

Risk Assessment of School Police Officers in Addressing Public Safety Related to School Violence: A Biopsychosocialcultural Perspective

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Abstract

Acts of school violence increase awareness of the public safety role played by school police. While not every school has permanently assigned police officers, research shows they can make a positive difference. The high profile gun violence cases have increased demands for safer schools, with an argument over the best ways to fund and achieve that goal. This paper examines high profile school shootings; traumatization in the wake of school violence, the biopsychosocialcultural impact of violence on school climate, as well as student resource officer relationships with pupils, parents and the community. The comprehensive effect of school violence is best measured using a biopsychosocialcultural paradigm. Training school police for crafting a safety plan, threat assessment, and scene management are discussed. Finally, implications for forensic psychological research and practice are explored.

Keywords: Criminal psychology; School violence; Traumatization

Training and Impact of Student Resource Officers on School Violence: A Biopsychosocial Perspective

Given the notable increase in school violence occurrences throughout the 1990's and continuing through the present, and the consequent demand for revised and bolstered school safety measures, SRO's are becoming a commonplace presence in schools across the nation. Frequently referred to as a "hybrid breed", SROs fulfill a position considerably more multifaceted than that of city police officers. Tasked with synthesizing the responsibilities of law enforcement officer, counselor, teacher, and liaison between law enforcement and the community, as well as undergoing responsibilities varying from crisis prevention/intervention to attending parent-teacher meetings, these particular officers undergo extensive specialized training to successfully fulfill such a position [1].

Traumatization in the Aftermath of School Violence

The psychological consequences of a school shooting are usually observed in trauma that is usually best captured via a DSM-5 PTSD diagnosis [2]. In the aftermath of school incidents, school administrators and public safety officials and the public struggle with pointed questions flowing from one meta question: how can this type of violence or terrorism be prevented? So the discussion and politics cover gun control laws, funding and support for school safety, the value of school police, and who should be permitted to carry guns on school grounds. To what extent are laws that are already on the books being enforced? Finally, can it be logically assumed that anyone with access to assault weapons is predisposed to commit school or some other form of mass casualty violence? As these societal questions percolate, school police can play a critical role in developing a campus-based plan in anticipation of potential shooting incidents.

Brief History of School Violence

The last ten years has been dominated by the rise school violence. School violence is an international problem. Over this same time period, there has also been an increase in scholarly work that is devoted to school violence. Normally, when these incidents occur, they immediately become high profile international events. Internationally, school violence can occur in many forms [3].

Many Americans are likely unaware that this is not a recent phenomenon: one of the deadliest school shootings in history occurred decades ago. In 1927, Bath, Michigan school board member Andrew Kehoe wired the local elementary school with dynamite. This explosion claimed the lives of 32 children and 7 adults, including Kehoe and his wife, whom he killed when he destroyed their farm by a dynamite explosion. Some might assess this as an act of terror, although it is difficult to completely understand the mentality of a terrorist. In terms of psychological profiling, Kehoe was known for his impulsive responses to what most would consider minor issues. It was later suggested that the precipitating event for his violence may have been his lost election for the post of town clerk. It was also speculated that extreme stress associated with the foreclosure of his farm and increased school taxes were motivating factors [4].

Over a decade ago, the Columbine High School shootings reignited concerns about school safety and guns on campus. On April 20, 1999, as Eric Harris, 18, and Dylan Klebold, 17, opened fire in their Littleton, Colorado high school. Harris and Klebold killed 12 classmates and one teacher. They injured 21 others before ending their own lives that day. At the time, this was the largest school massacre that the U.S. had witnessed in decades. The incident led to more police on campuses, as part of a broader examination of what makes a school safer [5].

On April 16, 2007, college students were the targets, when Virginia Tech senior Seung-Hui Cho initiated an attack on his college campus, killing of 32 students and wounding 17 more people. Forensically, during the psychological autopsy following this incident, it was

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discovered that more than a year prior to the Virginia Tech Shootings, in December 2005, a district court in Montgomery County, Virginia ruled that Cho was “mentally ill” and “an imminent danger to self and others” [5].

