

## **School Violence in South Carolina 1996-1998: An Incident-Based Descriptive Overview**

Violence in our schools, which has always been a great concern, has received increasing attention in recent years as a result of several well-publicized, horrific incidents. In many jurisdictions, the search for effective remedies has been hindered by the lack of reliable information concerning the extent and nature of crime in our schools. South Carolina has been fortunate in that the South Carolina Department of Education has been systematically collecting information concerning criminal incidents in the public schools since 1990. Additionally, the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED) has been collecting statewide crime incident reports for years, and has been a fully compliant participant in the Federal Bureau of Investigation's National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) program since South Carolina was part of the pilot program in 1991.

This report is an attempt to utilize incident-based reporting data to provide a descriptive analysis of the problem of school violence. It is important to understand that given the variation in data sources and methodology, the findings of this report may vary significantly in a number of respects from other recent reports concerning school violence. These differences in data collection and methodology make meaningful comparison of results between this and other studies problematic.

This report was funded by a grant from the Justice Research and Statistics Association, a nonprofit research agency based in Washington, D.C. The purpose of this grant was twofold. The first objective was to develop a means of extracting specific data sets from the South Carolina Incident-Based Report System (SCIBRS) which is maintained by the SLED. This was accomplished in cooperation with the University of South Carolina's Advanced Solutions Group (ASG), which developed an internet-based data extraction module for this project. The second objective was to analyze those data and produce a report describing the nature and extent of violent crime in South Carolina's schools for the years 1996, 1997, and 1998.

## Methodology

The South Carolina Incident-Based Reporting System (SCIBRS) database consists of incident reports from law enforcement agencies across South Carolina, and is operated and maintained by SLED. South Carolina has been a fully compliant participant in the Federal Bureau of Investigation's National Incident Based-Reporting System (NIBRS) program since its introduction in 1991. SCIBRS varies from NIBRS only to the degree that some additional data elements not required by the national reporting system are maintained on the state database. During this time period, there was 100% NIBRS participation among South Carolina's local law enforcement agencies. The offense categories used do not conform to state statutes, but rather to NIBRS offense codes. Offenses are categorized using NIBRS categories based on the facts of the offense as recorded in the narrative of the incident report. For the purpose of this report, violence was operationally defined as consisting of the following offenses:

- Aggravated Assault
- Forcible Fondling
- Forcible Sodomy
- Intimidation
- Murder
- Rape
- Robbery
- Simple Assault
- Sexual Assault with an Object

The NIBRS definition of each offense is provided in Appendix A.

Violence occurring at schools was operationally defined as an incident involving one of the above offenses which was reported to have occurred at a public or private school having grades kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade (school K-12) or some subset of those grades. NIBRS requires the reporting officer to identify the type of premise (restaurant, convenience store, shopping mall, etc.) at which an incident occurred. The use of a secondary premise is a feature specific to SCIBRS. The officer is required to report a secondary premise if the primary premise code is parking lot/garage (SCIBRS premise code 18), and the secondary premise may be used if the reporting officer believes its inclusion will significantly enhance the description of the crime scene (SLED, 1997).

Both the primary and secondary premises were used to determine whether the crime location was a school. If either premise was coded as school K-12 (SCIBRS premise code 22), then the incident was defined as occurring at a school. Incidents that occurred at school-related activities away from the school were not included. SCIBRS data for the calendar years 1996, 1997, and 1998 were analyzed, using the purge file for 1996 and the end year files for 1997 and 1998 (see Appendix B). Data sets were defined and extracted using the extraction module developed by ASG, and analyzed using SPSS Base 9.0.

## Findings

A total of 11,548 violent offenses with a primary or secondary premise code of school (K-12) were reported in South Carolina from 1996 through 1998. The distribution by year was as follows: 3,462 in 1996, 3,767 in 1997, and 4,319 in 1998. Simple assaults were the most frequently occurring offense, accounting for nearly two-thirds (65.7%) of all school violence offenses, followed by intimidation, which accounted for 17.5% of the total offenses. Although murder was the least frequently occurring offense, with only two reported cases during the three-year time period, the offenses of forcible sodomy and sexual assault with an object were also infrequently reported.

**Table 1**

### School Violence by Offense

<b>Offense</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Pct.</b>
Aggravated Assault	1,303	11.3
Forcible Fondling	337	2.9
Forcible Sodomy	36	.3
Intimidation	2,023	17.5
Murder	2	<.1
Rape	84	.7
Robbery	160	1.4
Simple Assault	7,585	65.7
Sexual Assault w Object	18	.2
Total	11,548	100.0

Source: SCIBRS

Violent crime occurred primarily during months in which school was likely to be in session and on weekdays. More violent offenses were reported during October than any other month, while July had the fewest number of offenses reported. Offenses were more likely to occur during the traditional school months, and were less likely to occur during the summer months.

