chiariello to death. |
| January 20, 1983,  Thursday | David F. Lawler, 14, Male | Parkway South Middle School;  St. Louis County, Missouri | Two Pistols | Killed: 2  Wounded: 1 | David F. Lawler entered into his study hall class at Parkway South Middle School and opened fire killing Randal Koger age 15 and injuring15 year old Greg Saffo followed by committing suicide. All students being in the eighth grade. |
| January 21, 1985,  Monday | James Kearbey, 14, Male | Goddard Middle School; Goddard, Kansas | M1-A  Semiautomatic rifle and  .357 Caliber handgun | Killed:1 Injured: 3 | After arming himself with a M1-A  Semiautomatic and a  .357 caliber handgun Kearbey shot and killed his principle and wounded three teachers. |

***During the Violence***

Given the amount of depression in this type of offender, most will want to die before or during the event in their minds, although the violent act they are committing will give them a feeling of finally being powerful.

**Table 12.10. During the Violence**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Thoughts about Death** | | Wanting to die before or during event |
| **Negative Feelings** | Feeling powerful during event | |
| **Not in Control** | Feeling not in control and an unreal experience | |
| **Worried about** | A few are worried about their loved ones | |

At the same time, they will feel the act is an unreal experience and one of being almost totally out of control. During the violence some will be worried about the ultimate impact of the violence upon the loved ones in their lives.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Historical Examples of this type of School Violence Perpetrator** | | | | | |
| March 25,  1993,  Thursday | Lawanda  Jackson, 19,  Female | Sumner High  School; St.  Louis, Missouri | handgun | 1 Killed  (Tony Hall,  Student, EX  boyfriend) | Lawanda Jackson killed  her ex-boyfriend with  a pistol. |
| November 4, 1993,  Thursday | Omar Jones, 19, Male | Terry Parker High School; Jacksonville, Floride | gun | 1 killed (student) | Shooter tried to rob a younger victim but when unsuccessful, he shot him in the head with his pistol. |
| September 15, 1995,  Wednesday | Daniel Watson | George Rogers Clark High School; Clark County, Kentucky | Guns | 0 Wounded | Daniel Watson (Student) had been in a fight, returned home and brought two guns. He held one student hostage. |

***The Aftermath***

Most *Traditional* types of offender will reflect greatly on their past and what led them to where they find themselves, but they will still blame others for their acts.

**Table 12.11. The Aftermath**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Placing of Blame for Act** | Blaming others for act |
| **Feelings about Reality** | Realizing reality of event and situation |
| **Thoughts about Future** | Worried about ever getting out of prison |
| **Views of Self** | Feeling numb |
| **Negative Feelings about Act** | Felt as if they needed to do what they did |
| **Negative Feelings about Self** | Worried about going to prison and wishing they had died during event |

The reality of what they have done and the damage caused will begin to sink in and concerns over their future will as well. Most will offer that they are feeling simply numb, but had to do what they did. The issues of depression and wanting to die will continue deep into their years of incarceration.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Historical Examples of this type of School Violence Perpetrator** | | | | | |
| October 11, 1996,  Friday | Kembert Thomas, 15, Male | Sumner High School; St. Louis, Missouri | gun | 1 Killed (Lamon Hones, Student) | During a fight the shooter opened fire and fatally wounded Lamon Hones. |
| January 27,  1997,  Monday | Tronneal Mangum, 13, Male | Conniston Middle School; West Palm Beach, Florida | gun | 1 killed (John Pierre Kamel, Student) | John was attempting to retrieve his stolen watch from Tronneal (student) when Tronneal opened fire killing John. |
| February 19, 1997,  Wednesday | Evan Ramsey, 16, Male, Caucasian | Bethel Regional High School; Bethel, Alaska | 12-guage shotgun | 2 killed  (1 principal,  student),  wounded  (2 students) | Shooter (student) entered student commons area where he fatally shot a student and the wounded two more. Then he entered the school, and fatally shot the principal. After which he laid his gun down and surrendered. |

**ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

These offenders demonstrate how children so often feel unimportant, ignored, and mistreated, whether they really are or not. There does not have to be significant physical and sexual abuse for these kids to act. Most frightening is that when they decide to act they will and will be totally certain that their planned act of violence must occur.