Most recently, America has gone through a mass school shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, Connecticut. This incident was jarring to many because a majority of the victims were very young children, between the ages of five and ten. On December 14, 2012, Adam Lance, who was subsequently found to be a disturbed 20-year-old man, shot his mother in their Connecticut home. He then proceeded to his old grammar school, where authorities believe he shot the door to get it unlocked, and then went on a shooting rampage. Lanza killed 20 children and six adults at Sandy Hook, including the principal, school psychologist, and teachers making an effort to save their students’ lives. Debate over access to guns and ammunition soon followed grief over the Sandy Hook shootings. For example, a New York Times article stated Lanza “was carrying an arsenal of hundreds of rounds of deadly ammunition – enough to kill virtually every pupil in the school if given enough time” [6]. At the same time, gun advocacy groups called for increased presence of armed police officers on campus to deter would-be school shooters

At Clarksville High School in Arkansas, families have absorbed some of the lessons learned from the Sandy Hook shooting. This school has created a controversial rash plan of protection for its students. They have decided to arm more than 20 teachers and administrators with 9-mm handguns. Arkansas gun laws allow licensed security guards to carry weapons on campus. After undergoing 53 hours of training, these teachers and staff are considered guards. The superintendent at Clarksville, David Hopkins reported, “The plan we’ve been given in the past is lock your doors, turn off your lights and hope for the best. That’s not a plan” (Fox News). Fiscally, school leadership asserts that they can avoid the costs for 24-hour armed security when they have employees who are certified to utilize weapons.

There are two opposing school safety views on the aforementioned plan. On the one side, gun advocates believe the plan represents the best reaction to such a serious threat. On the other side, skeptics are concerned that a student might accidentally be shot or somehow get a gun from personnel or the arsenal on site. Some parents have expressed concern with this plan, and even removed their children out of the school, indicating that school police are trained for these situations, not educators. According to Shah [7], school personnel in Utah were permitted to carry concealed weapons onto campus for more than a decade. In several Texas school districts certain school personnel are permitted to carry concealed weapons to school.

There are cost-related concerns associated with proposals to put a school resource officer in every each school building in the U.S. For example, some estimate the cost at about 13 billion a year, or about \$500 a student. Essentially, this service, “would take up half of federal spending on elementary and secondary education if paid for by the federal government” [8].

School resource officers (SRO) are police specifically trained for working as law enforcement agents and educators in schools. Prior to the Sandy Hook shooting, Newtown had two school officers. Administratively and practically, officers assigned to school often feel marginalized from the rest of the department. Sometimes they may be deemed less critical to law enforcement needs in the wider community [9]. Following the Sandy Hook shooting, Newtown added police to

their schools. School police changed their workplace hours to better fit with the schools’ operating hours. Newtown’s goal is to expand its SRO program to have one officer in every school, but it was reported that the town lacks enough officers to fulfill that demand. “It’s very political,” Penna said. “It’s costly, they have to solve all the financial issues” [9]. According to the Center for Problem-Oriented Policing, effective school safety plans are holistic. They include school data (incident and disciplinary reports), police data, community crime and violence data, surveys from school staff students, and parents. School layout, class schedules, and specific age groups of the children inform evacuation plans. “Data collection should include a review of all aspects of the school security environment: persistent crime and disorder issues; physical and environmental considerations; threat assessments; and disaster planning” [10].

Many police foundations support SROs. Penna and Flynn are both members and spokespersons for the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO). NASRO’s primary goal is the prevention of violence in schools: “NASRO is an organization for school-based law enforcement officers, school administrators, and school security/safety professionals working as partners to protect students, school faculty and staff, and the schools they attend” (NASRO.org). The SROs, who is trained through NASRO, have three main responsibilities within schools: teacher, counselor, and law enforcement officer. NASRO places high value on these roles:

The goal of NASRO and SRO programs is to provide safe learning environments in our nation’s schools, provide valuable resources to school staff, foster a positive relationship with our nation’s youth, and develop strategies to resolve problems affecting our youth with the goal of protecting every child so they can reach their fullest potential. (NASRO.org)

NASRO believes that the presence of the local police on school grounds is imperative for the safety of students and faculty. NASRO and other organizations provide specialty training to train police officers, which combine law-enforcement skills with specialized training in the education setting. According to the Center for Problem-Oriented Policing, federal and local funding for School Resource Officers has increased in the last decade:

The COPS in Schools grant program of the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services... provided funding for SROs in and around primary and secondary schools. Since 1999, the COPS Office has been awarded over \$750 million to more than 3,000 grantees, resulting in the hiring of more than 6,500 SROs [10].

