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The American Gun Culture: Potential Impact on K-12 School Violence

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Abstract

Most researchers insist on combining all school shootings/violence incidents into one type of *act* and therefore one type of *actor* and one type of *event*. However, public mass shootings, university environments, international incidents, and K-12 school shootings and violence are not the same. They have different catalysts, motivations, types of occurrence, and offenders. The research for this work is part of a comprehensive examination of 78 currently incarcerated U.S. K-12 school violence offenders and their acts between 1979 and 2011 in 33 states. Topics examined include: weapons used and injuries incurred, availability of guns, where the gun or weapon was obtained, the number of weapons used, the rounds of ammunition available, the number of potential victims, and the number of individuals killed or injured. In addition, these findings will be presented as they relate to an author developed four-category typology of K-12 school violence perpetrators: traditional school violence perpetrators, gang related school violence perpetrators, associated school violence perpetrators, and non-associated school violence perpetrators. This study intends to contribute to the national debate about American gun culture and the impact of interest in and availability of guns and other weapons on K-12 school violence in the U.S.

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 high-powered automatic weapons are used and extensive physical harm is caused seem to bring about the most attention. 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 new school-related shooting brings about renewed controversy about the vast number of weapons readily available to juveniles across the nation.

This chapter is the result of a comprehensive and on-going research project investigating myriad causes of K-12 school violence and disturbance in America. It involves an extensive examination of 78 incarcerated U.S. K-12 school violence offenders and their acts between 1979

and 2011 in 33 states. Each of the incidents examined in this study involved the use of some type of weapon (*e.g.*, small knife, .22 caliber pistol, high-powered automatic rifle, or propane tank). We present select findings that focus on: weapons used and injuries incurred, the availability of guns, where the gun or weapon was obtained, the number of weapons used, the rounds of ammunition available, the number of potential victims, and the number killed or injured. In addition, these findings are presented as they relate to an author-developed typology of K-12 school violence perpetrators: traditional, gang-related, associated and non-associated. We intend for this study to contribute to the national debate about American gun culture and the impact of interest in and availability of guns and other weapons on K-12 school violence in the U.S.

Review of the Literature

Since 16-year old Brenda Spencer used “I don’t like Mondays” as her justification for killing 2 and injuring 9 people with rifle fire at Cleveland Elementary School across from her home in San Diego, California in 1979, researchers have attempted to determine correlates for this extreme type of juvenile delinquency and school violence. While school shootings remain, especially on a large scale, relatively rare (Crews, 2016; Crews, Crews, & Burton, 2013) in the percentage and type of school violence in general, they cause the most concern for parents, teachers, law enforcement, and educational administrators. In addition to the fear these types of events cause, they also bring about a great deal of debate on proper responses. Some feel that stringent zero tolerance policies are the answer while others argue for more gun control in society (Lawrence & Birkland, 2004). Some argue that increased counseling and service to young people is the answer while others argue for the increased use of school expulsion and the building of more juvenile correctional facilities (Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2001).

Research on agenda setting is useful for examining the media's role in elevating these issues to the national spotlight. Research in agenda setting (Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2001) (*i.e.*, a process through which the mass media communicate the relative importance of various issues and events to the public) has demonstrated that dramatic news events (such as a high school shooting) can drive particular issues (such as gun control) to the top of media and governmental agendas. Debates and discussions about school shooting often see varying views converging on the gun-control aspect of the problem, but they often substantially diverge on other understandings of what kind of problem such events represent and how to address it.

Many argue that the differing institutional structure and incentives of the news media and politicians can create or inhibit interinstitutional positive feedback in the problem-defining process often based on personal political agendas (*i.e.*, framing issues to move issues forward in desired direction) (Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2001). Agenda divergences are amplified when prominent politicians cue the media to follow particular story lines that depart from actual effective and meaningful legislative activity. Obviously, political events and policy discussion set parameters for debate and help to determine how an issue comes to be defined. Though existing research has examined the effects of alternative representations of political issues on public opinion, less attention has been given to highly salient issues, such as gun policy, and the potential effect of framing on causal attributions of blame for tragic events (Lawrence & Birkland, 2004).

The debate about solutions to school violence incidents where firearms are used is interesting and ironic at the same time. Many argue for more firearms on school grounds such as armed security or police to combat the issue, while others argue for less (Crews, Crews, & Burton, 2013). Studies suggest that mass shootings often share two common characteristics.

The shooters are very often mentally ill and many use guns with large-capacity magazines, allowing them to fire multiple rounds of ammunition without reloading (Kimmel, M.S. and Mahler, M. (2003). As policymakers consider options to reduce such gun violence, many argue (Crews, Crews, & Burton, 2013) they should understand public attitudes about various violence-prevention proposals, including policies affecting persons with mental illness; past research findings on Americans' attitudes about policies for curbing gun violence need to be updated.