This type of offender is also one of the most dangerous in that many have a deep-seated desire to die during their act of violence. Responders may be forced into positions where they have to take the life of this type of offender because they are provoked and have no choice.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Historical Examples of this type of School Violence Perpetrator** | | | | | |
| March 25, 2011,  Friday | Michael Phelps, 15,  Male, Caucasian | Martinsville West Middle School; Martinsville, Indiana | 9mm handgun | 1 wounded (15-year- old was shot twice in the abdomen. | Phelps shot a fellow classmate outside the cafeteria. The shooting was a result of a fight that occurred at a dance earlier in the week. |
| February 27, 2012,  Monday | Thomas “TJ” Lane, 17,  Male | Chardon High School; Cleveland, Ohio | Ruger MK III .22  caliber semi- automatic handgun and knife | 3 killed,  3 others injured. | Fired 10 shots at a group of students in the cafeteria |
| November 29, 2012,  Thursday | David Phan, 14, Male | Bennion Junior High School; Taylorsville, Utah | Unknown as to what type of gun | 1 killed | Suspended from school earlier in the afternoon. Once arriving at home, grabbed a gun from the home, went back to the school with a group of students and shot himself; reason for suspension was not given |

**15**

**EPILOGUE**

**Question: Has it always been like this?**

**Answer: Yes, sort of. . . .**

Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.

—George Santayana (December 16, 1863–September 26, 1952),

Philosopher, essayist, poet, and novelist

**INTRODUCTION**

As the final part of this work is being written the attack on a party in the Inland Regional Center in San Bernardino, California, on December 2, 2015, at around 11:00 a.m. is being broadcast on CNN and other news outlets. The usual casts of characters with personal agendas begin their same old attempts to use such a horrific incident to their advantage. It is sad to most that each time an event such as this occurs there seems to be very little interested in determining why the event happened beyond a consideration as to whether the event was a terroristic attack. Obviously it was determined to be such, but many conspiracy theories flew through most media outlets.

Another phenomenon occurs as well. People immediately try to group all types of violent events into one large all-inclusive bucket. Therefore they come up with massive arguments on such peripheral issues such as gun-control and use (or lack thereof) of medications to deal with real or perceived mental health issues in individuals.

There will always be guns. There will always be personal issues that cause people to resort to violence. There will always be mental health issues. There will always be crime, poverty, and depression.

Those issues need to be addressed in the United States and then maybe people will not be as willing to pick up a weapon and harm themselves and others.

**ALL DOCUMENTED SCHOOL VIOLENCE INCIDENTS FROM 1700 TO 2015**

Any attempt to document all incidents of school violence or disturbance in American K–12 schools is essentially an impossible task. Conducting any type of research when it comes to school violence and disturbance is extremely difficult and findings can be misleading at best.

As stated before, there are many reasons for this, first no system for recording and enumerating individual acts of crime existed until 1933, when the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s *Uniform Crime Report* was developed. Second, many forms of individual aggression, such as juvenile misbehavior, were not a matter of great public concern and attention until the 1960s; moreover, throughout history, even definitions of what constituted school disturbance have varied.

Third, reporting procedures have varied, and continue to vary, among school districts and it was not until the 1970s did many school districts kept comprehensive data on student criminality on their campuses, and the result is that most early information on school disturbance and problems is primarily anecdotal or simply not available. Fourth, local school administrators have historically played down their problems to give the impression that they controlled their school situation completely. Thus, fifth, most researchers involved in this type of research only use and depend on the data and information gained from others and never do their own field research.

The following examination is based on 594 incidents which could be identified and verified between July 1, 1764, and November 30, 2015. Moreover, for many of these incidents there was enough information to make any reasonable discussion of the events.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Over All** | ***Traditional*** | ***Gang-Related*** | **Associated** | ***Non-Associated*** |
| 1700-1899 | 21 | 14 | 0 | 3 | 4 |
| 1900-1919 | 30 | 14 | 0 | 14 | 2 |
| 1920-1929 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 1930-1939 | 9 | 3 | 0 | 5 | 1 |
| 1940-1949 | 15 | 6 | 1 | 6 | 2 |
| 1950-1959 | 17 | 11 | 2 | 3 | 1 |
| 1960-1969 | 15 | 13 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| 1970-1979 | 28 | 17 | 0 | 7 | 4 |
| 1980-1989 | 29 | 25 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| 1990-1999 | 297 | 220 | 45 | 25 | 7 |
| 2000-2009 | 61 | 49 | 6 | 4 | 2 |
| 2010-2015 | 70 | 44 | 11 | 8 | 7 |

Table 15.1. Number of Documented School Violence Incidents from 1700 to 2015

The above provides a representation of the distribution of documented school violence incidents between 1700 and 2015. These events have been typed and divided based on the definitions of the 4 types of school violence perpetrators examined in this work: *Traditional*, *Gang-Related*, *Associated* and/or Mentally Ill, and *Non-Associated* and/or Mentally Ill school violence perpetrators.

The following is a discussion of the trends in the *overall* number of school violence incidents and the evolution of them as divided by type of perpetrator.

Chart 15.1. Documented School Violence Incidents from 1700 to 1959

The above table shows the documented school violence events from 1764 to 2015 (n = 93) (see chart 15.1). The first realization presented here is that the United States has had school violence since the very first school houses opened. This first event documented in America was on Friday, July 6, 1764, at the Pontiac’s Rebellion School (three miles north of present day Greencastle, Pennsylvania). It is reported that four Native American males entered the school house and shot the twelve people inside, then proceeded to scalp them. This resulted in 11 being killed and 1 injured.

Many assume that violent acts committed at or around K–12 schools is a new phenomenon. The information provided above offers that prior to the twentieth century, American schools experienced at least 21 incidents of violence. Fourteen of these incidents involved *Traditional* types of school violence (shootings, fights, stabbings, etc.) by currently enrolled and attending juveniles, but a little less than half of the incidents were committed by outsiders. Three of the earliest events involved individuals coming to the school grounds for revenge for their perceived mistreatment from teachers or mistreatment of fellow family members. Four of these events involved older individuals choosing to commit their acts of violence at or near a school with not apparent connection to the school. This early trend is seen in almost every decade since this time.

Chart 15.2 examines the documented school violence incidents between 1960 and 2015 (see chart E.2). Obviously, this is the period where the bulk of the incidents occurred. During this time period approximately 500 events occurred across the United States in K–12 schools. Over half of these incidents occurred in one decade 1990 to 1999 (297) and over half of the *Traditional* school violence incidents (220) happened during the same period.

Most would assume that most of the violence in schools would have been related to gang violence due to what was occurring on American streets during this period. The second highest number of incidents (45) were identified as gang related. It should be remembered though that in this type of research it is sometimes very difficult to identify clearly the true motivation for a violent act. For example, a school shooting may be between two rival gang members, but the catalyst for the violence may in reality be over a mutual girlfriend. Thus, how should such an event be classified?

Chart 15.2. Documented School Violence Incidents from 1960 to 2015

Most jurisdictions will label it as gang related if there is any evidence that one or more of the offenders is a known gang member. But, in reality, the ultimate violence may be a simple unrelated dispute over something non-*Gang-Related*.

This chart (chart 15.2) also mirrors the violent crime rates in the United States in the late 2000s as well. After a very significant increase in violent crime in the early 1990s, the mid 2000s saw a second spike, albeit much less, in all forms of violence. While the late 1990s found a large number of school violence incidents, the late 2000s did as well.

