

Chapter 61

Law Enforcement's Impact on School Violence

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ABSTRACT

Since the 1980s, school violence has been prominent in society and is gradually increasing in occurrence. In 1999, the Columbine High School shooting shocked the country demonstrating how deadly school violence can be, with a death count of 13 total people, including 12 students and 1 teacher. The next prominent occurrence was in 2005 on the Red Lake Indian Reservation, where 10 people were killed at the hands of a 16-year-old student. Another more recent act of school violence was in 2012 in Newtown, Connecticut, at Sandy Hook Elementary School. There, the shooter killed 28 people including children and teachers inside the school and his mother. And the latest horrific incidence of this kind took place at the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, in February of 2018. The shooter took the lives of 14 students and 3 school employees. As a response to these shootings, law enforcement has collaborated with schools to implement the use of school resource officers, emergency evaluation/reaction drills, and new policies regarding school violence.

INTRODUCTION

In the 1980s and 1990s, a veritable epidemic of lethal violence erupted in schools across the United States. Americans witnessed a new and disturbing social phenomenon: school rampage shootings executed by disturbed and alienated present or former male students who decided to settle grudges against peers, teachers, or administrators with bullets and sometimes even bombs. Such violence seemed to commence with the Columbine High School massacre on April 20, 1999, with a total of 15 dead and 23 wounded. Dylan Klebold, 18, and Eric Harris, 17, students at Columbine High School in Littleton,

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Colorado, arrived at their school with the purpose of committing a large-scale massacre. Equipped with firearms and explosives, they shot and killed twelve students and a teacher before turning the guns on themselves. Shootings at Columbine High School, Red Lake Senior High School, in Red Lake, Minnesota, and Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, have shaken a fundamental belief that children are safe in school. These tragic events resulted in expansive policy changes across our nation in the years to follow.

During the past decade, school violence has once again been at the center of national attention. It has become a public health issue beyond individual behaviors that violate the mission, climate, and need of a school to be free of drugs, weapons, and acts of violence towards fellow students, staff, or teachers. Although a vast majority of students will never experience school violence, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2014) argues that approximately 2% of all homicides among school-aged children occur on school property. School violence has demanded responses from various entities within schools and mobilized support from policy makers, practitioners, researchers, and law enforcement (Anderson, Allen, & Jenkins, 2016).

This chapter will explore four high profile school shooting incidents, which occurred at Columbine High School, Red Lake Senior High School, Sandy Hook Elementary School, and the most recent shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. These events in American history haunt the surviving victims, families of the victims, and the public. Subsequently, people have sought out justice and change so that these horrific types of school violence will not happen again. Law enforcement policies started to mold to the needs and demand for protection against school violence. An examination of law enforcement's response to these critical incidents in academic institutions is also provided.

COLUMBINE HIGH SCHOOL SHOOTING

Littleton, Colorado, a suburb of Denver, was founded in 1890 after 245 residents voted to incorporate the town; the 13-square-mile city is now home to more than 44,000 people. Littleton has top-ranked primary schools, multiple higher education establishments, and more than 2,000 diverse businesses. With such incredible characteristics, this is a place where no one would expect one of the most horrific school shootings to take place.

On April 20, 1999, two high school students, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, arrived at Columbine High School and planted two duffel bags containing homemade bombs in the school cafeteria. The bombs were programmed to detonate at the same time fellow students were filling the cafeteria for their lunch break – the one point in the day when a vast number of students would be in one place – a perfect opportunity for Klebold and Harris to achieve maximum casualties. Approximately three miles away from Columbine, Klebold and Harris planted a diversionary bomb in a field to detonate at a specific time and draw attention away from the high school (contrary to their plan, the bomb only partially detonated, causing just a small fire that was quickly extinguished). When the bombs in the cafeteria failed to go off, the shooters decided to head into the school and ultimately shot and killed 12 Columbine students and one teacher before taking their own lives (Brown & Merritt, 2002).

At approximately 11:19 a.m. MST, Klebold and Harris made their way through the west entrance of the school and started to shoot at people running in the hallways, including one teacher, Coach “Dave” Sanders. Coach Sanders was trying to clear the hallways when he was struck by a bullet; eventually he was pulled inside a classroom where he would die hours later waiting for help. The largest number of

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