**Table 2**

**School Violence by Month**

<b>Month</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Pct.</b>
January	1,041	9.0
February	1,179	10.2
March	1,206	10.4
April	930	8.1
May	1,194	10.3
June	165	1.4
July	110	1.0
August	481	4.2
September	1,477	12.8
October	1,708	14.8
November	1,160	10.0
December	897	7.8
Total	11,548	100.0

Source: SCIBRS

Violent offenses were also more likely to occur during the week rather than on weekends. More violent offenses were reported on Wednesdays than on any other day, while the fewest offenses were reported on Sundays. Similar to the distribution of school violence by month, this may be related to schools' operating schedules.

**Table 3**

**School Violence by Day of the Week**

<b>Day</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Pct.</b>
Sunday	125	1.1
Monday	1,964	17.0
Tuesday	2,250	19.5
Wednesday	2,450	21.2
Thursday	2,388	20.7
Friday	2,210	19.1
Saturday	161	1.4
Total	11,548	100.0

Source: SCIBRS

The majority (68.3%) of school violence occurred from 8:00 AM to 2:59 PM, an approximation of the hours that school is in session. During school hours a greater proportion of school violence (37.5%) was reported during the morning hours than during the afternoon hours (30.8%). This was followed by the 3:00 PM to 5:59 PM time period, which accounted for 15% of school violence. The comparison of weekdays and weekend days provides noteworthy differences. On weekdays, 69.5% of school violence occurred during the 8:00 AM to 2:59 PM time period. On weekends (Saturday and Sunday), the 8:00 AM to 2:59 PM time period accounted for 38.1% of school violence. Additionally, school violence was more likely to occur later in the day on weekend days than on weekdays.

**Table 4**

**School Violence by Time of Day**

<b>Time Period</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Pct.</b>
Midnight to 7:59	939	8.1
8:00 AM to 11:59 AM	4,332	37.5
Noon to 2:59 PM	3,559	30.8
3:00 PM to 5:59 PM	1,732	15.0
6:00 PM to 8:59 PM	614	5.3
9:00 PM to 11:59 PM	372	3.2
Total	11,548	100.0

Source: SCIBRS

For the purpose of this analysis, the offense weapon was defined as the most serious, i.e., the most potentially deadly weapon involved in the incident. For example, if a handgun and a knife were involved in an incident, the offense weapon was defined as a handgun. The weapons most commonly used in committing school violence were personal weapons, defined for the purposes of SCIBRS as hand, feet, fists, etc. Personal weapons were the most serious weapons utilized in 72.2% of reported school violence cases. Firearm violence was infrequent. Firearms were used in 113 (1%) of reported school violence cases. Handguns were the most commonly used firearms, accounting for 91 of the 113 firearm cases. It is important to note that the involvement of a firearm does not necessarily mean the weapon was fired.