Despite increased funding, many school budgets struggle to find the resources to permanently employ an SRO. School Resource Officers and police officers can assume many public safety duties in a school system even without a permanent assignment to one school. The Center for Problem-Oriented Policing says that these roles include:

Problem-solving partnerships that pair officers with school personnel; situational crime prevention, including the use of physical barriers, security technology, and access control; participation in holistic efforts to decrease risk factors associated with violence or to increase protective factors at the individual, family, school, peer, and community level; technical assistance partnerships that focus on safety planning, crisis response planning, threat assessment, and security and safety audits; and sponsorship of youth activities and periodic in-school trainings and presentations [10].

As SRO's play the roles of educators, mental health counselors, they maintain traditional police intervention obligations, including, "threatened or actual use of weapons, other physical violence, disorderly conduct and hooliganism, the identification and disposal of hazardous or illegal materials, and criminal and disorderly behavior that take place on or immediately outside school grounds" [10].

The Biopsychosocialcultural Impact of Violence on School Climate

Engel (1977) indicated that a biopsychosocial model includes a fuller spectrum of mental and physical factors that interact with one another. The elements of the biopsychosocial model stress the operation of biological, psychological and social factors. For example, there are multifactorial responses observed in students that can include physical injury, emotional withdrawal, dysphoria, lower self-esteem, higher levels of aggression, trauma-related disorders, and the perception that school is not a safe place [11-13]. The reason for using this type of a model is that it offers a more comprehensive perspective for understanding the nature of diverse health concerns. Johnson (2013) expanded the biopsychosocial model to include a "cultural" element. The assessment or inclusion of culture is not entirely new but it has become a central factor in the mental health field [2]. In the context of school violence or terrorism, there are obvious psychological consequences that must be understood within the cultural context in which they occur. In other words, a biopsychosocialcultural response to school violence by default translates evidence-based practices into helpful experiences for the victims of these acts [14]. Given the crucial importance of culture, public safety must presume that the behavior of the perpetrators and victims can be explained by culturally-relevant behavior. The meaning that a school-age child attaches their academic experience is impacted by their culture. For example, Taiwan is one Asian society where long-standing cultural values and outside influences must be considered simultaneously when examining the relationships between risk factors and school violence [15]. Taiwanese are still partially guided by values stemming from a blend of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism [16]. To be effective, in addressing school violence or terrorism, public safety must operate within a system that is inclusive of a cultural factor. From a biological perspective, critical health issues are often challenging because of their multidimensional nature [17]. The biopsychosocial model of challenge and threat offers a theoretical explanation for the nexus between specific psychological experiences and biologically-based patterns of physiological responses. The public safety demand related to school violence requires a biopsychosocialcultural perspective because of the traditional models are insufficient to address the emerging Homeland Security needs. The issues fueled by school violence and terrorism pose a globally significant public safety challenge with diverse causal and consequential factors. A biopsychosocialcultural model prevents public safety efforts from being weakened by inadequate data during the assessment and intervention process.

The post-traumatic effects of violence on a school are most comprehensively assessed using a biopsychosocialcultural approach. That is, it is evident that the impact a school shooting can come to be observed as a form of dramatization for communities. A considerable amount of time, resources, and action on the part of the school are required in the aftermath of such events. Though prevention is worthwhile, school personnel must formulate and be trained for the various "what if scenarios" aimed at being prepared to implement their plan in the event of school shooter(s). In the aftermath of the

Columbine High School attack of 1999, several organizations delivered scene management training programs for responding to active shooter situations. However, the importance of threat assessment and tactics has been lost over time. School protection plans must be permanently integrated in all school districts in order to reduce the inherent risks.

The same safety plans must also be integrated with post-school shooting incident psychological plans. Although, critical incident stress debriefing has limitations, it is wise for school districts to develop post-incident response strategies. For example, school police may be able to work with school personnel to help students feel safe at school again after these events. To no surprise, it is the residual effects from these incidents that the potential for anxiety and/or PTSD, are more likely to emerge. Many of these students need mental health services. Schools must make services these available on campus and provide the related support resources to their families. A school shooting is a traumatic event, and in the aftermath of the event, the school campus itself will be the source of triggers for many students who experienced trauma. School personnel should be aware of this and provide the necessary support to their students [18].

