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Office of Educational Research and Improvement
National Center for Education Statistics



U.S. Department of Justice
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Executive Summary

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Indicators of School Crime and Safety, 2000

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FOREWORD

The national focus on school crime and safety continues to be of paramount importance. During the past year, overall levels of crime in school decreased, and students seem to feel more safe in school than they did in the last few years. Yet, violence and theft still mar the school experiences of many students and challenge parents, teachers, and school officials to respond.

Continued progress in improving the safety of our children entrusted to schools relies on having accurate information about the nature, extent, and scope of the problem. This report is intended to provide information that will assist in developing policies and/or programs to prevent and cope with violence and crime in schools.

This is the third edition of *Indicators of School Crime and Safety*, a joint effort by the Bureau of Justice Statistics and the National Center for Education Statistics. The report provides detailed statistical information to inform the nation on the current nature of crime in schools, and is a companion document to the *Annual Report on School Safety: 2000*. The *Annual Report* is a joint publication of the Departments of Education and Justice that provides an overview of the nature and scope of school crime and describes actions schools and communities can take to address this critical issue. The two reports respond to a 1998 request by President Clinton for an annual report card on school violence.

This edition of *Indicators* contains the most recent available data on school crime and safety drawn from a number of statistical series supported by the federal government. These data include results from a study of violent deaths in school, sponsored by the Department of Education and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the 1999 School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), which is conducted by the Census Bureau on behalf of our agencies.

The Bureau of Justice Statistics and National Center for Education Statistics continue to work towards providing more timely and complete data on the issue of school-related violence and safety. Not only is this report available on the Internet in its entirety, but individual indicators are updated there throughout the year as new data become available. The inclusion of detailed data from the full calendar year 1999 NCVS (this edition includes only selected statistics from January–June 1999) and from a new survey of school administrators on crime and victimization in the schools is planned for next year's edition of *Indicators*.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Schools should be safe and secure places for all students, teachers, and staff members. Without a safe learning environment, teachers cannot teach and students cannot learn. In fact, as the data in this report show, more victimizations happen away from school than at school.¹ In 1998, students were about two times as likely to be victims of serious violent crime away from school as at school (Indicator 2).

In 1998, students ages 12 through 18 were victims of more than 2.7 million total crimes at school (Indicator 2). In that same year, these students were victims of about 253,000 serious violent crimes at school (that is, rape, sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assault). There were also 60 school-associated violent deaths in the United States between July 1, 1997 and June 30, 1998—including 47 homicides (Indicator 1).

The total nonfatal victimization rate for young people declined between 1993 and 1998. The percentage of students being victimized at school also declined over the last few years. Between 1995 and 1999, the percentage of students who reported being victims of crime at school decreased from 10 percent to 8 percent (Indicator 3). This decline was due in part to a decline for students in grades 7 through 9. Between 1995 and 1999, the prevalence of reported victimization dropped from 11 percent to 8 percent for 7th graders, from 11 percent to 8 percent for 8th graders, and from 12 percent to 9 percent for 9th graders.

However, for some types of crimes at school, rates have not changed. For example, between 1993 and 1997, the percentage of students in grades 9 through 12 who were threatened or injured with a weapon on school property in the past 12 months remained constant—at about 7 or 8 percent (Indicator 4). The percentage of students in grades 9 through 12 who reported being in a physical fight on school property in the past 12 months also remained unchanged between 1993 and 1997—at about 15 percent (Indicator 5).

As the rate of victimization in schools has declined or remained constant, students also seem to feel more secure at school now than just a few years ago. The percentage of students ages 12 through 18 who reported avoiding one or more places at school for their own safety decreased between 1995 and 1999—from 9 to 5 percent (Indicator 14). Furthermore, the percentage of students who reported that street gangs were present at their schools decreased

¹The reader should be cautious in making comparisons between victimization rates on school property and elsewhere. These data do not take into account the number of hours that students spend on school property and the number of hours they spend elsewhere.

from 1995 to 1999. In 1999, 17 percent of students ages 12 through 18 reported that they had street gangs at their schools compared with 29 percent in 1995 (Indicator 16).

