

## Overview of South Carolina's School Violence Research Project

The purpose of South Carolina's school violence research project was to provide a description of violence in South Carolina's public and private schools based on an analysis of incident-based reports. South Carolina has had statewide incident-based reporting for decades and has been participating in the Federal Bureau of Investigation's National Incident-Based Reporting (NIBRS) program since 1991. In recent years, the South Carolina Statistical Analysis Center (SAC), as part of the South Carolina Department of Public Safety's Office of Justice Programs, has focused on increasing the use of incident-based data, particularly the South Carolina Incident-Based Reporting System (SCIBRS) data maintained by the State Law Enforcement Division (SLED). One of the ways in which the SAC has sought to increase access to and use of SCIBRS data was through the development of specialized software, specifically NIBRS Analysis Software. This software was developed by the University of South Carolina's Advanced Solutions Group (ASG) through support from the Byrne Memorial Fund.

The NIBRS Analysis Software was originally designed to serve as a user-friendly means of accessing SCIBRS data to produce reports and respond to simple inquiries. The user interface was written in C++, and Oracle was used in conjunction with SAS to produce output. Unfortunately, in order to achieve the desired level of user-friendliness, the analytical capacity was limited. The number of data transformations was limited, as were the variables that could be used. As a result, sometimes manual manipulation of output reports was necessary for responding to more complex inquiries. It was clear that a descriptive overview of school violence based on incident reports would require extensive work beyond the capability of the existing software. Consequently, the SAC contracted with ASG to develop an additional module for the NIBRS Analysis Software, one that would allow data to be extracted in a format compatible for use by analytical software packages.

This extract module created by ASG uses the NIBRS Analysis Software as a means by which approved users access SCIBRS data to create data sets for analysis. An inter-agency letter of agreement approved by the South Carolina Department of Public Safety and ASG provided the contractual basis for this work. The user selects the appropriate yearly data files, determines the appropriate unit of count (victim, arrestee, etc.) and selects the variables to be included in the data set. A flat file delimited by commas is then created based on those commands. For example, one of the areas of interest for this report concerned victims of school violence. In order to construct a file with the necessary information, a user would define the unit of count as victims, select the variables of interest, (for example, age, race, sex, and victim/offender relationship) and select the year. A text file, which could be accessed and converted to a format compatible for SPSS, was then created. This step was repeated for all of the years of interest, then the files were merged using SPSS to create a single file from which data analysis over a multiple-year period could be performed. From this data set, frequency tables and cross-tabulations which formed the basis of the report were generated. [Screen captures of the module used are available for viewing.](#)

## **Overview of the Data Source**

The SCIBRS data set consists of the compilation of incident reports filed by local law enforcement agencies throughout the state. Whenever a criminal incident is reported to law enforcement, the responding officer fills out a Uniform Incident Report that is forwarded to SLED. The information in SCIBRS is drawn from this report. SCIBRS is fully compliant with the FBI's NIBRS requirements and has additional data elements as well that SLED has determined would provide useful information. The secondary location field used in this report (school) is an example of such an additional element.

Participation in NIBRS among South Carolina's law enforcement agencies has been virtually 100% since 1991, with the exception of the final quarter of 1995. Law enforcement agencies that do not report directly to SLED report through other local law enforcement agencies, usually the Sheriffs Department. For the most part, SLED receives incident reports and enters the data, determining the offense classification based on a review of the narrative describing the incident. For law enforcement agencies that have been certified to transmit their data electronically to SLED, the offense classification is made at the local level. Part of the certification process involves training to make reliable offense classifications.

The SCIBRS data are maintained in annual files, created after the previous year's data have been received and entered. However, SLED keeps each file open for an additional year to enable it to receive edits, additions, deletions, and other corrections. As a result, there are two types of annual files: year-end files, which are the first version of the annual file, and purge files, which are the final, corrected versions of that file. This analysis accessed the purge file for 1996 and the year-end files for 1997 and 1998. Although it would have been preferable to use the 1997 purge file, those data files were not available at the time the analysis was started.