**Table 5**

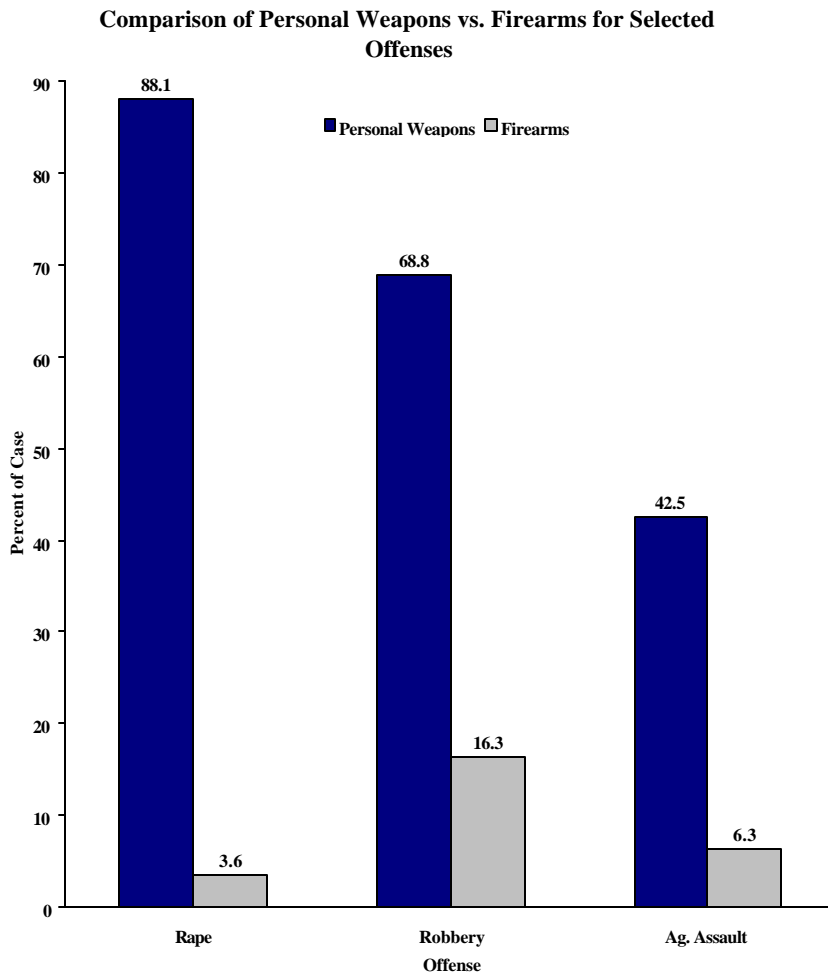
**Weapon Use in School Violence**

<b>Weapon</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Pct.</b>
All Firearms	113	1.0
Knives/Sharp Objects	239	2.1
Blunt Objects	266	2.3
Personal Weapons	8,335	72.2
Other	410	3.6
Unknown	2,104	18.2
None	81	.7
Total	11,548	100.0

Source: SCIBRS

Firearms were more likely to be involved in robberies or aggravated assaults than any other school violence offense (note: both murders involved handguns). Firearms were involved in 16.3% of robberies and 6.3% of aggravated assaults. However, with the exception of intimidation and murder, personal weapons (hands, fists, feet, etc.) were the most common weapons of choice for each violent offense.

**Graph 1**



Source: SCIBRS

## Victim Characteristics

There were a total of 14,070 victims of school violence during the 1996 through 1998 time period. Victims ranged in age from very young children to the elderly. The median age was 15 years of age and the mean was 20 years of age. Although this finding may be related to the ages of students, it is worth noting that 26.9% of all victims were either under five years of age, or over 18 years of age, i.e., outside the typical age range of students in the K-12 grade range.

**Table 6**

### **School Violence Victims by Age Group**

Age Group	Number	Pct.
0 to 4	192	1.4
5 to 9	451	3.2
10 to 12	1,789	12.7
13 to 16	6,541	46.5
17 to 18	1,494	10.6
19 to 24	457	3.2
25 to 34	1,015	7.2
35 to 44	1,034	7.3
45 to 54	913	6.5
55 to 64	164	1.2
65 & older	20	.1
Total	14,070	100.0

Source: SCIBRS

Males made up 53.3% of the school violence victims. Males were more often victims of murder, robbery, and aggravated assault than females. Females were more often victims of violent sex offenses (rape, forcible sodomy, forcible fondling, and sexual assault with an object) than males.

**Table 7**

**School Violence Victims by Sex**

<b>Sex</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Pct.</b>
Female	6,533	46.4
Male	7,498	53.3
Unknown	39	.3
Total	14,070	100.0

Source: SCIBRS

School violence victims were more often white than black. There were small numbers of victims who were identified as Asian or Native American. Race was unknown for .7% of all school violence victims.

**Table 8**

**School Violence Victims by Race**

<b>Race</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Pct.</b>
Asian	29	.2
Black	6,832	48.6
Native American	9	.1
White	7,099	50.5
Unknown	101	.7
Total	14,070	100.0

Source: SCIBRS

In terms of race/sex categorization, white males constituted the largest proportion of victims, followed by black males, white females, and black females.

**Table 9**

**School Violence Victims by Race/Sex Category**

<b>Race</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Pct.</b>
Asian Female	9	.1
Asian Male	20	.1
Black Female	3,196	22.9
Black Male	3,635	26.1
Native American Female	5	<.1
Native American Male	3	<.1
White Female	3,277	23.6
White Male	3,822	27.4
Total	13,967	100.0

Note: For purposes of this chart, cases where race or sex was unknown were excluded.

Source: SCIBRS

Although victimization was distributed relatively evenly among the major race/sex categories, there were some noteworthy differences observed. In terms of age, white females had a mean age of 23.58 years, compared to 20.43 for white males, 18.53 years for black females, and 17.58 years for black males. The finding noted earlier, that females were more likely to be victims of violent forcible sex offenses and that males were more likely to be victims of other violent offenses, held true across racial categories.