Conducting any type of research in regards to school violence and disturbance occurring in K-12 American schools is extremely difficult. It is difficult to locate information due to inconsistencies in definitions of school violence versus school disruption and lack of proper record-keeping. 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. Most early information on school disturbance and problems is primarily anecdotal or simply not available, with even the very definition of "school" changing over time. Further, many forms of individual aggression, such as juvenile misbehavior, were not a matter of great public concern and attention until 1960s. It was not until 1970s that many school districts started keeping comprehensive data on student criminality on their campuses. This is primarily due to the increased demand after the civil rights movement and anti-Vietnam war efforts from the general public for institutions and governmental agencies to be more accountable and transparent.

Throughout history, even definitions of what constituted school disturbance have varied. Reporting procedures have varied, and continue to vary, among school districts across the United States. Local school administrators have historically played down their problems to give the impression that they controlled their school situations completely.

We have found that as of late 2017, no other study has surveyed or interviewed as many perpetrators or examined as many events as have been studied in this research. 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 (CO) shooting as the foundation for their extensively utilized report entitled, *The School Shooter: A Threat Assessment Perspective*.

Trying to determine the number of potential victims for any type of violence is difficult. This is definitely the case when studying school-related violence. The number of potential victims may be reported as only the students in a particular classroom or hallway (*e.g.*, 2 to 10) or, in some random shootings, the entire study body (*e.g.*, 150 or more) might be at risk. Attempting to examine the number of potential victims is difficult given the myriad types of school violence incidents. It can be argued that when a violent act occurs on or near a school's property, all children are at risk.

It is obvious that more research is needed into the true underlying causes of juvenile violence in general in schools, but especially these horrific types of events. There is also the need for more research related to Americans' fears about school violence and the inherent policy debates. The majority of the studies dealing with this topic demonstrate a strong tendency to group all school violence together because it is something that scares people so much, rather than think about it in a more nuanced fashion and consider how policy may also need to be nuanced. This study attempts to address the need to examine incidents of school violence in greater detail to foster more nuanced understanding of events and perpetrators to inform the policy debate.

Theoretical Perspective

For the overall research project, the theoretical perspective used is the concept of Functionalism, also known as Structural-Functional Theory. The structural-functional approach is a perspective in sociology that sees society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability (Spencer, 1898). It asserts that human lives are guided by social structures, which are relatively stable patterns of social behavior. One of the key ideas in Structural Functionalism is that society is made-up of groups or institutions, which are cohesive, share common norms, and have a definitive culture. Functionalist theorists examine social practices and their impact on society and its constituent subgroups and define these social practices as any social occurrences that have a pattern and are repetitive in their nature (Khromina, 2007). These social practices include social roles, social structures, social norms and social institutions.

The application of Structural Functionalism to issues of school violence require that we remember that the individuals who commit these crimes are neither aberrant one offs nor their demonized depictions in media coverage of such events, but individuals within a greater demographic of young people and students that as a whole have similar motivations, strains, and aptitudes concerning stress management. In this way, Functionalism allows us to view these instances as extreme manifestations of stressors and value norms prevalent throughout society, but more overtly and simply expressed by a subset of that society that is more impressionable and less experienced in the nonviolent resolution of conflict and stress. It is difficult to pinpoint the exact influences on any one act or actor; it is less difficult to show the relationship between a culture's value system regarding firearms and the use of those firearms by one demographic within that society, in this case students.

It can also be argued that this relationship goes both ways. Various studies argue that politicians use the perception of high crime rates as a platform for their elections (Takacs, 2009). These false uses of important issues are visible in poll data through participants' higher interpretation of crime rates during election years. Taking attention away from the real issues at hand, and concentrating instead on crime and violence which is usually 'battled' with the increase of incarceration rates (Hollander, 1991). Juveniles use violence and therefore crime to serve many functions: in order to belong to a group, to defend themselves against their environment, in order to get monetary benefits that they are unable to attain through other means and as a way to express and filter out their internal rage (Tetlack, 1984). Simplifying this issue for political motives creates a potential feedback loop between the fear of gun violence and the need for guns to protect ourselves from violence.

This chapter is a piece of a larger body of research focusing on individuals who commit extreme forms of violence in K-12 institutions. This research aims to shed light on the specific motivations of these individuals, as well as the context within which they acted. This is often set in contrast to public perception, our understanding of both these acts of violence and the actors heavily skewed by social outrage, the media's framing, and our own general ignorance do to lack of such nuanced research. The use of Structural Functionalism in light of this more nuanced understanding of school shooters allows us to analyze the beginnings of violence, or at least the means by which this violence is perpetrated, as a function of social norms and values, rather than an outlier that exists in spite of it.

Methodology

In order to consider possible relationships between gun culture and school violence, this study set out to examine instances of school violence in greater depth, starting with a survey of

convicted perpetrators and then conducting a content analysis of media sources about the events in which they were involved. The following is a brief overview of the research population and methods used to gather information on the myriad potential causes of K-12 school violence and disturbance in America.

The desired population for this study was convicted school violence perpetrators who had committed violent acts in American K-12 schools and on school property and who were alive and incarcerated at the time of the study. Between 2008 and 2011, all publicly available lists and news reports (*i.e.*, news reports, governmental sites, and school violence research sites) 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, resulting in 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, once the list of offenders of these 120 incidents was identified, the appropriate state correctional system database was extensively searched to determine which of these offenders 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.

Next, descriptive data from publicly available secondary sources (*e.g.*, court transcripts, news reports, journal articles, school violence research sites, 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 more comprehensive portrait of K-12 school violence in the United States in comparison to the way that school violence is typically reported in the United States. It also

allowed the separating of offenders 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.

Traditional school violence perpetrators 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 were defined as those who were identified (either through self or law enforcement identification) 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 were identified as offenders who were generally much older and targeted a school with which they may (*Associated*) or may not (*Non-Associated*) have had involvement. These are either past students who returned to their former school to commit a violent act or targeted a school with 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).

For this study, the following was the population sample:

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)

Study Limitations

In regards to the entire research study (much of which is not discussed in this chapter), the potential limitation for this particular study is that various conclusions are drawn from a

small sample of respondents. There could also be concerns over the timespan of 1979 to 2011 (*i.e.*, no “recent” cases examined).

We feel that limitations are minimized in parts of the overall research project given the extensiveness of a survey instrument (involving 365 variables), number of personal interviews and other on-going efforts to maintain contact with research population (e.g., phone calls and letters). 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. In light of these considerations, a decision was made to limit the sample for the overall research project to incarcerated individuals whose offenses were committed in or before 2011.

For this chapter, the data analysis did not exceed simple percentage calculation based on results from original research. While this data was eventually entered into a database, the findings presented here do not offer the results of more extensive statistical analysis or tests.

Results

The following is an overview of the results of this research as it relates to the potential impact of the *American Gun Culture* and the resulting interest in, knowledge of, and availability of guns and weapons in the United States upon K-12 American school violence. Results are presented as they relate to each of four categories of offenders (traditional, gang-related, associated and non-associated), and a summary of characteristics relating to each category of offender is also offered.

Availability and Source of Weapons

The following is an overview of the availability, source, and type of weapon used in the school violence incidents studied. Overall, the findings call into question many commonly held beliefs about school violence.

Availability of Weapons

The following 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.



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, either using a weapon which was a gift to them or stealing one or more from their parents. An interesting phenomenon 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).

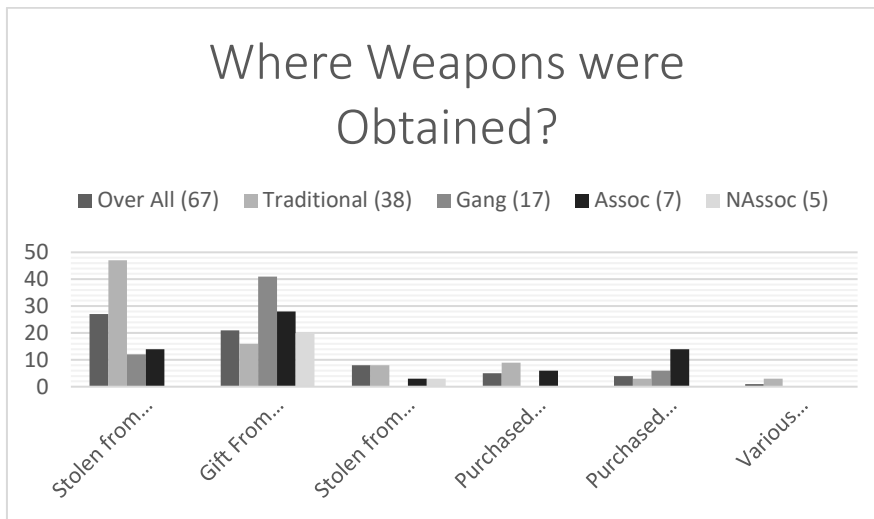
Some parents had been advised to choose a hobby that they could do together with their troubled child – some chose sharing firearms.

The *Gang-Related* school violence perpetrators followed this trend but most often reported that they had obtained their weapons from prior thefts (21%) or from friends (41%). Being generally older many *Associated* school violence perpetrators reported that they simply used weapons that they legally owned (6%), while *Non-Associated* school violence perpetrators also owned the weapons used, but these weapons were mostly items such as vehicles, propane tanks, and machetes.

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.

As is evident, 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. While almost half (41%) of the *Gang-Related* school violence perpetrators received theirs from friends. The generally older *Associated* school violence perpetrators reported that most of them (21%) were obtained as gifts from their parents. Interestingly, the *Non-Associated* school violence perpetrators almost equally (14%) reported that their weapons were obtained as gifts from parents, stolen from parents, gifts or loans from friends, and purchased legally.