**EXAMINATION OF INCIDENTS FROM 1700 TO 2015 BY TYPOLOGY**

The following section offers an overview of the types of school violence events between 1700 and 2015 (see chart 15.3). In order to offer more detail on the true nature of these events, they have been broken down by type of perpetrator.

Chart 15.3. *Traditional* School Violence Incidents from 1700 to 2015

Between 1700 and 2015 there were approximately 416 incidents of school violence which could be attributed to *Traditional* types of offenders (see chart 15.4). As with all trends, the bulk of these events occurred between 1990 and 1999. Of all types of events this type was approximately 70% of all of the documented events.

Chart 15.4. *Gang-Related* School Violence Incidents from 1700 to 2015

Given the location of the event (in or around K–12 school buildings/grounds) this would make sense. What should be noted here is that there has been a steady trend of violence committed by juvenile against their schools, classmates, and teachers since the late 1700s. As will be discussed further in this section, these trends match the trends in all types of juvenile violence in United States and that of the American public.

The number of identified *Gang-Related* school violence events is interesting (see chart 15.5). The first identified *Gang-Related* event was Wednesday, June 26, 1946, at Public School 147 Annex of the Brooklyn High School for Automotive Trades in Brooklyn, New York. Reportedly, 7 unidentified African-American males, ages 17 to 18, shot to death another student who refused to give up his lunch money to the gang. He was shot in the chest with a pistol. There were also 2 events which occurred in the 1950s, but then no other documented incidents until the 1990s. The second surge in juvenile violence in and out of schools in the late 2000s did involve a large number of *Gang-Related* incidents.

As discussed many times in this work is the fact that there is a growing number of *Associated* and/or Mentally Ill school violence perpetrators targeting their former schools, teachers, and administrators. The chart above offers an overview of these types of offenders between 1700 and 2015. This is one group which has had a constant representation in all decades of the history of American K–12 education.

Chart 15.5. Associated and/or Mentally Ill School Violence Incidents from 1700 to 2015

Historically there have been slightly more (76) school violence acts committed by older *Associated* individuals than *Gang-Related* (65) *Non-Associated* and/or Mentally Ill School Violence Incidents from 1700 to 2015 (see chart 15.6). This is extremely interesting given the common perception that the public generally has in regards to who is the great danger to school safety. It is also interesting that this type of offender mirrored all other types of offenders by the largest number of these types of attacks occurring in the 1990s.

As with *Associated* and/or Mentally Ill school violence perpetrators, *Non-Associated* types of offenders have always been a threat to American K–12 schools. As stated earlier, the very first event documented in America was on Friday, July 6, 1764, at the Pontiac’s Rebellion School. This type of event, albeit given the time period, can be seen as a *Non-Associated* type of attack.

Chart 15.6. *Non-Associated* and/or Mentally Ill School Violence Incidents from 1700 to 2015

As with all other types of offenders, this type of perpetrator can be found in almost all decades. Thus, individuals who have no true connection to a particular school may still target it for their act of violence. The fewest events from 1700 to 2015 (36) involved this type of perpetrator. It should be noted that this type of offender is the fastest growing type of threat to American schools.

**DOCUMENTED SCHOOL VIOLENCE INCIDENTS FROM 1700 TO 2015 BY DECADE**

The below (chart 15.7) offers information on the 21 incidents of school violence which occurred in the United States between 1700 and 1899 (see chart 15.7). The bulk of the events involved *Traditional* types of offenders (14), but a significant number of events involved *Associated* (3) and *Non-Associated* (4) types of offenders.

Chart 15.7. Incidents from 1700 to 1899 by Decade by Typologies

In examining the distribution of events, *Traditional* types of incidents were equally distributed throughout this time period.

The period between 1900 and 1919 is an interesting time for school violence (see chart 15.8). During this period there was an equal distribution of *Traditional* (14) and *Associated* (14) types of school violence incidents. There were no *Gang-Related* incidents reported during this time and only 2 *Non-Associated* incidents.