There was an increase in the use of marijuana among students between 1993 and 1995, but no change between 1995 and 1997. In 1997, about 26 percent of these students had used marijuana in the last 30 days (Indicator 19). Furthermore, almost one-third of all students in grades 9 through 12 (32 percent) reported that someone had offered, sold, or given them an illegal drug on school property—an increase from 24 percent in 1993 (Indicator 20).

Therefore, the data shown in this report present a mixed picture of school safety. While overall school crime rates have declined, violence, gangs, and drugs are still evident in some schools, indicating that more work needs to be done.

ORGANIZATION OF THE CURRENT REPORT

This report, the third in a series of annual reports on school crime and safety from the Bureau of Justice Statistics and the National Center for Education Statistics, presents the latest available data on school crime and student safety. The report repeats many indicators from the 1999 report but also provides updated data on fatal and nonfatal student victimization, nonfatal teacher victimization, students' perceptions of safety and the presence of gangs, and students' avoidance of places at school. In addition, it provides new data on students' reports of being the target of derogatory hate-related language and seeing hate-related graffiti at school.

The report is organized as a series of indicators, with each indicator presenting data on a different aspect of school crime and safety. It starts with the most serious violence. There are five sections to the report: Violent Deaths at School; Nonfatal Student Victimization—Student Reports; Violence and Crime at School—Public School Principal/Disciplinarian Reports; Nonfatal Teacher Victimization at School—Teacher Reports; and School Environment. Each section contains a set of indicators that, taken together, describe a distinct aspect of school crime and safety.

Rather than relying on data from a large omnibus survey of school crime and safety, this report uses a variety of independent data sources from federal departments and agencies including the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Center for Education Statistics, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Each data source has an independent sample design, data collection method, and questionnaire design, all of which may be influenced by the unique perspective of the primary funding agency. By combining multiple and independent sources of data, it is hoped that this report will present a more complete portrait of school crime and safety than would be possible with any single source of information.

However, because the report relies on so many different data sets, the age groups, the time periods, and the types of respondents analyzed can vary from indicator to indicator. Readers should keep this in mind as they compare data from different indicators. Furthermore, while every effort has been made to keep key definitions consistent across indicators, different surveys sometimes use different definitions, such as those for specific crimes and “at school.”² Therefore, caution should be used in making comparisons between results from different data sets. Descriptions of these data sets are located in appendix B of this report.

KEY FINDINGS

Some of the key findings from the various sections of this report are as follows:³

VIOLENT DEATHS AT SCHOOL

From July 1, 1997 through June 30, 1998, there were 60 school-associated violent deaths in the United States. Forty-seven of these violent deaths were homicides, 12 were suicides, and one was a teenager killed by a law enforcement officer in the line of duty (Indicator 1). Thirty-five of the 47 school-associated homicides were of school age children. By comparison, a total of 2,752 children ages 5 through 19 were victims of homicide in the United States from July 1, 1997 through June 30, 1998. Seven of the 12 school-associated suicides occurring from July 1, 1997 through June 30, 1998 were of school age children. A total of 2,061 children ages 5 through 19 committed suicide that year.

NONFATAL STUDENT VICTIMIZATION—STUDENT REPORTS

Students ages 12 through 18 were more likely to be victims of nonfatal serious violent crime—including rape, sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assault—away from school than when they were at school (Indicator 2). In 1998, students in this age range were victims of about 550,000 serious violent crimes away from schools, compared with about 253,000 at school.

- The percentage of students in grades 9 through 12 who have been threatened or injured with a weapon on school property⁴ has not changed significantly in recent years. In 1993, 1995, and 1997, about 7 to 8 percent of students reported being threatened or injured with a weapon such as a gun, knife, or club on school property in the past 12 months (Indicator 4).

²Readers should consult the glossary of terms in appendix C for the specific definitions used in each survey.

³All comparisons reported here were statistically significant at the 0.05 level. See appendix B for details on the methods used here.

⁴Definitions for “on school property” and “at school” may differ. See appendix C for specific definitions.

- In 1998, 12- through 18-year-old students living in urban, suburban, and rural locales were equally vulnerable to serious violent crime and theft at school. Away from school, however, urban and suburban students were more vulnerable to serious violent crime and theft than were rural students. (Indicator 2).
- Younger students (ages 12 through 14) were more likely than older students (ages 15 through 18) to be victims of crime at school. However, older students were more likely than younger students to be victimized away from school (Indicator 2).