Number and Types of Weapons

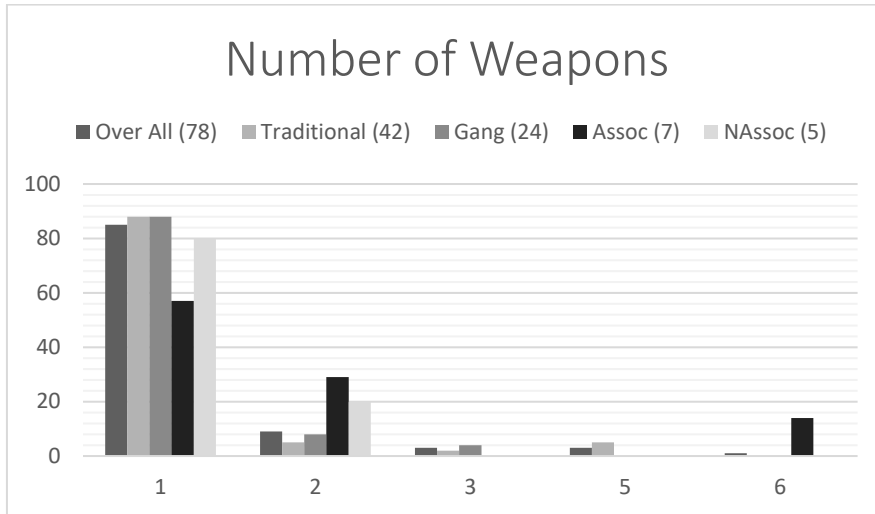
Incidents where large caliber or large numbers of weapons are used seem to receive the most attention and resulting headlines. While the number of weapons used in acts of school violence varies greatly, it becomes apparent that the variance is probably due to the various types of offenders and their 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. 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. *Gang-Related* school violence perpetrators were also mostly (87%) found to have used a single weapon.

In contrast to these groups, *Associated* school violence perpetrators had one weapon a little over half the time (57%) and two weapons 29% of the time, but 14% did have at least

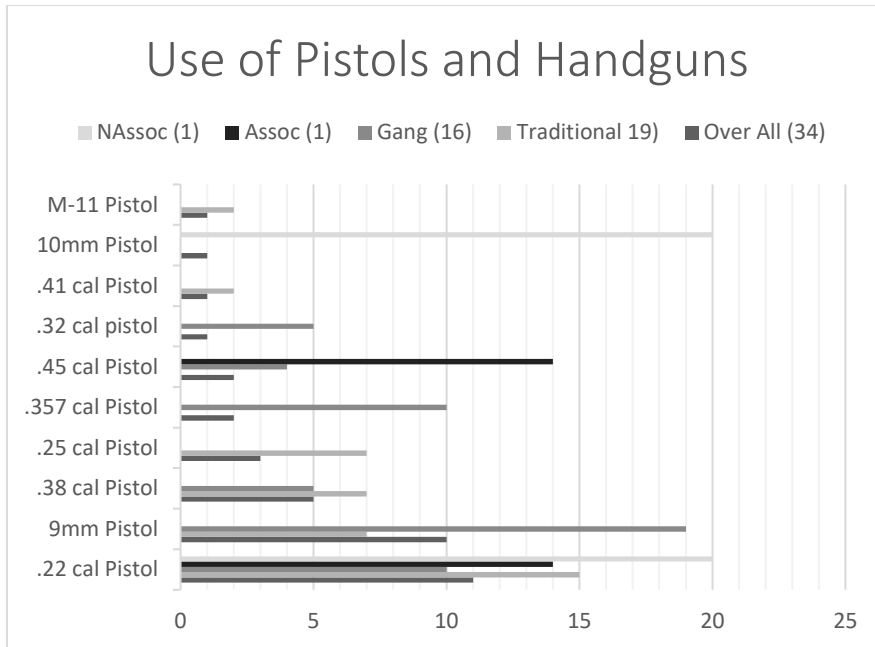
six weapons with them at the time of their offense. The *Non-Associated* school violence perpetrator was less likely than the *Associated* perpetrator to possess two weapons, doing so only 20% of the time.



Types of Weapons

The following is a brief examination of the types of weapons used in the school violence incidents explored in this study. Given the use of varying types of weapons, this topic is broken down into use of pistols/handguns, shotguns/rifles, weapons other than firearms, and the use of multiple weapons.

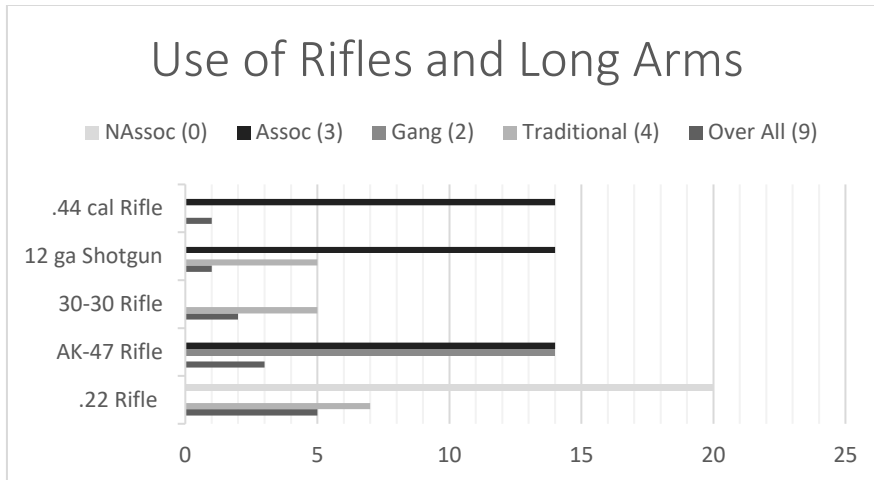
Types of weapons used: pistols/handguns



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.

Gang-Related school violence perpetrators mostly (19%) preferred the 9mm semi-automatic pistol. But they also used guns ranging from .22 caliber pistols to .45 caliber pistols. This may be due to the fact that many of the weapons are stolen from various homes, business, or vehicles. The *Associated* school violence perpetrators were almost evenly distributed between use of .22 caliber pistols (14%) and .45 caliber hand-guns (14%). *Non-Associated* school violence perpetrators were divided evenly between .22 caliber pistols and 10 mm pistols (20%) and were more likely to use other types of weapons.

Types of weapons used: shotguns/rifles

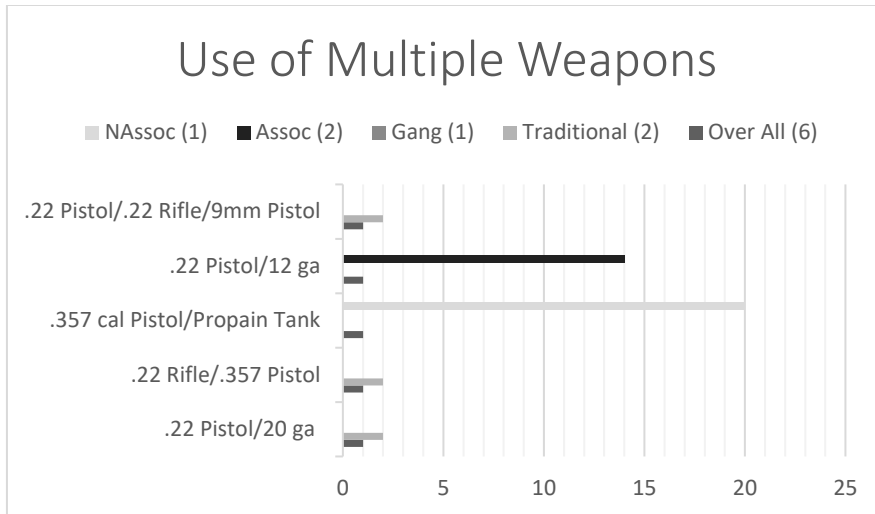


While not used as often overall, shotguns and rifles made up a significant percentage of the types of weapons used. In these incidents, 12% involved weapons ranging from a common 12-gauge shotgun to the less common AK-47. The *Traditional* school violence perpetrators used the .22 caliber rifle (7%) and 30-30 rifle use was a close second (5%). The only weapon of this type reported to be used by *Gang-Related* school violence perpetrators was the AK-47 (14%). Interestingly, the *associated* school violence perpetrators used the 12-gauge shot-gun, .44 caliber rifle, and AK-47 equally at 14%. For the *Non-Associated* school violence perpetrators, only 20% used a long gun, a .22 caliber rifle.

Types of weapons used: multiple weapons

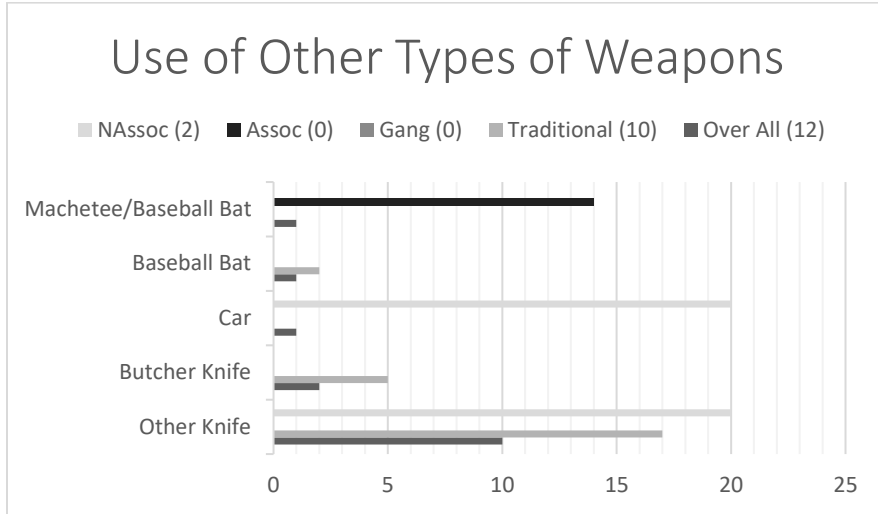
The vast majority of the incidents (85%) only involved one weapon. Overall, only 5% of the incidents found the offender to have more than one weapon (the remaining 5% utilizing something that would not conventionally be considered a *weapon*, such as their hands). *Traditional* school violence perpetrators averaged having more than one weapon approximately 2% of the time. From this study, *Gang-Related* school violence perpetrators were found to only have one weapon used during their violence. Unfortunately, *associated* school violence

perpetrators were found to have at least two weapons 20% of the time, and *Non-Associated* school violence perpetrators were found to be the same, at 14% of the time.

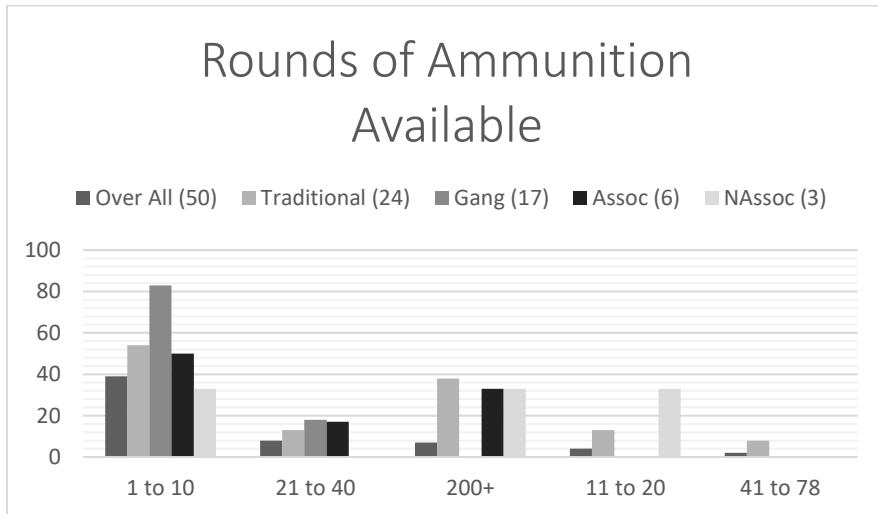


Types of weapons used: other than firearms

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). Interestingly, *Gang-Related* school violence perpetrators were not found to have used any other type of weapon except a firearm in this study. For *Associated* school violence perpetrators, 14% used work tools (most often a machete) or common household items such as baseball bats to harm students at the schools they attacked, while *Non-Associated* school violence perpetrators used a knife (20%) or their own car (20%) most of the time.



Rounds of Ammunition Available



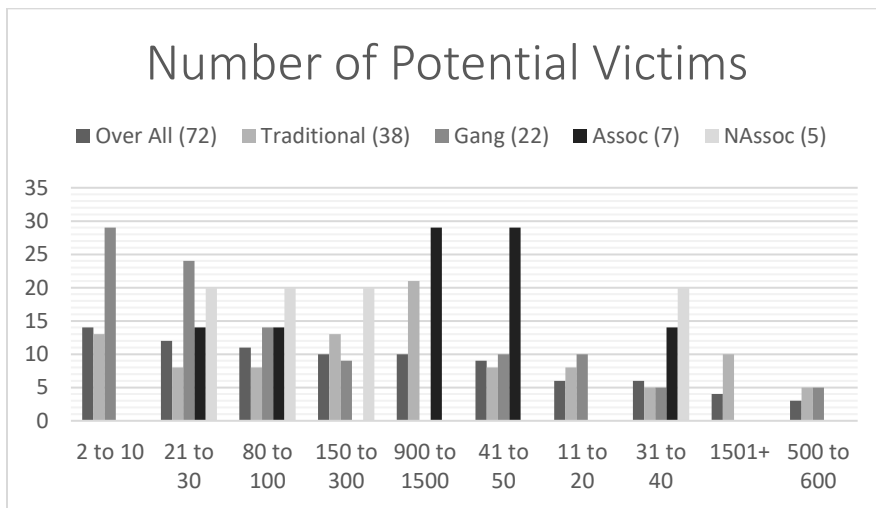
An examination of these incidents found that, overall, 39% of the offenders had 1 to 10 rounds available to them, generally based on the capacity and number of bullets the particular weapon would hold. This was true for 54% of the *Traditional* school violence perpetrators, but 38% had over 200 rounds with them at the time of their act. Most *Gang-Related* school violence perpetrators used one weapon during the commission of their act, so 83% of these

incidents involved 1 to 10 rounds of ammunition. The *Associated* school violence perpetrators findings are interesting in that 33% of these offenders had 1 to 10 rounds, but the same percentage had 11 to 20 and over 200 rounds. *Non-Associated* school violence perpetrators were similar for those that used actual handguns or long arms; 50% had 1 to 10 rounds, but 33% had over 200 rounds available.

Potential Victims, 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.

