Chapter 8

Sometimes They Come Back:
Examining the Threat of Associated and Non–Associated and/or Mentally Ill School Violence Perpetrators

Gordon A. Crews
Tiffin University, USA

ABSTRACT

In this chapter it is argued that school violence and its potential in K-12 schools cannot be dealt with by simply removing the troublesome/problematic students from classrooms and/or school grounds. The expelling, suspending, incarcerating, or placing of a juvenile in an alternative school setting may only increase their anger against their former school and teachers. An anger which may continue to grow throughout their lives. Moreover, there is a growing trend of students who have failed to achieve in life returning to their former school and committing acts of violence. The author focuses on two types of these perpetrators. First, associated and/or mentally ill perpetrators who target a school of which they have negative past or current involvement, and, second, non-associated and/or mentally ill perpetrators who target a school of which they had no direct past or current involvement but instead see the school as a “symbol of innocence” or something missing in their lives.

INTRODUCTION

Americans must realize that K-12 school violence and its potential cannot be dealt with by simply removing the troublesome or problematic students from classrooms and schools. The expelling, suspending, or placing of a juvenile in an alternative school setting may only increase their anger against their former school and teachers. This may be part of the reasons for the growing trend of students who have failed or continued to have negative issues in their lives returning to their former school and committing acts of violence.

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The purpose of this chapter is to examine the potential threat of Associated and Non-Associated and/or Mentally Ill school violence perpetrators. For this research, Associated and/or Mentally Ill school violence perpetrators were identified as offenders who were generally older than more traditional types of offenders and targeted a school of which they have past or current involvement. These are most often former students who return to their previous school to commit a violent act. This violence may be against a former teacher, coach, or principal, or simply against the school as a whole. For most of these types of school violence perpetrators, the K-12 school was the place where they experienced their first failures, abuse, and mistreatment.

The Non-Associated and/or Mentally Ill school violence perpetrator, on an intellectual level, may be the most interesting of all types of offenders. They are also the type of offender who is most reluctant to offer any true insight into way they chose the K-12 school as a target for their violence. A great deal of this is obviously due to the high percentage of these offenders who were and remain mentally ill. These are not past students who returned to their previous school to commit a violent act, but, instead, targeted an unfamiliar school for other reasons. These reasons range widely from one seeing the school as a “symbol of innocence” or a location to harm others at a time in their lives where all of their hopes and dreams are still alive and possible. These types of offenders feel they are no longer at that level nor will they ever be so again.

**Background Research**

This chapter resulted as part of a comprehensive on-going research project investigating the causes of K-12 school violence and disturbance in America. Between 2008 and 2012, 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+ 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 to 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 the separating of them by “type” of school violence perpetrator for more in-depth analysis. From extensive review of the cases, surveys, and interviews, four (4) types of offenders were identified: