

# Chapter 1

## The American K–12 School Violence Incident: A Brief Study

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### ABSTRACT

*The authors give an overview of a research project that examined in detail 106 characteristics of 78 school violence incidents that occurred in the United States between 1979 and 2011. The result is an extensive overview of the location, date, and time of school violence incidents; the school environment in which violence occurred; the school violence incident itself; the characteristics of the perpetrators involved; characteristics of weapons used; and injuries incurred. The authors pose to the reader six major findings of the characteristics of K-12 school violence incidents in the United States which they argue must be considered as we move forward in dealing with this issue.*

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter resulted as part of a comprehensive and ongoing research project investigating the characteristics and causes of K–12 school violence and disturbance in the United States (Crews, 2016a). Between 2008 and 2012, all publicly available lists and news reports were scoured to obtain a population of names of perpetrators who committed acts of violence on kindergarten to 12th-grade school property or at a school function since the early 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 (Crews, 2016a).

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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 (Crews, 2016a):

*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 Violence Perpetrators (7 of the 78 offenders in this sample);  
*Non-associated* School Violence Perpetrators (5 of the 78 offenders in this sample).

*Traditional* school violence perpetrators (Crews, 2017a) were 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 (Crews, 2017b) were 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* school violence perpetrators (Crews, 2017c; Crews2017d) were 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 were 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).

This chapter focuses on the overall findings of this research and combine the events of all four types of offenders. Detailed examinations of individual types of offenders are discussed in depth by the author in other publications.

## **LOCATION, DATE, AND TIME OF SCHOOL VIOLENCE INCIDENTS**

The next sections of this chapter examine the location, date, and time of the 78 identified school violence events.

### **Location of Incidents**

This section examines the characteristics of school violence perpetrators, their acts, and the schools in which they committed their violence. As discussed prior, 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.

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