Safe2Tell [19] is a not-for-profit organization, based on the Colorado Prevention Initiative for School Safety, that provides young people a resource for reporting threatening behaviors and endangering activities. Students can report suspicious behavior anonymously, increasing reporting, while providing them a sense of safety. School shootings across the country have impacted the way that students think. In some it has caused confusion, fear, or anxiety, while other students have become violent themselves. Safe2Tell has the potential to prevent further incidents from occurring, through emphasizing to students that it is all right for them to contact someone, that they can trust someone else with the information they have, and most importantly that they can be safe [19].

Crafting a Safety Plan in Anticipation of School Violence

It is critical that school staffers work together with law enforcement to better prevent, prepare, and respond to an active shooter incident within a school environment. Many programs can develop an action plan for themselves. The important piece is for school administrators to commit to an action plan and make sure that all school personnel are trained in its procedures. The National Incident Management System (NIMS) is a, "nationally recognized emergency operations plan that is adapted for large critical incidents where multi-agency response is required," [20]. The NIMS promotes priority-setting, efficient communication of both resources and information, and interagency cooperation [20]. The goal of the NIMS is to allow the school staff and law enforcement to respond together to any critical incident, with quality communication and organization with other responding organizations. NIMS provides a systematic approach of response, though it is not a plan of action in itself. Each school must come together to actively determine what its unique plan of action should be.

It is important to note that although armed security at the school can protect students from an attack, it is also likely that if an attack should come, these officers could be the first targets of such acts. School Resource Officers (SROs) must be alert and inquisitive. SROs can be trained to respond alone or as a team with the first arriving patrol officer [21]. Schools and law enforcement need to work together to develop realistic safety plans for the school in order to create collaboration of SRO's and the first response team.

Training sessions and drills of school safety plans must be conducted jointly with the school staff and corresponding law enforcement. These training sessions must take place in the most realistic environment available, so that individuals are realistically prepared for the real event. A memorandum of understanding regarding an exact plan and procedures [20] should be crafted between the school and local law enforcement, governing future incidents. School administration must be aware of the tactics that law enforcement plans to use so that they do not get in the way of the operation, but instead can help it succeed. It should be noted that threats from within a school (e.g., student, parents or teacher) remain nearly impossible to prevent.

Amongst the response plans established for schools across the country is the Rapid Response system [22]. The system created a web-based tool of still pictures and video that police officers can then use. In the case of a crisis, "officers can access the tool on their patrol car computers, get an electronic view of the school, and identify hazards, exits and vantage points for a fast, accurate response" [22]. Not all school districts can afford this system, however, so must resort to different methods.

Most sources suggest that once a threat is detected, schools should immediately call 911 and go into lockdown. Taking this immediate action will ultimately result in, "less targets for the shooter(s), reduce confusion for arriving officers, help contain the situation, and minimize the chance of an accidental shooting by responding officers," [20]. School procedures for lockdown may differ, but it is recommended that all schools have a pre-determined signal or code to alert school staff that they are going into lockdown.

Following the communication of the lockdown, staff should lock all the doors and establish a safe area within their proximity. Students should be instructed to stay quiet, get down as low as possible, and remain away from any visible areas, such as windows. Schools can establish a color card system to help visually signal to law enforcement the status of each location, such as non-hostiles (green card) or in need of medical treatment (red card). Captain James Carmody of Port Huron City Police in Port Huron, Michigan, describes this color-coding system:

During a crisis you cannot be guaranteed of communications between a classroom and emergency personnel. Port Huron schools came up with a novel idea to alert SWAT Team members of an injured person in a classroom when communications have been cut off: In every teacher's closet, there are two sets of three posters, each of a different color. In a life-threatening emergency, all school personnel and students know that they are to tape the red card in the window to alert people on the outside that they need help immediately. A yellow card informs paramedics that there are injuries in the room, but not life threatening. A blue card notifies them that there are no injuries. These cards are also placed under the classroom door into the hallway to notify the SWAT team of the same information. [20,23]. This system can assist law enforcement and personnel prioritize safety procedures.

