

Preventing School Violence: Evidence from Averted Rampage Attacks

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Contemporary School Violence Prevention Practices:

Punitive Discipline & Amplified Security:

- Zero Tolerance Policies
- Surveillance via School Resource Officers and Cameras
- Locked Doors and Metal Detectors

Violence Risk Assessment:

- Profiling
- Warning Signs
- The Threat Assessment Approach

Averted School Rampage



Philly Police Foil Teen's Plot to Attack School

Seize huge cache of weapons on display in his bedroom

Oct 11, 2007 8:51 PM CDT



Bomb Explodes in Home of NY Teen Columbine 'Fan'

Sep 30, 2009 2:07 AM CDT



Another Teen Nabbed in Columbine-Like Plot

Apr 25, 2008 9:04 AM CDT



Bombs Found Near School on Columbine Anniversary

Apr 21, 2011 5:10 AM CDT



Tampa Police: We Stopped School Massacre

Aug 17, 2011 12:48 PM CDT

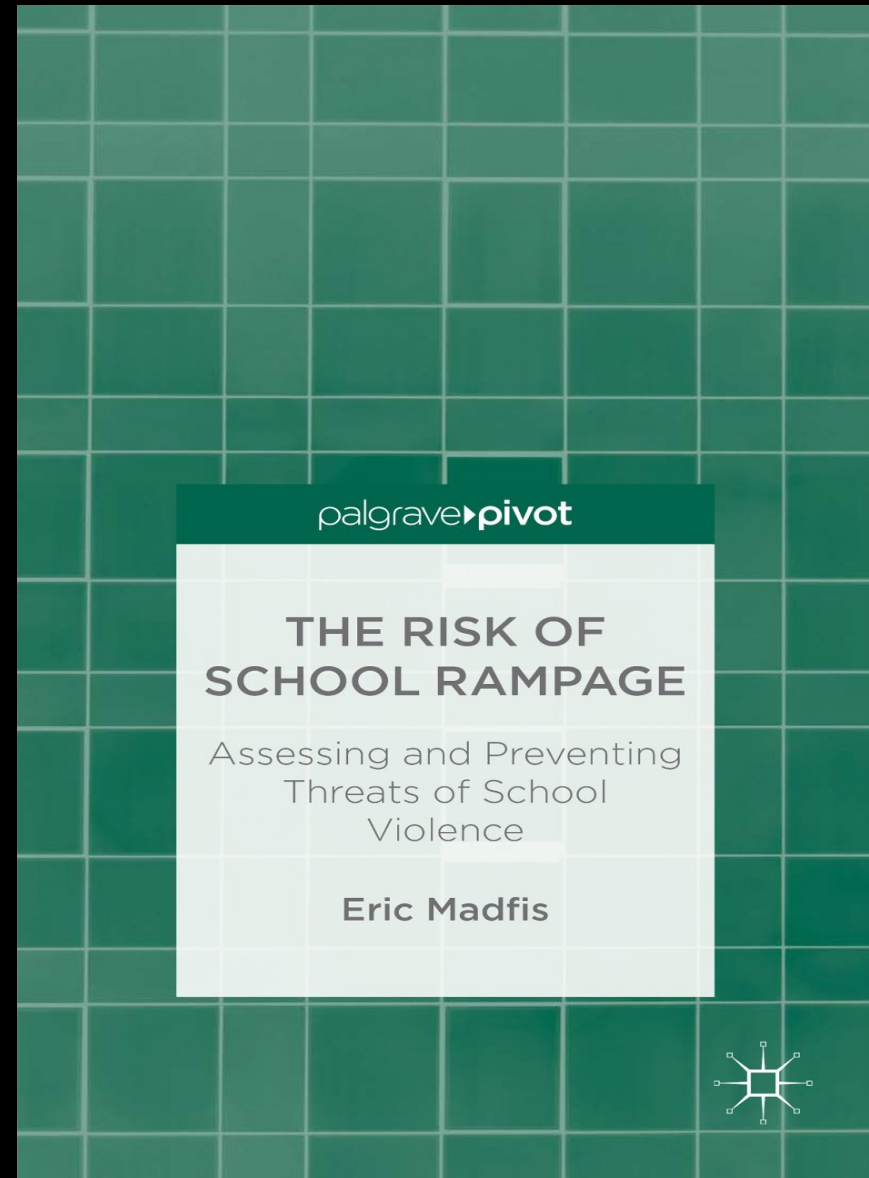


SC Teen Busted in 'New Columbine' Plot

Apr 21, 2008 5:29 AM CDT

Research Methods

- Located 195 cases across USA from 2000-2009
- Granted access to 11 public schools in Northeast that averted a rampage attack
- In-depth interviews with 32 people (17 administrators, 4 counselors, 7 security/police officers, and 4 teachers) directly involved in averting incidents
- Triangulated with newspaper reporting, court transcripts, legal briefs, and police incident reports



School Rampage Prevention

What has worked:

- Positive bystander behavior (students coming forward to SRO's, counselors, administrators, and teachers) – linked to positive school climates where students trust staff
- Threat assessments based on how direct, detailed, developed, and actionable the plots were, not warning signs or profiles

Bystander Behavior and the Student Code of Silence

Breaking the Code – Interventions through Leakage

- Directly Informed Confidants, Indirectly Informed Bystanders, Threatened Targets, Involved Co-Conspirators

Following the Code – Bystander Inaction

- People coming forward were rarely directly informed confidants or close friends, but were often acquaintances, targets, and even co-conspirators
- In nearly all cases, far more students knew and did **not** come forward than the number of students who knew and did come forward

Genuinely positive school climates are needed to foster positive bystander behavior

Forms of Risk Assessment

Threat Assessment Criteria:

- **Assessing the Plot's Detail** – victim(s) targeted, location(s) selected, date and timing planned
- **Appraising Weaponry** – presence of weapons (firearms, knives, ammo, pipe bombs, explosives, chains and locks), attempts to obtain/manufacture weapons, weapons training

Profiling or Warning Sign Criteria:

- **Personal Characteristics** – ethnic/racial and gender identity, previous misbehavior, and prior mental health issues
- **Group Characteristics** – school social status, deviant subcultural affiliation

Conclusions

- Officials who averted attacks deemed threat assessment criteria to be the most crucial, and these criteria gave them far more confidence in the validity of their assessments – this speaks to the value of considering context and severity over zero tolerance and unreliable predictive measures
- Focus should be on forging positive school climates and restorative disciplinary practices, rather than upon punitive discipline and enhanced security – this, in turn, will increase positive bystander behavior when leakage occurs
- Both solutions not only thwart rampage attacks but have additional potential for reducing school exclusions and diminishing the school-to-prison pipeline