Chart 15.8. Incidents from 1900 to 1919 by Decade by Typologies

Extremely interesting is the fact that only two incidents of school violence at a K–12 American school can be documented (see chart 15.9). The first was on Tuesday, February 15, 1927, when Thomas J O’Donnell, Jr., committed suicide in his school auditorium. In his suicide letter, he said he wanted to reduce the financial burden of his family. The second was on Wednesday, May 18, 1927, when school Treasurer Andrew Kehoe, who was having financial problems, killed his wife before setting bombs off at his home. He then headed to his school where he set off a number of bombs he had planted over the preceding weeks. He also used a bomb to kill himself in his car. This was the largest school massacre at the time resulting in 45 deaths and 58 injuries.

Chart 15.9. Incidents from 1920 to 1929 by Decade by Typologies

Thus, during this time period, there were only two documented acts of school violence. One involved a *Traditional* type of incident and the second what should be classified as an associate type of offender.

Between 1930 and 1939 there were 9 documented school violence incidents (see chart 15.10). All types of offenses occurred during this time except *Gang-Related* events. The slightly more prevalent type of offense was that of the *Associated* type of perpetrator. Given this time period of the Great Depression in America it not surprising that many people would strike out against familiar American schools given the stress upon people during this time.

Chart 15.10. Incidents from 1930 to 1939 by Decade by Typologies

The second least number of school violence events occurred during the 1940s (see chart 15.11). As with the 1930s, the 1940s saw *Associated* types of perpetrators being a large percentage of the types of offenders. This was matched by the number of *Traditional* types of perpetrators as well. As discussed earlier, this decade did see the first documented case of *Gang-Related* violence in an American school.

Chart 15.11. Incidents from 1940 to 1949 by Decade by Typologies

The 1950s experienced 17 incidents covering all types of offenders (see chart 15.11). The majority were *Traditional* types of perpetrators. There was also an almost equal distribution of events between 1950 and 1959.

Chart 15.12. Incidents from 1950 to 1959 by Decade by Typologies

While the period between 1960 and 1969 were very violent on many college and university campuses, it only had 15 events across the county at K–12 schools (see chart 15.13). Of this number, 13 were found to be *Traditional* types of offences, but 2 did involve *Non-Associated* and/or mentally ill types of perpetrators.

Chart 15.13. Incidents from 1960 to 1969 by Decade by Typologies

During the time period between 1970 and 1979, the United States experienced approximately 28 incidents of school violence across the country (see chart 15.14). Of this number the largest percentage of incidents were committed by *Traditional* types of offenders (17). The second largest group at 7 was the *Associated* types of offenders.

Chart 15.15. Incidents from 1970 to 1979 by Decade by Typologies

Chart 15.15. Incidents from 1980 to 1989 by Decade by Typologies

Interestingly, this period did not have any *Gang-Related* incidents documented.

The period between 1980 and 1989 was just a prelude to the drastic increase in all types of juvenile violence experienced in the 1990s (see chart 15.15). During this period the vast majority of events involved *Traditional* types of offenders, equally distributed throughout the decade. Albeit questionable, there were actually no *Gang-Related* types of incidents clearly documented during this period.

As discussed extensively in this work, the 1990s experienced the greatest number of violent events in all areas of criminal behavior (see chart 15.16). This decade experienced approximately 50% of all documented incidents between 1700 and 2015. The largest number of incidents was committed by *Traditional* types of perpetrators (49), and gang related was a distant second (11). All types of offenses saw great increases in their numbers during this time period.

The period between 2000 and 2009 is one of the most interesting decades when it comes to exploring school violence in America (see chart 15.17). As with all types of offenses, the decade started with high percentages of violence and ended the same. But, during the mid-2000s, the country experienced a decrease in all type of violence. Sixty-one incidents occurred during this time period. The largest number (49) were *Traditional* types of offenders and all other types were distant seconds and thirds.