Victim ethnicity was determined by the reporting officer. Ethnicity consisted of three categories, Hispanic, non-Hispanic and unknown, and was reported independent from racial category. Of the 13,787 victims of school violence, only 29 (.2%) were reported as Hispanic.

Victims were likely to have known, but not be related to, the offender. The NIBRS victim/offender relationship category "acquaintance" accounted for 69.2% of all victims. NIBRS allows for 26 victim/offender relationships. For the purpose of this analysis, the NIBRS categories were collapsed to create a new set of categories: family relationship, known to victim, romantic relationship, work relationship, and not known to the victim. Family relationships were operationally defined as the victim being the spouse, common-law spouse, parent, sibling, child, grandparent, grandchild, in-law, stepparent, stepchild, stepsibling, other family member (aunt, cousin, nephew, etc.) or ex-spouse. Known-to-victim relationships consist of acquaintances, friends, neighbors, babysittees, children of boyfriends or girlfriends, and persons who were otherwise known to the victim. Romantic relationships were defined as victims who were the boyfriends or girlfriends of

the offender, or who were participants in a homosexual relationship with the offender. Work relations were defined as employers or employees of the offender. The not-known category was used when the victim did not know the offender or when the relationship was unknown.

**Table 10**

**School Violence Victims by Victim/Offender Relationship**

<b>Relationship</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Pct.</b>
Family	331	2.4
Known to Victim	11,522	81.9
Romantic	175	1.2
Work	9	.1
Not Known	2,033	14.4
Total	14,070	100.0

Source: SCIBRS

The extent of victim injury is determined and reported by the officer taking the incident report. It is important to note that the officer's assessment of the type and extent of injury does not constitute a medical diagnosis, nor is there provision for following up and correcting any reported data concerning undetected or misinterpreted injuries. The most frequently reported injury category was no injury, which was reported in more than half the cases (56%). The next most frequently reported type of injury was a minor injury, reported in nearly one quarter of the cases (24.2%).

**Table 11**

**School Violence Victims by Injury**

<b>Injury</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Pct.</b>
Broken Bones	68	.5
Internal Injury	55	.4
Severe Laceration	264	1.9
Minor Injury	3,410	24.2
Loss of Teeth	17	.1
Unconsciousness	2,175	15.5
Other Major Injury	201	1.4
None	7,877	56.0
Total	14,067	100.0

Note: One case was missing injury data. Injuries were not listed for the two murders.  
Source: SCIBRS

## Arrestee Characteristics

Arrest data are reported whenever a person has been processed by arrest, apprehension, warrant service or Uniform Traffic Ticket. Importantly, arrest data are also reported whenever juveniles are taken into custody, whether they are charged or not (SLED, 1997). There were a total of 7,467 arrestees associated with school violence incidents from 1996 to 1998. The largest offense category for which people were arrested in connection with school violence was simple assault (70.9% of all arrests). The least frequently occurring offense was murder, with two arrests.

**Table 12**

### School Violence Arrestees by Offense

<b>Injury</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Pct.</b>
Aggravated Assault	979	13.1
Forcible Fondling	158	2.1
Forcible Sodomy	23	.3
Intimidation	879	11.8
Murder	2	<.1
Rape	34	.5
Simple Assault	5,276	70.9
Sexual Assault w Object	6	.1
Total	7,467	100.0

Source: SCIBRS

The majority (64.5%) of school violence arrestees were in the 13 to 16 years of age group. The next most common arrestee age group was the 17 to 18 years of age group (16.3%). Only a small percentage (7%) of school violence arrestees was outside the 5 to 18 years of age range. Juveniles (16 years old or younger) accounted for 76.8% of school violence arrestees. Juveniles outnumbered adult arrestees in every offense category other than murder. Both murder arrestees were adults.

**Table 13**

**School Violence Arrestees by Age Group**

<b>Age Group</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Pct.</b>
0 to 4	1	<.1
5 to 9	94	1.3
10 to 12	825	11.0
13 to 16	4,818	64.5
17 to 18	1,214	16.3
19 to 24	228	3.1
25 to 34	131	1.8
35 to 44	90	1.2
45 to 54	46	.6
55 to 64	16	.2
65 & older	4	.1
Total	7,467	100.0

Source: SCIBRS

School violence arrestees were predominately male, and males constituted a majority within each offense category. Males accounted for 71.5% of school violence arrestees. Males were arrested most frequently for simple assault, with that offense accounting for 79.1% of male arrests. Males accounted for 97.2% of school violence arrestees where the offense involved sexual violence. The offenses for which females were most often arrested were aggravated assault, where they accounted for 24.9% of the total, and simple assault, where they accounted for 31.9% of the arrests. The two offense categories of simple and aggravated assault accounted for 90.5% of female school violence arrestees.

