

# Chapter 44

## Response to School Violence

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter sets forth to examine the different forms of violence that are present within U.S. school systems along with the general response to these acts. Acts of institutional and personal violence will be discussed along with the potential harm that each act presents. While institutional violence often goes ignored, the impact of these acts can have a substantial negative influence on the life and future career of children. Alternatively, instances of personal violence frequently receive substantial media attention while also causing high levels of fear among the American public regarding the safety of our schools. The most publicized and heinous type of personal violence that has transpired within school settings is events involving an active shooter(s). In addition to identifying the various types of violence, suggestions for improvement and preparedness are offered to reduce the prevalence of violence within schools.*

### INTRODUCTION

School violence has become an ever increasing concern for members of society and educational leaders. While past topics of school-related issues have had a tendency to focus on school performance and the educational achievement of students, school systems are now presented with the challenge of developing policy initiatives to specifically address the broad threat of school violence. When discussing school violence, many people tend to automatically think of intruders on campus and school shootings. Although it is necessary for school systems to develop safety plans to address instances of intruders and school shootings, these events are relatively rare and are often the result of moral panics created from sensational reports of these infrequent acts by the news media. Other more common forms of violence are more frequently committed even though they are often overlooked in terms of news media accounts or concerns within the community.

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The recent media focus on school violence (Knezevich, 2013; Strauss, 2013; Taylor, 2015) has increased the discussion regarding the prevalence, causes and prevention of school violence. School violence is not a new phenomenon but in recent years it has spread to American suburbs and rural areas where it had previously not been a reason for concern (Watts & Erevelles, 2004). This spike in school violence has led to the development of local, state and federal initiatives to prevent and combat the issue as well as numerous studies examining the causes and consequences of school violence (Redding & Shalf, 2001). While violence in schools is viewed by the public as an imminent threat, research shows that middle and high school students are optimistic and feel relatively safe at school as they believe that violence is more likely to occur elsewhere (Chapin & Coleman, 2006). Optimistic bias involves the belief that “bad things happen to others, but not me” (Chapin & Coleman, 2006). From that standpoint, it is argued that in order to reduce school violence, we must reduce optimistic bias and recognize our own vulnerability to these acts (Chapin & Coleman, 2006).

This chapter will provide an exploration of the many ways that violence is present within educational institutions. The examination will cover common acts of violence that are routinely publicized as well as other, less common, forms of violence that are generally not perceived to be equated to violence. The purpose in identifying both forms is two-fold: one, to show how violent acts can be intentionally or unintentionally perpetrated in the pursuit of either personal or institutional goals. Secondly, to demonstrate that all forms of violence within educational institutions detract from the overarching purpose of ensuring that students have a safe place to develop into intellectual beings and that these acts can negatively impact the future life opportunities of these kids. As will be seen, some of these events will generate a response from law enforcement officials while others will remain outside the jurisdiction of the criminal justice system. The law enforcement and educational system response to these acts will be examined along with suggestions for potential improvement to reduce the perpetration of these events.

## **SCHOOL VIOLENCE**

Kids spend a majority of their time during the day within a classroom setting (Meehan & Kerig, 2010). It is the expectation that kids should be subjected to a safe, secure environment that fosters their intellectual growth and achievement. Unfortunately, schools have become battlegrounds where students and teachers fear for their safety and academic achievement is reduced (Kingery et al, 1993; Sturge, 1982). Eitle and Eitle (2003) found that the presence or fear of violence within schools would create stressful places to work and learn which could plausibly lead to students being less attached and committed to school. As students become less attached and committed to scholastic achievement, increased instances of low educational performance and dropping out of school become realistic concerns.

School violence is a broad term that includes youth violence that occurs on school property, in transit to and from school on buses, or during school-sponsored events (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013). School violence has been defined as any behavior that violates a school’s educational mission or climate of respect or jeopardizes the intent of the school to be free of aggression against persons or property, drugs, weapons, disruptions, or disorder (Center for the Prevention of School Violence, 2008). Violence is often viewed as behaviors that create harm, damage, or injury. A more accurate understanding of violence should include aggressive acts that place another in fear of harm or injury although the actual infliction of damage may not occur. The justification for this stance stems from the fact that aggression has tremendous physical, economic, social, and psychological consequences (Park-

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