VIOLENCE AND CRIME AT SCHOOL—PUBLIC SCHOOL PRINCIPAL/DISCIPLINARIAN REPORTS

In 1996–97, 10 percent of all public schools reported at least one serious violent crime to the police or a law enforcement representative. Principals' reports of serious violent crimes included murder, rape or other type of sexual battery, suicide, physical attack or fight with a weapon, or robbery. Another 47 percent of public schools reported a less serious violent or nonviolent crime (but not a serious violent one). Crimes in this category include physical attack or fight without a weapon, theft/larceny, and vandalism. The remaining 43 percent of public schools did not report any of these crimes to the police (Indicator 8).

- Elementary schools were much less likely than either middle or high schools to report any type of crime in 1996–97. They were much more likely to report vandalism (31 percent) than any other crime (19 percent or less) (Indicator 9).
- At the middle and high school levels, physical attack or fight without a weapon was generally the most commonly reported crime in 1996–97 (9 and 8 per 1,000 students, respectively). Theft or larceny was more common at the high school than at the middle school level (6 versus 4 per 1,000 students) (Indicator 9).

NONFATAL TEACHER VICTIMIZATION AT SCHOOL—TEACHER REPORTS

Over the 5-year period from 1994 through 1998, teachers were victims of 1,755,000 nonfatal crimes at school, including 1,087,000 thefts and 668,000 violent crimes (rape or sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated and simple assault) (Indicator 10). This translates into 83 crimes per 1,000 teachers per year.

- In the period from 1994 through 1998, senior high school and middle/junior high school teachers were more likely to be victims of violent crimes (most of which were simple assaults) than elementary school teachers (38 and 60, respectively, versus 18 crimes per 1,000 teachers) (Indicator 10).

- In the 1993–94 school year, 12 percent of all elementary and secondary school teachers were threatened with injury by a student, and 4 percent were physically attacked by a student. This represented about 341,000 teachers who were victims of threats of injury by students that year, and 119,000 teachers who were victims of attacks by students (Indicator 11).

SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Between 1995 and 1999, the percentages of students who felt unsafe while they were at school and while they were going to and from school decreased. In 1995, 9 percent of students ages 12 through 18 sometimes or most of the time feared they were going to be attacked or harmed at school. In 1999, this percentage had fallen to 5 percent. During the same period, the percentage of students fearing they would be attacked while traveling to and from school fell from 7 percent to 4 percent (Indicator 13).

- Between 1993 and 1997, the percentage of students in grades 9 through 12 who reported carrying a weapon on school property within the previous 30 days fell from 12 percent to 9 percent (a 25 percent reduction) (Indicator 12).
- Between 1995 and 1999, the percentage of students ages 12 through 18 who avoided one or more places at school for fear of their own safety decreased, from 9 to 5 percent. In 1999, this percentage represented 1.1 million students (Indicator 14).
- Between 1995 and 1999, the percentage of students who reported that street gangs were present at their schools decreased. In 1995, 29 percent of students reported gangs being present in their schools. By 1999, this percentage had fallen to 17 percent (Indicator 16).
- In 1997, about 51 percent of students in grades 9 through 12 had at least one drink of alcohol in the previous 30 days. A much smaller percentage (about 6 percent) had at least one drink on school property during the same period (Indicator 18).
- There was an increase in the use of marijuana among students between 1993 and 1995, but no change between 1995 and 1997. About one quarter (26 percent) of ninth graders reported using marijuana in the last 30 days in 1997. However, marijuana use on school property did not increase significantly between 1993 and 1995, nor between 1995 and 1997 (Indicator 19).
- In 1995 and 1997, almost one-third of all students in grades 9 through 12 (32 percent) reported that someone had offered, sold, or given them an illegal drug on school property. This was an increase from 1993 when 24 percent of such students reported that illegal drugs were available to them on school property (Indicator 20).

- In 1999, about 13 percent of students ages 12 through 18 reported that someone at school had used hate-related words against them. That is, in the prior 6 months someone at school called them a derogatory word having to do with race/ethnicity, religion, disability, gender, or sexual orientation. In addition, about 36 percent of students saw hate-related graffiti at school (Indicator 15).

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