Chart 15.16. Incidents from 1990 to 1999 by Decade by Typologies

Chart 15.17. Incidents from 2000 to 2009 by Decade by Typologies

This final section examines the approximately 70 events committed from 2010 until November 30, 2015 (see chart 15.18). This period appears to be supporting the idea that the number of school violence incidents may be on the up rise again. There were 44 *Traditional* incidents during this period and 11 gang related. *Associated* numbers made up 8 incidents and almost tied with *Non-Associated* at 7.

Chart 15.18. Incidents from 2010 to 2015b y Decade by Typologies

**A COMPARISON OF ARREST RATES AND SCHOOL VIOLENCE INCIDENTS**

As a final comparison for the reader, the final section of this work is a simple overview of American violent crime rates and school violence.

As will the detailed examination of the documented school violence events between 1960 and 2014, there was a spike in the 1990s in all types of violent behavior in the United States (see chart 15.19). The above chart is data collected by the Uniform Crime Report as maintained by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. It is interesting to see support for the idea that violence in American society will always find its way into its schools.

Chart 15.19. Violent Crime Rates 1960 to 2014

In comparing the *overall* school violence rates between 1960 and 2015, it is obvious that the trends are very similar. Drastic spikes in school violence in the 1990s mirrors that of the *overall* violence in American society.

Chart 15.20. Over All School Violence Incidents 1700 to 2015

Chart 15.21. *Traditional* School Violence Incidents 1960 to 2015

This same trend is found in what the country experienced when it came to *Traditional* types of school violence. *Traditional* type of perpetrators mirrored that of other types of violent offenders in American society historically.

Chart 15.22. *Gang-Related* School Violence Incidents 1960 to 2015

*Gang-Related* types of offenses mirror these same trends. The 1990s experienced the largest amount of gang violence in history and made up the second largest amount of school violence events.

Chart 15.23. Associated and/or Mentally Ill School ViolenceIncidents 1960 to 2015

15xperiencing only a slightly different finding in the 1970s, the *Associated* type of school violence perpetrators’ violence mirrored the trends of all other types of violence in America.

Chart 15.24. *Non-Associated* and/or Mentally Ill School Violence Incidents 1960 to 2015

Finally, *Non-Associated* types of perpetrators mirrored the same violent trends. The most interesting finding in this time period is the drastic increase in the number of these events as the country closes 2015. The growing trend seems to be more and more people attacking K–12 schools of which they have no connection to except the desire to harm others.

**CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, juvenile violence has existed as long as there have been juveniles and school violence has existed since there were schools. The findings of this research support this comment. School violence has existed since the very first schoolhouses were established in the United States. Throughout history that have been attacked internally by their students and externally by those seeking revenge against a particular school or society as a whole.

Schools are significant factors in everyone’s past, current, and future lives. One may currently be a student, a teacher, principle, staff member, or parent of a child who is attending a K–12 school in the United States. The impact that schools have in each person’s life also involves the experiences that have while in school and the treatment they receive. Unfortunately, many decide to hurt themselves or others due to a myriad of issues. Schools also provide many easily accessible targets for those who wish to rob, assault, or kill young people. Small elementary schools are often the targets of individuals who wish to strike back at society by attacking those who are most vulnerable. Large urban schools experience large amounts of gang-related and street violence. The schools falling between the two often have students who are mistreated and bullied at home and at school.

The resulting violence should not surprise anyone.

It is hoped that the reader understands the attempts at distinguishing between 4 types of school violence perpetrators. Many insist on combining all types of school shootings/violence, therefore they often find one type of offender, committing one type of violent act, and therefore they determine there is one type of defense. This could not be further from the truth when examining K–12 school violence historically in the United States. Public mass shootings, university shootings, international shootings, and K–12 school shootings are not the same.

They have different catalysts, motivations, types of occurrence, and offenders. Thus, they must have different approaches, strategies, and responses.

It is hoped that this work can contribute to future attempts to deal positively, fairly, and effectively with school violence in American K–12 schools.

