

# Causes, Impacts and Preventions of Campus Crime

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## ABSTRACT

This study provides a comprehensive overview of the causes, impacts, and prevention methods of campus crime, laying a foundation for future exploration of campus crime. This article summarizes existing research on campus crime and draws connections from crime in general and applies it to the context of campus crime. The definition, types, and recent rate of campus crime are presented in the study. This study highlights childhood experiences, certain victim characteristics, and institutional settings as well as environmental factors as major causes of campus crime. Multiple theories and results from existing experiments are referenced in support. The impact of campus crime focuses on the well-being and social functioning of student victims, as well as their later academic achievement. Following the risk factors discussed, several methods of prevention are demonstrated. This study concludes by pointing out drawbacks and gaps in current research and suggesting more specific areas for future examination.

**Keywords:** *Campus crime; Causes; Impacts; Preventions*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Campus crime has been a long-standing type of crime throughout history. Campus crime refers to the violence and criminal behaviors occurred on college or university campuses. Different types of campus crime range from trivial to serious in terms of severity, including arson, homicide, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, weapon, drug abuse, sex offenses, hate crimes, smoking, and alcohol use/abuse [1]. In 2018, approximately 28,500 criminal incidents were reported on postsecondary education campuses in the United States. Within these cases, 12,300 were classified as forcible sex offenses (43%), 9,600 were burglary (34%), 3100 were motor vehicle thefts (11%), 2,200 were aggravated assaults (8%), and 800 were robberies (3%) [2].

Although the frequency of campus crime decreased from 2009 to 2018, the number of reported campus crimes increased by 8 percent in the short term from 2014 to 2017, along with a rise in public concerns [2]. Although on-campus crime is a prevalent phenomenon across all demographics, it is only in recent days that researchers and government officials have begun to focus on and explore the causes, characteristics, and solutions of campus crime. Many existing studies have suggested social and environmental factors as leading causes to the formation of on-campus criminal behaviors. However, childhood experience, as the important component in all types of crime, has yet to be mentioned. In addition, there

is limited research on the impact of campus crime on students beyond property and bodily damages. Such topics are more broadly emphasized in general crimes, without specific linkage to campus crime. Likewise, the development of approaches to campus crime prevention requires more exploration to effectively counteract risk factors.

This study aims to integrate existing research on on-campus crime and make logical connections with other related studies to provide a comprehensive overview of campus crime. The content will provide new insights into future investigations into the impact and potential prevention methods of crime on campus. The first part of the study is dedicated to identifying the causes and risk factors of on-campus crime from aspects of childhood background, victim's characteristics, and school environment. The second part focuses on the impacts of campus crime on students. The final section will elaborate on existing and potential prevention measures for campus crime corresponding to the contributing factors discussed in the first section, as well as highlighting further implications.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Definition of Crime

Crime exists in any social context and has significant impacts on the functioning of both individuals and

society as a whole. It is defined as a punishable act that violates social norms and national laws [3]. Crime is an anti-social behavior disapproved by society. As a common type of crime that can involve a wide range of criminal activities, campus crime is discussed in the study.

## **2.2. Causes**

### *2.2.1. Childhood Experience*

Childhood is a critical period for a person's cognitive, personality, and behavioral development. Numerous studies have demonstrated a connection between childhood abuse and adult criminal behavior. In a study conducted by Zhang and Zheng, they sampled 1,001 incarcerated Chinese men and found that 61.5% of the subjects have received minimal maltreatment, 26.6% has experienced low abuse and high neglect, and 7.8% has been subjected to high physical and emotional maltreatment in childhood [4]. The results showed a strong correlation between childhood abuse and the development of criminal behavior. Therefore, as a common type of crime, campus crime can be explained in the context of early childhood background. Having identified childhood experiences as a risk factor for campus crime, the following section will be discussing it by applying a variety of theories.