School personnel should prepare a Crisis Response Box, filled with the information administrators and others need for effective management in a critical situation. Captain Terry Rammell of La Habra Police Department in La Habra, California expresses, "We found that organizing a box that contains crucial information we would need to respond to a critical incident was a great way for both the schools and the police to think through how they would work together in an actual crisis," [20,23]. Of course contents of the box should be reviewed and

discussed amongst school personnel, at least annually, so that its contents are familiar and still up-to-date. Contents of the box should include aerial photos of the school campus, a map, campus layout, teacher/employee roster, keys, fire alarm turn-off procedures, gas line and utility line layout, cable television satellite feed shut-off, student photos, incident command system (ICS) key responders' phone numbers, designated command post and staging areas, student attendance roster, evacuation sites, student disposition forms, emergency data cards, list of students with special needs, first aid supplies location, inventory of staff resources, and emergency resource list [20]. The emergency resource list details individuals and organizations who are available to assist in an emergency situation. Included in this list are organizations such as the Federal Aviation Authority (FAA), which Captain James Carmody explains is an organization most schools would never think of calling, "yet, as soon as the news media learn of a disaster they send their helicopters and it's the last thing you'll need to gain control of the situation... the noise factor alone makes it difficult for people to hear on the ground," [20]. Only the FAA can restrict the airspace and the call should be made as soon as possible [20].

Once the safe area is established and students take their safety positions within the area, school personnel should then account for students and remain in the safe area without opening any doors until law enforcement arrives and safety is communicated. It is important that school personnel learn through their training that under no circumstances should they try to "be a hero," [20], and save the day by making contact with the shooter. School personnel must allow police first responders to make the initial contact. Communication is key in the event of a school shooting, and training personnel in effective communication allows for this success. Bill Slade, Chief of Police for Pearl Police Department in Pearl, Mississippi states, "Open-ended communication with school administrators and law enforcement officials must take place while planning. Each must know what his or her individual responsibility is and be comfortable with it... A tragedy is not the place to start debating assignments or responsibilities or whose turf it is," [20], further emphasizing the importance of training personnel previous to the start of the school year. It is also important that school personnel be aware of the evacuation sites, staging area(s), and command post-locations. These sites must be pre-determined, then maps showing different routes to these locations should be included in the Crisis Response Box. Inadequate cellular phone service has been an issue in past events, due to cell sites being overloaded. Schools must prepare themselves with alternate communication methods, perhaps a few satellite telephones [18].

Parents can help reinforce the safety plan with their children, rehearsing the possibility of a crisis at school. Parents are encouraged to talk about violence with their children and teach them how to solve problems without using violence. By encouraging students to talk about their problems and be open with their emotions, parents can be involved in maintaining healthy mind sets for their children, decreasing the threat of violence amongst schools [18].

Training School Police for Threat Assessment and Scene Management

Organizations such as COPS (Community Oriented Policing Services) and NASRO (National Association of School Resource Officers) serve as prominent and widely recognized SRO training organizations, although no uniform set of duties or training exists since state law and school district regulations vary. NASRO's 40-hour course covers the three universally accepted roles of an SRO, referred

to as the “Triad Concept” (individual and classroom teaching skills, school law enforcement practices and counseling/problem solving skills) and likely challenges, such as gang activity, drug abuse etc [23]. Additionally, NASRO administers follow-up courses for its officers in training, varying from 12-hour verbal de-escalation and diffusion training classes to broader courses teaching implementation of crisis plans, emergency response plans and threat assessment [23].

A divergent yet equally effective program is offered by the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) organization. To begin, COPS utilizes a pre-training service regiment wherein all trainees develop skills unique to school environments including but not limited to: teaching, mentoring/counseling, working collaboratively with school administrators, time management and the application of juvenile laws and case law [24-26]. COPS uses classroom training, field training, shadowing experienced SROs, as well as written materials detailing pertinent statutes, district curriculum outlines and more [24-26].

While initial training programs may vary from a 40-hour educational program to a three-day intensive workshop, all SROs are encouraged to attend supplementary in-service training courses designed to refresh pertinent skills such as investigation techniques and juvenile procedural law. Periodical meetings organized by supervising sergeants are typically implemented throughout the year. Such meetings are hosted by various specialists possessing expertise in subjects such as working with special needs populations, establishing anonymous tip lines within schools, drug awareness, and current trends among gang affiliations surrounding the school grounds [24-26]. Finally, SROs frequently attend annual conferences and courses regarding advanced training in crisis intervention, terrorism planning, school violence prevention, and child abuse.

Given that Student Resource Officers must simultaneously embody the positions of officer, teacher, mentor and counselor, their inclusion in a school campus crisis team remains invaluable. SROs are trained to employ preventative measures such as coordinating intelligence with local police agencies, deterring violence and reducing drug possession within the school environment. Moreover, SROs provide a multitude of valuable resources and skills as a member of post-trauma crisis intervention teams. More specifically, formally trained SROs are informed of the police emergency procedure and tactics (including those employed by SWAT) and emergency response system protocol (including those of the medical response team, mental health professionals and mobile crisis units). Moreover, SROs possess the ability to employ crowd control tactics in an effort to avoid aggressive riot behavior as well as the ability to de-escalate volatile situations and employ persuasion techniques [23].