Potential Victims

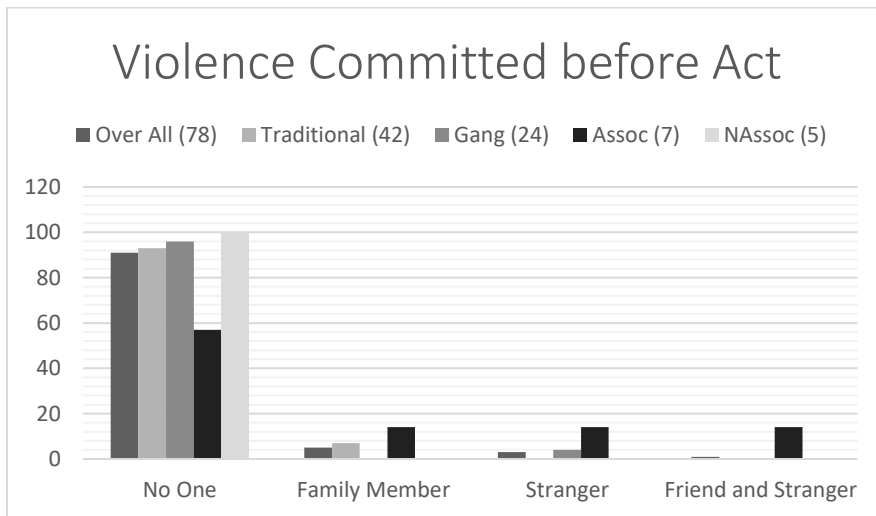


Overall, 14% of the incidents had 2 to 10 potential victims and 4% had over 1,500 potential victims. *Traditional* school violence perpetrators committed acts almost evenly where 2 to 300 students were potential targets, but 21% committed acts which put an entire student body at risk (such as random shooting in schools). *Gang-Related* school violence perpetrators occurred with only 2 to 30 potential victims approximately half the time (53%). This is probably due to the fact that most of these types of acts involved one or two targets with only a few bystanders present during an attack. *Associated* school violence perpetrators ranged equally (14%)

between potential victims from 21 to 300. This is probably due to the fact that most of these types of offenders have a target in mind (*e.g.*, past teacher, coach, or principal) and seek that individual out upon whom to commit their violence. *Non-Associated* school violence perpetrators follow this same pattern (20%), although they are simply targeting the entire school, often smaller rural or suburban schools.

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 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 harmed others before coming to school and others while fleeing the scene of their crime.

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. *Gang-Related* school violence perpetrators only did this 4% of the time. This trend changed when examining the actions of

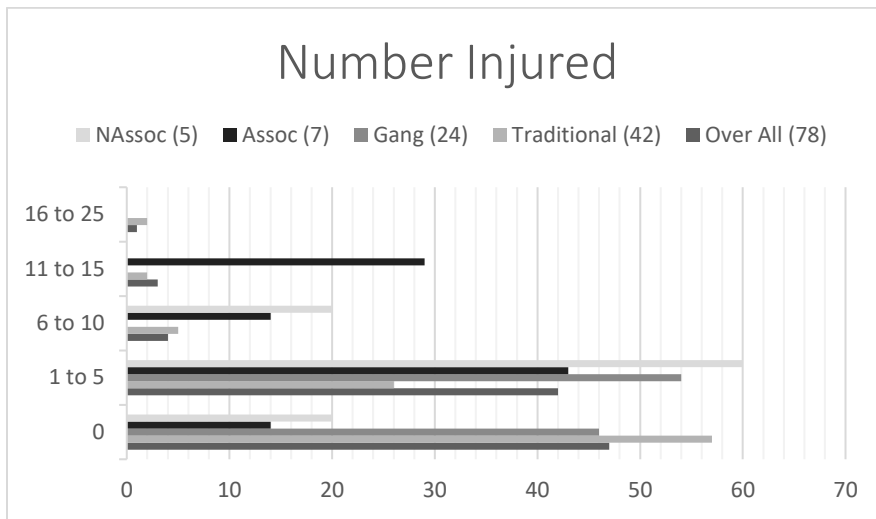
other types of offenders. For *Associated* school violence perpetrators, almost half (42%) did actually hurt others prior to seeking their target at a school, but *Non-Associated* school violence perpetrators did not do so at all (100%).

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. *Gang-Related* school violence perpetrators followed this trend in that they did not kill anyone in 21% of their acts, but did in the vast majority (75%) of their acts. This is probably due to the fact that they often have one or two targets and seek just those targets out and no others. *Associated* school violence perpetrators did not take a life in 29% of their incidents, but were responsible for at least 4 deaths in 14% of their acts. A similar trend is found in *Non-Associated* school violence perpetrators. This group did not take a life in 60% of their attacks, but took 2 in 40% of the attacks.

Number Injured



The following examines the findings related to the number physically 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. *Gang-Related* school violence perpetrators saw 46% with no injuries, but one to five individuals were harmed in 54% of their events. A trend which is extremely frightening is the fact that 86% of all attacks by *Associated* school violence perpetrators resulted in the harm of others at a school. This finding was the same for *Non-Associated* school violence perpetrators, with 80% of their attacks resulting in one to ten individuals harmed.

Summary of Characteristics Displayed By Each Group of Perpetrators

Traditional School Violence Perpetrators

Characteristics of Weapons Used and Injuries Incurred by Traditional School Violence Perpetrators	
Were Weapons Readily Available to Offender?	Yes
Where Was Gun/Weapon Obtained	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

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

It also appears that this type of offender is one most likely to keep their plans secret until violence occurs. Most find that 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 – they are probably not in legal trouble, not in counseling, and not in therapy. It appears from this research that in the vast majority of incidents, one day they reached their final straw and committed their violent act. If they decided to use a weapon it was most often from their own home or the home of a friend.