#### 2.2.1.1. Social Learning Theory

Albert Bandura's social learning theory suggests that the victims who have received or witnessed abuse at a young age learn aggressive behaviors through observation and emulation. Often time, without being fully aware of the negative consequences of violence, children tend to perceive it as a mechanism to obtain positive outcomes such as emotional release or material acquisition, which reinforces their learning process of criminal behaviors [5]. Long-standing criminal tendencies can be easily translated into a campus environment against others.

#### 2.2.1.2. Frustration-Aggression Theory

Frustration-Aggression Theory recognizes frustrated emotion as the central cause of aggressive behaviors. The presence of frustration always yields aggression in different forms [6]. An experiment conducted by Hokanson, Burgess, and Cohen was in correspondence to this theory-- frustrated subjects appeared to be more aggressive than others [7]. If an individual continues to be frustrated by surroundings throughout his or her entire childhood, such as being neglected by parents or being constantly abused, then it is more likely that he or she will translate the emotion into a force of violence against others in the future.

#### 2.2.1.3. Erik Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development

According to the Stages of Psychosocial Development proposed by Erik Erikson, a person undergoes several critical stages throughout their life, and a failure to achieve the developmental task at one stage will lead to struggles in later life. From age 13 to 21, people face the "Identity VS. Role Confusion" crisis. This stage is also the period when an individual begins to pursue higher education. At this point, young people strive to explore their self-identity and life purpose through actively seeking opportunities to express themselves and establishing trustable caring relationships with others [8]. However, when adolescents fail to carry out sufficient self-expressions to locate an appropriate self-position in society, they suffer an identity crisis, in which in response to the crisis, they tend to establish sub-cultures to fill the gap created by role confusion [8]. Without proper guidance, people are susceptible to adhere to deviant and delinquent behaviors, leading to a commitment to campus crime.

#### 2.2.1.4. Self-Defence Mechanism

The self-defense mechanism is another factor closely related to child development. A self-defense mechanism is a psychological response that protects people from distress and perceived threats. There are potential links between self-defense mechanisms with a person's "attachment styles, personality traits, stages of ego development, and proneness to different personality disorders" [9]. Thus, children who suffer maltreatment when they are young and more likely to unconsciously utilize self-defense mechanisms to cope with anxiety and negative feelings, which may impair their personality and ego development over time, giving rise to a criminal tendency on campus.

### *2.2.2. Victim's Characteristics*

Several studies have highlighted characteristics that make individuals more susceptible to falling into victimhood of campus crime. Students who constantly party at night and consume recreational drugs are exposed to a higher risk of becoming the targets of violent crime, as it increases their contact with perpetrators and hazardous situations. Alcohol consumption, as well, acts as an important risk factor for becoming a victim. Data shows that the majority of reported school crimes, especially suicide, rape/sexual assault, and physical assault, involve drug and alcohol intake [10].

Another factor that increases the chance of victimization is a temporal dimension to campus crime—routine [11]. College students often have a set of consistent routines throughout the week such as attending classes at a fixed schedule. Students' routines

make their behavior patterns and presence more predictable, which creates the opportunity for deliberate crime. Hence, a student's routine can be attributed as a leading explanatory factor for non-random victimization that occurs at some specific time or location. In addition, the students who live in all-male or coed dorms, have high expenditure on non-essentials, participate in a fraternity/sorority are at increased risk of theft [11].

In 2018, about 814 incidents of on-campus crime were categorized as hate crime causes [1]. Racial discrimination is one of the main motivations behind hate crime. Research has shown that a one percent increase in the number of black students on campus quintuples to a total increase of 5.1 violent crimes per 100,000 students [12]. This study concludes that a higher number of African American students is often associated with a higher victimization rate on campus.

Moreover, the risk factor of certain types of crime is closely related to the experience of prior victimization [13]. People who have previous rape history, especially in childhood, are exposed to a greater risk of subsequent victimization that may occur in adulthood. Past research has discovered that two-thirds of women with prior experience of sexual victimization have been sexually assaulted multiple times. On school campuses, 23% of rape victims experienced more than one sexual offense in a year [13].