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In addition to over 26 years of post-secondary education experience, Dr. Crews has conducted POST certified law enforcement training in South Carolina, Rhode Island, Georgia, Ohio, and Alabama in the areas of proper police practice. He has also worked with the *Turkish National Police* and *Ghana National Police* on community policing initiatives. Most recently, he has begun communication with the *Japan National Police Academy* on a comparison of approaches to juvenile delinquency and violence by law enforcement in Japan and the United States.

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His publications include refereed journal articles and work chapters dealing with juvenile and school violence, Occult/Satanic involvement and youth, and various law enforcement and correctional issues. His works include *Faces of Violence in America* (Simon & Schuster, 1996); *The Evolution of School Disturbance in America: Colonial Times to Modern Day* (Praeger, 1997); *A History of Correctional Violence: An Examination of Reported Causes of Riots and Disturbances* (American Correctional Association, 1998); *Chasing Shadows: Confronting Juvenile Violence in America* (Prentice Hall, 2001); *Living in Prison: A History of the Correctional System with an Insider’s View* (Greenwood Publishers, 2004); *In the Margins: Special Populations and American Justice* (Prentice Hall, 2008); and, *Critical Examinations of School Violence and Disturbance in K-12 Education* (IGI Global, 2016). His most recent work is entitled, *School Killers Speak: School killers speak: A comprehensive examination of perpetrators, events, and characteristics of K-12 school violence in America* (The Veritas Group, 2016). Dr. Crews currently has two new works being published: *Policing America: An Introduction to Law enforcement* (Cognella, 2017), and *The Death Row Cookwork: Food to Die For* (The Vertias Group, 2017).

Dr. Crews has myriad current research interests/efforts in the areas of violence and resulting societal reactions. A primary project as of 2013 is the interviewing and surveying of 78 incarcerated school violence (K-12) offenders across the United States. A secondary effort is in working on a new work with a convicted murderer on death row in South Carolina dealing with the realities of living in prison and being incarcerated in the United States. A third, and ongoing, focus is on an international comparison of police and societal response to individuals involved in alternative belief practices (e.g., Satanism, Wicca, Goth, etc.). Through these efforts, he currently has two manuscripts under development: *Juvenile Delinquency and Violence: Examining International Police and Societal Response* (CRC Press) and *The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Living and Dying in Prison* (Alpha Works).

He is former President of the *Themis Center for Policy, Practice, & Research* (WV) and is currently President and owner of *The Veritas Group, LLC*, a consulting firm based out of Huntington, WV. Since 2000, he has conducted extensive field research in these areas across the United States, United Kingdom, Middle East, Netherlands, Central Europe, Scandinavia, Turkey, Ghana, Central and Eastern Europe (i.e., Macedonia, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungry, Slovakia, Austria, Czech Republic, Slovenia, Serbia, and Croatia). His most recent research was conducted in Brazil (2010), Japan (2011), and in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland (2012).

Perhaps his most relevant experience which speaks to his ability as an effective expert witness in policing and correctional matters is his role as a lead police/correctional expert in a grant-funded review of police and correctional training curricula (state, county, and municipal) from more than 60 academies across the United States. This 3 year project involved evaluating all academy curricula and noting what courses were offered, their length and content, and other characteristics of the curricula, instructors, and academies. This work resulted in a complex statistical evaluation and recommendations to improve curricula and make training more effective. The results of this work have been presented at various regional and national conferences and are being developed into manuscripts for publication review in respected criminal justice journals.

Dr. Crews has also appeared as a consultant on national and international programming such as *CNN, MSNBC, Good Morning America, Anderson Cooper 360◦, The Abrams Report, Nancy Grace, Gloria Van Susteren, African National Television,* and *Due Diligence on Voice of Russia Radio Network.*

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**Findings for Other Types of School Violence Perpetrators**

**Gang-Related School Violence Perpetrators**

There are some very interesting things to consider when examining the *Gang-Related* school violence perpetrator. While no one would ever encourage an individual to join a gang, it does appear that these individuals, besides the criminal aspect of their lifestyle, are well-adjusted individuals. They were found to be the most to be worried about their loved ones and unintended victims in this entire sample. They seem to have a type of social support and brotherhood that none of the other types of offenders have in their lives.