Gang-Related School Violence Perpetrators

It is extremely interesting that this type of offender seemed not to suffer from many of the issues that other types of school violence perpetrators did in regards to views of self and others. They appeared often to be the type of offender who was most worried about the consequences of their actions upon loved ones.

As with all types of offenders they appeared to have ease in locating a weapon to use, most often obtaining one from a friend or associate.

Characteristics of Weapons Used and Injuries Incurred by Gang-Related School Violence Perpetrators	
Were Weapons Readily Available To Offender?	Yes
Where Was Gun/Weapon Obtained?	From friend
Number of Weapons	1
Rounds of Ammunition Available	1 to 10
Types of Weapons Used	9mm pistol
Number of Potential Victims	2 to 10
Killed or Injured Anyone outside School before or After School Incident	No
Number Killed	0
Number Injured	1

Based on this study, it appears that the *Gang-Related* school violence perpetrator most often will generally have one weapon, very often a 9mm pistol with 2 to 10 rounds available. The vast majority will not have killed or injured anyone immediately prior to their act and will most often not kill an individual at the school but will injure at least one bystander.

Associated School Violence Perpetrators

This type of offender was the first group of offenders in this study to use varying types of weapons from handguns to baseball bats.

Characteristics of Weapons Used and Injuries Incurred by Associated School Violence Perpetrators	
Were Weapons Readily Available to Offender?	Yes
Where Was Gun/Weapon Obtained?	Stolen, gifts, legally owned
Number of Weapons	1
Rounds of Ammunition Available	1 to 10
Types of Weapons Used	.22 caliber pistol, .45 caliber pistol, AK-47, 12-gauge shotgun, .44 caliber rifle, machete, and baseball bat
Number of Potential Victims	41 to 50
Killed or Injured Anyone outside School before or After School Incident	No
Number Killed	0
Number Injured	1

Based on this study, it appears that the *Associated* school violence perpetrator's weapons were easily found and were very often legally owned and usually given as gifts by others. Interestingly, they seemed to be much more prevalent in smaller student bodies with lower amounts of potential victims. It also appeared that they had not injured anyone prior to their act of school violence but did injure at least one during the event.

Non-Associated School Violence Perpetrators

The *Non-Associated* 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.

In regards to the weapons used and harm caused, this type of offender had easy access to weapons in that they generally used items which they legally own.

Characteristics of Weapons Used and Injuries Incurred by Non-Associated School Violence Perpetrators	
Were Weapons Readily Available To Offender?	Yes
Where Was Gun/Weapon Obtained?	Gift from family or legally owned
Number of Weapons	1
Rounds of Ammunition Available	1 to 200
Types of Weapons Used	.22 caliber pistol, .22 caliber rifle, knife, vehicle, and propane tank
Number of Potential Victims	21 to 300
Killed or Injured Anyone outside School before or After School Incident	no
Number Killed	0
Number Injured	1 to 5

Based on this study, it appears that the *Non-Associated* school violence perpetrators often use a .22 caliber pistol or rifle, but more often the weapon of choice was a vehicle. When a

vehicle is used they appeared to most often crash into school property locations and then attack students with other items such as propane tanks and machetes. When they did use firearms the study suggests they are the one group to bring the most ammunition. Again, they most often appear to attack smaller schools with smaller numbers of potential victims. They also appear to be the type of offender who will do the most harm and injuries to others at 1 to 5.

Discussion

As discussed in this chapter, 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. As with all types of offenders, weapons will be readily available, most often found in their own homes, and stolen from parents. The following is a seldom examined topic in school violence research: the actual number of rounds with and available to the offender.

The number of weapons during an incident is, of course, important, but the amount of ultimate damage that weapon can do will vary on the amount of ammunition available. It is a common perception that in most school violence incidents a long gun, like the AK-47, is the weapon of choice. Based on the findings of this study, this does not appear to be the case for all types of school violence perpetrators.

There is a common perception that most school violence incidents involve semi-automatic high powered weapons. 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.

Data from this study suggest that 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 a high-powered automatic weapon. It must be noted that some offenders who target schools for other than rational 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.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is hoped that this work will contribute to the exploration of the extremely complicated phenomenon of school violence in American K-12 schools. Most researchers insist on combining all school shootings/violence incidents into one type of *act* and therefore one type of *actor*. However, there is a great deal of variation in these incidents as seen in the evidence presented in this study. Public mass shootings, university environments, international incidents, and K-12 school shootings and violence are not the same. They have different catalysts, motivations, types of occurrence, and offenders. Hopefully, this work will demonstrate the importance of not generalizing views on violence causation and find the benefit of the unique nuances that can be found when examining in detail one type of offender committing their acts in one type of environment.

Finally, it is hoped that the work presented will assist others in the national debate about the impact of the *American Gun Culture* and the resulting interest in, and availability of, guns and weapons in the United States upon K-12 American school violence.

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