### *2.2.3. Institution Environment and Characteristics*

Based on the ecological theory in criminology, human delinquent behavior is the product of interaction with the surrounding environment. This framework highlights the social structure and physical setting of postsecondary institutions as the underlying causes of campus crime.

One of the characteristic that makes campus crime prevalent and easily achievable is the spatial dispersion of campuses [11]. Many colleges and universities are designed s park-like areas with limited barriers, allowing people to freely enter or leave. It increases offenders' access to approach their targets and engage in more different patterns of crime. The school campuses are segmented by buildings designated for specific purposes like research, instruction, and student residence [11]. Some specific uses of lands increase the possibility of crime or victimization as they draw both the offenders and victims together [14]. For example, parking lots are a high-incidence location for motor vehicle theft, while sexual assaults mostly occur in dormitories.

Moreover, there appears to be a correlation between the proximity of the campus to areas with high unemployment and campus crime rate [10]. There are two historical schools of thought examining the unemployment-crime relationship — “supply of offenses”

and “supply of victims” [15]. High unemployment is accompanied by poorer economic status and fewer available opportunities, which reduces the opportunity cost of choosing a criminal activity. Therefore, people are more likely to engage in illegitimate activities to seek potential payoffs. At the same time, however, low employment levels are associated with a proportional decline in the production and consumption of new goods [15], leading to fewer incentives and benefits to crime. Without a sufficient supply of suitable victims, the motivated perpetrators may shift their attention to campus students in search of targets. As a result, campuses near locations of high unemployment may generate more crime on campus.

In Volkwein's research, he compared campus and community crime data of 390 institutions. He identified that two-year institutions that do not provide student residence have the lowest violent and property crime rates. Conversely, medical schools and health science centers, which take longer to complete and have wealthy personnel and expensive equipment, appear to have the highest rates of crime, especially property crime [12]. Their characteristics constitute the perfect victim for criminals. As Volkwein has demonstrated with another example, school campuses that have above-average per capita income and library resources tend to attract more violent crime [12]. Therefore, it can be concluded that institutions with more advanced infrastructure and affluent social groups are more vulnerable to campus crime.

In addition to the physical settings directly associated with the formation of crime, there are physical or social objects that alert people to potential criminal victimization that might happen, referred to as ‘incivilities’ [13]. The existence of these objects violates the community standards, norms, and values. For example, signs of vandalism and abandoned cars may indicate to people the possibility of victimization. People tend to have a heightened fear of crime when they see incivilities in their surroundings [16]. The atmosphere of the institution also determines criminal patterns. Colleges that have a party atmosphere raise the possibility of crime, particularly sexual-related offenses [13].

## **2.3. Impacts**

### *2.3.1. Fear of Victimization*

Nowadays, incidences of campus crime are reported more frequently on new. This has led to a rising fear of victimization among parents and students. Going back in time, researchers discovered that there was a significant increase in numbers of students panicking about on-campus attacks and avoiding certain areas in their schools between 1989 to 1995 [16]. In 2011, researchers reported that the rate of sexual assault victimization is

growing rapidly on college campuses. Rape is the most feared type of crime by college women around the world. In the United States, it is considered the most severe and underreported crime [13]. Despite government efforts to mitigate the high frequency of sexual assault through policies and social programs, they have not brought down the incidences. A heightened level of fear for crime and victimization on campus inevitably impairs people's health condition as well as life quality, which will be discussed in the next two sections.

### *2.3.2. Health and Social Functioning*

Crime victimization is associated with changes in normal functioning that significantly detracts people's quality of life. In addition to physical injury or material loss, victims often experience cognitive changes after victimization, followed by a range of psychological and cognitive impairments that ultimately disrupt people's lives [17].

Approximately half of the violent crime victims suffer moderate to extreme distress, leading to depression, hostility, avoidance, alienation, and anxiety. Other psychological effects involve fear, humiliation, embarrassment, anger, and some physical symptoms that come along, such as nausea and muscle tension [17]. Post-traumatic stress disorder is a mental disorder identified by many clinical researchers as a common outcome of crime victimization [17]. These psychological traumas are associated with interpersonal attachment, social withdrawal, alcohol/drug abuse, hypervigilance, sleep disturbance, intrusive memories acute symptoms of depression, and many other disruptions [17]. More serious crimes tend to exacerbate a victim's experience with these disorders. As two types of crime that are prevalent on all college campuses, sexual assault is more serious than burglary and thus causes a greater degree of disruption to students' lives. For example, college female victims of rape self-reported negative changes in their self-schema, eating disorders, chronic pain, anxiety, depression, and friction in social, work, and home environments [18].

Moreover, cognitive changes resulting from victimization predispose individuals to memory problems, concentration deficits, decision-making difficulties, disorientation, and increased susceptibility to social influence [17]. As a result, they prevent students from regularly solving and coping with different issues and relationships, both of which are fundamental skills needed to be successful in college and later in life.

Under the impacts of these psychological and cognitive impairments, crime victims undergo difficulty integrating into social life. They tend to have lower levels of satisfaction with life and minimize their leisure activities or connections with society [19]. In a study by Nadelson and several other researchers, they discovered

that more than half of rape victims continued to limit social interactions 15 to 30 months after being assaulted [19]. The impairment in social engagement is adverse to people's recovery and participation in society. An adequate amount of connection with the community is crucial for college students since this is the stage where they begin to explore their roles and identity.

### *2.3.3. Academic Performances*

As described in the previous section, crime victimization and fear have devastating effects on a person's health and cognitive functioning. These effects subsequently result in victims' poorer academic performances. Individuals who have experienced violent offenses or sexual assault on their postsecondary campuses reported a noticeable decrease in school attendance, quality of work, and overall grades. For example, one study showed that 14.3% of female students who were raped in their first semester of college had a GPA of less than 2.5 by the end of their second semester, compared to 5.9% for female students who were not raped [18]. This statistic demonstrates a negative correlation between academic achievement and crime victimization. The inability to perform normal functional skills and suffering from mental disorders are challenges that victims need to overcome. Fear of possible campus crime has also been shown to hinder student achievement in school, as it increases the stress and anxiety of being a potential victim [18].

## *2.4. Preventions*

### *2.4.1. Early Education*

This study has discussed how exposure to violence and maltreatment in childhood contribute to the formation of crime. Such causes can be targeted using developmental crime prevention, where researchers identify the risk factors and implement specific prevention methods to counteract them [20]. For example, four types of programs have been tested to be very successful, including parent education, parent management training, child skills training, and preschool intellectual enrichment programs. They take the forms of individual and family programs; general parent education; preschool programs; daycare programs; parent management training; skills training; peer programs; school programs; and community programs [20]. Each of the prevention methods listed above targets early childhood development and education and aims to reduce the chance of abuse or any risk factors for crime. They have each been tested in a longitudinal study by different researchers. The results showed that groups that participated in any of these programs were less likely to exhibit violent or criminal tendencies. At the same time, they are more likely to achieve higher grades and earn higher incomes than groups without preschool

educational programs [20]. Therefore, effective early education is very important to establish an appropriate developmental stage for individuals to prevent them from committing a crime on campus in the future.

#### 2.4.2. Governmental Policy

Effective governmental policy is the foundation to solving the rapidly growing crime rate on campus. In the United States, there is federal legislation named the *Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act* [11]. This act requires institutions of higher education in the United States to disclose campus security information for the campus and surrounding areas to increase crime awareness and safety. Congress has allocated funds to the Federal Office of Violence against Women to establish rape/sexual assault education and precaution programs to work with campus and advocacy organizations [11].