This type of offender, just like most of the other types of school violence perpetrators, will believe that their act of violence must occur, but it is most often seen as just a simple by-product of the lives they lead. They will not want to die and will target one individual to attack. They will injure the fewest bystanders in most cases because they have one target in mind. They also do not take hostages, and they leave the scene, thus removing the threat, as quickly as possible.

As with almost all types of offenders examined they will feel very powerful during their act of violence and will almost always blame their victim for the assault. As expected they will attack larger high schools with very high percentages of minority students. These schools will almost always be in urban areas.

For the *Gang-Related* offender, the school can offer more than just the location of a rival or an identified target. A very high percentage of these types of events involved gang members coming onto K–12 school campuses seeking victims for robberies. Students just getting dropped off at school or waiting to be picked up after school made up a significant portion of this type of offenders victims.

For schools, *Gang-Related* violence is an extremely difficult problem to deal with. This type of threat is internal and external. Periods before school, lunch, and after school are times when school officials must be vigilant in monitoring the school campus. This is when outside gang members often target their rivals and invade a school property.

**Associated and/or Mentally Ill School**

**Violence Perpetrators**

Surpassed by only *Gang-Related* offenders, *Associated* school violence perpetrators pose the most significant threat to a K–12 school. For a multitude of reasons, these individuals will begin to believe that someone at their former school is somehow responsible for their current failures or negative issues in life. They may also see their former high school as the place where their troubles and failures began. This type of offender, in every incident examined, returned to kill a former teacher, athletic coach, or principal. They had no plans on harming any students or bystanders, just the person they had identified as being most responsible for their own failures in life.

These former students are also a unique threat, too, in that they are very familiar with the school grounds, layout of buildings, and class schedules. Therefore when they begin planning their violence, they will know what extra precautions they need to take to increase their likelihood of being “successful” in the attack.

This is a sobering reminder to all school personnel that how they treat a student may have fatal repercussions down the line. Many of these offenders return to their schools four or five years after they left the school. Many of these offenders were expelled or dropped out of their former school for a multitude of reasons. This speaks to the need for other types of policies in dealing with troublesome students beyond simply getting rid of them.

**Non-Associated and/or Mentally Ill School**

**Violence Perpetrators**

The *Non-Associated* on the other hand are individuals who have lost all hope in life and see that their own death may be the only answer. Some of these individuals are filled with so much hatred that they wish to attack a school in that it is a symbol of happy young people just beginning their lives. This is why this is the only type of offender in this study which targeted preschools and elementary schools.

This type of offender is the type that crashes cars into school property or school buildings and then attacks students with baseball bats, machetes, or even attempts to detonate homemade explosive devices attached to propane tanks. Unfortunately, this type of offender drives the creation of new school buildings as fortresses and many external security measures.

This type of offender is the same type of individual who attacks the audience of a movie theater or shopping mall. They are the type that opens fire on crowds outside of national monuments. Sadly they are also the type which attack preschool children on a playground.

**About The Veritas Group Consulting, LLC**

**The Veritas Group**

"Working for Justice and Security through effective Policy, Practice, and Research"

**The Veritas Group** is a consulting firm based in Huntington, WV, privately owned and operated by Gordon A. Crews, Ph.D., who has more than 35 years of experience working, teaching, and researching in criminal justice.  Our areas of expertise are law enforcement (e.g., use of force, pursuits, resource allocation, traffic stops, training), corrections (e.g., release & reentry, prison labor, probation & parole surveillance, institutional violence, death row & capital punishment), and juvenile delinquency & violence (e.g., school violence, impact of "Goth" or occult involvement on violence). We also provide expert witness testimony or expert commentary in these areas.

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