Despite the lack of uniformity within Student Resource Officer training, organizations such as COPS and NASRO provide specialized training. Standardized police academy training, in conjunction with specialized SRO training, continued education and local in-service training provided by each respective region culminates to produce extensive and specialized training appropriate for school environments.

Student Resource Officer Relationships with Students, Parents and the Community

As the number of deployed Student Resource Officers increases across the nation it is pertinent to address the evolving dynamic between police personnel and students, school administration, parents

and the community at large as a result of police presence within the scholastic environment. The literature suggests that police personnel frequently consider SRO presence to serve two primary factors: to improve school safety and to forge a stronger relationship between officers and their community [27,28]. Additionally, current literature suggests SRO programs carry with them other benefits, including reducing the workload of patrol officers, enhancing the reputation of the agency in the community, improving student-officer relations and creating strong relationships with school administration personnel [27]. As can be deduced, many, if not all, SRO initiatives are motivated to create a positive working environment for all parties involved.

Finn [27] notes that SRO presence typically augments a positive relationship with each of the groups above. Trust is established between the school and police personnel that allows for an open line of communication, with each agency becoming more apt to seek advice and help from the other. Moreover, school administrators value rapid response time from on-campus officers, as opposed to calling 911. Finn [27] further notes that law enforcement officers report improved attitudes and behavior from student populations, as well as increased student comfort reporting crimes as a result of the more frequent and positive interaction with officers. The increase in student reporting of crimes carries heavy implications regarding SRO effectiveness. While recent data has yet to demonstrate a significant reduction in school crime and violence as a result of SRO presence, it is noted that the volume of violent occurrences may be stagnant due to increased student reporting that offsets decreased violence rates [29]. School violence rates are decreasing as student reporting has increased, but recent data has not been able to determine whether this reduction can be attributed to SRO presence and/or student reporting which prevented violence.

Parents of students typically view SRO presence favorably, reporting an increased perception of safety. Interestingly, parents, teachers and administrators in several communities possess such favorable feelings about the SRO presence that in instances wherein local officials withdrew funding parental objections forced local officials to reinstate SROs [27].

McDevitt and Panniello [30] produced similar findings regarding the relationship dynamic between SROs and students, noting the positive youth behavior as a result of SRO interaction. In a survey of 907 students, it was found that student comfort with SRO officers (characterized by simple acts such as knowing the SROs name and engaging in conversation) bolstered positive regard and respect for SROs, and consequently heightened student perceptions of safety in school environments [30]. Therefore, the establishment of favorable opinions of SROs may serve as the most critical component of the relationship between SROs and students, which consequently affects student perceptions of safety, comfort and trust in officers.

A significant amount of literature suggests school administrators, teachers, students, and parents support such programs. Frequently, SRO presence in schools contributes to heightened public perceptions of safety and deters student misconduct and violence [28]. However, both student and parent populations express some reservations, noting “overly aggressive or authoritative officers” and “being harassed and ‘treated like criminals’” as well as the presence of officers on campus conveying a lack of safety or implying “that their school is a dangerous place... and that children might feel as though they are under constant police surveillance”. While some dissent over the SRO presence is to be expected given variables psychosocial/cultural characteristics and

divergent personal experiences, the overwhelming sentiment is that of support for the concept.

Implications for Forensic Psychological Research and Practice

Forensically, school police are in the best position for achieving public safety on campuses when there is an immediate threat. Despite the needs evidenced by high-profile gun violence incidents, many school districts do not have officers at each school. From a research standpoint the potential success of these police officer assignments could be assessed through comparison of schools with matching academic profiles. Various variables could be assessed for schools with and without SROs. The forensic research could be extended to examine the criminal psychology of school violence. That is, for individuals currently incarcerated for school violence, would the presence of an armed police officer served as a deterrent or have negligible effect on their decisions to attack a particular school. The findings from this type of forensic psychological research could guide school and public safety budgeting at all levels of government. Also, schools that allowed personnel to carry guns could be compared to schools that do not allow armed personnel. This article explored school police in the context of high profile violent incidents. Issues explored in this article also have anti-terrorism applications domestically and internationally.

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