#### 2.4.3. School Policy

In response to the presence of legislative mandates and stricter guidelines, secondary institutions have become more active in promoting campus safety. Approximately 64% of higher education institutions prevent people from entering their academic buildings at night or on weekends [21]. Most schools have improved their campus security arrangements with more advanced technology. Some colleges or universities have increased the availability of on-campus transportation services for school members to travel around campus without any costs. Other schools have applied “blue light” emergency phones that connect directly to campus police or security to ensure timely assistance [11]. Redesigning the school campus and buildings is also a method used by many institutions to reduce the chance of victimization. Additionally, many schools are offering educational programs during freshman orientation to increase students' awareness and knowledge about sexual violence. Some even incorporate bystander intervention training to teach students how to cope with witnessed crime. [11] Preventive measures taken by schools are critical to eliminating crime on campus; therefore, schools are encouraged to continue to assess campus safety and devise effective prevention plans.

#### 2.4.4. Campus Design

Campus safety is closely related to the design of the campus environment. Therefore, several studies have examined the security features in the landscape and suggested implementation plans for crime prevention, using the concept of “Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design” (CPTED) [22].

Newman's defensible space theory proposed three fundamental principles in CPTED: access control, surveillance, and territorial reinforcement [22]. Access

control acts upon the use of strategies such as guards and locks to restrict unauthorized user access. Surveillance strategies aim to unveil suspicious persons. For example, schools can enhance lighting and add windows. A higher risk of being seen will limit the occurrence of crime. Working together with access control and surveillance, strengthening a school's sense of territory can increase security awareness and discourage criminals [22].

Furthermore, CPTED has been summarized into nine major strategies that can be applied to the environmental setting design to minimize the on-campus crime rate. For example, provide a clear border definition of controlled space, offer marked transitional zones, relocate gathering areas, place safe activities in unsafe locations, re-designate the use of space to provide natural barriers, improve scheduling of space, re-design or revamp space to increase the perception of natural surveillance, and overcome distance and isolation [22]. These guidelines provide insights for postsecondary school institutions in designing campuses for effective crime prevention.

### 3. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

Although a lot of research has been done on crime topics, they are not specific to campus crime. The formation process of on-campus aggressive behavior remains to be investigated. The childhood experience discussed in this study as a risk factor for campus crime is based on research on crime in general. To yield more accurate conclusions, more direct correlations with campus crime should be explored. Additionally, the lack of comprehensive and recent campus crime data remains a challenge to uncover patterns of campus crime. Therefore, educational institutions should report their crime figures in a timely and truthful manner, to conduct a more in-depth examination of campus crime and develop more solid prevention methods.

Compared to other types of crime, campus crime is a relatively under-studied area. In addition to the lack of direct correlation between existing crime studies and campus crime, many variables and factors are awaiting to be discussed. For example, academic majors largely determine and reflect an individual's schedule and personality. Some student majors may be more vulnerable to campus crime. However, limited research has touched on this potential association and thus should be of interest to future scholars.

Moreover, due to insufficient findings of on-campus crime, more effective preventive measures could not be discovered. Most researchers identified only a few potential risk factors for campus crime but did not link them to how they framed criminal motives. Understanding the correlation of cause and motivation will suggest solutions to campus crime. Therefore, future research could target the motives behind student offenses.

Furthermore, since campus crime victimization is proven to have a lot of long-term negative impacts on individuals, researchers should consider ways to mitigate the harms. While seeking effective prevention is important to improve student safety and public health, post-victimization remediation and support measures are equally significant. Therefore, researchers should work with clinics and other organizations to develop programs or approaches to help student victims overcome challenges brought by victimization and recover from mental distress.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Against the background of frequent incidents of campus violence in post-secondary institutions around the world, the discussion and emphasis on on-campus crime in today's society is continuously increasing. However, research about the specific characteristics, formations, and subsequent costs of campus crime remains limited, which prevents the implementation of an effective prevention plan. This study primarily summarizes existing research on the topic of campus crime and provides insights into additional potential aspects by drawing a connection between campus crime and crime in general. The causes, impacts, and prevention methods of campus crime are highlighted, providing a detailed overview of campus crime. The role of childhood experiences specifically in campus crime is one of the major new insights raised in this study. The study also suggests areas of deficiency that need further exploration. Current studies on crime can act as a groundwork for further specific research on campus crime. Ensuring the safety and healthy development of students is crucial to the progress of society as a whole.

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