**Table 14**

**School Violence Arrestees by Sex**

<b>Sex</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Pct.</b>
Female	2,130	28.5
Male	5,337	71.5
Total	7,467	100.0

Source: SCIBRS

School violence arrestees were more often black (73.1%) than white (26.8%). Asians and Native Americans accounted for less than 1 percent of all school violence arrestees.

**Table 15**

**School Violence Arrestees by Race**

<b>Race</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Pct.</b>
Asian	19	.3
Black	5,439	73.1
Native American	3	<.1
White	2,005	26.8
Total	7,466	100.0

Note: There was one case in which arrestee race was unknown.

Source: SCIBRS

Black males constituted the single largest group of arrestees for school violence by race/sex categorization, followed by black females, white males, and white females. Asian and Native American males and females combined accounted for .3% of total arrestees.

**Table 16**

**School Violence Arrestees by Race/Sex Category**

<b>Race</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Pct.</b>
Asian Female	2	<.1
Asian Male	17	.2
Black Female	1,615	21.8
Black Male	3,797	51.3
Native American Female	1	<.1
Native American Male	2	<.1
White Female	501	6.8
White Male	1,488	20.1
Total	7,466	100.0

Note: This chart does not include one arrestee whose race was unknown.

Source: SCIBRS

Within race/sex categorizations for arrestees, there were some noteworthy differences in age. Black males, black females, and white males were similar in terms of age, having average ages of 15.35 years, 15.85 years and 15.95 years, respectively. However, white female arrestees averaged 17.14 years of age.

Very few Hispanics were reported as school violence arrestees. Twenty-five arrestees were Hispanic (.3%), 6,956 (93.2%) school violence arrestees were categorized as non-Hispanic, and 486 (6.5%) were reported as being of unknown ethnicity.

## Discussion of Findings

At first glance, the volume of violence occurring in South Carolina schools, at an average of 3,849 violent crimes per year, might be large. However, the occurrence of life-threatening or very serious violence was comparatively infrequent. Simple assault and intimidation offenses, where there is no serious threat to the victim's life or immediate health and well being, constituted 83.2% of all reported school violence. Over the three-year period there was an annual average of 434 aggravated assaults, 28 rapes, 53 robberies, and less than one murder (two over a three-year period). These findings must be considered within the context of the size of the school-age population. There were 1,500 public and private schools operating in South Carolina during school year 1997-98. There were more than 700,000 students in South Carolina's public and private schools in school year 1997-98, with more than 50,000 professional staff (public school only), as well as an undetermined number of other employees (South Carolina Department of Education, 1999). Although any level of violence is unacceptable, considering the large number of students and the proportion of a child's time that is spent in school, these findings are not as discouraging as they might seem at first glance.

Weapon use, beyond personal weapons such as hands, feet, fists, etc., was uncommon in school violence. Knives and blunt objects were the most commonly used weapon after personal weapons, but their use was comparatively infrequent, with 233 knives and 269 blunt objects involved in school violence during the three-year time period. The use of firearms was even less common. Over the three-year period, there were 113 instances of firearms involved in school violence. The infrequent use of weapons might be related to the low level of serious injuries reported. However, when firearms (overwhelmingly handguns) were involved, the offenses were more serious. Both murders involved handguns. It is important to note that this finding is not necessarily a valid indicator of the degree to which firearms and other dangerous weapons are present in schools, but simply an indicator of how often they are used in violent crimes.

Not surprisingly, school violence is a youth-dominated phenomenon, both for victims and offenders. School-age children, though not necessarily students at the school where the violence occurred or even necessarily students, accounted for a majority of the victims and offenders involved in school violence. The relationship between the victims and the offenders was overwhelmingly that of someone who was known to the victim, but was not a friend or family member. Victimization by strangers was infrequent.

Females made up slightly less than half of the victims, while they accounted for approximately a quarter of those arrested for school violence. Males made up slightly more than half of the victims of school violence, but accounted for nearly three-quarters of those arrested. African-Americans accounted for nearly half of school violence victims, and more than 70% of the arrestees. Ethnicity (Hispanic or non-Hispanic) was not a factor. Very few Hispanics were reported either as victims or arrestees.

School violence occurred primarily while schools were open. Most reported school violence occurred during the school year, on the weekdays and during typical operating

hours. Less than 3% of school violence was reported on weekends, and less than 7% of school violence was reported during the months of June, July, and August.

It is important to note the limitations of these findings, as well as the need for additional research concerning school violence. The SCIBRS data, while a valuable source of information, do not provide information about the economic, academic and many other relevant characteristics of those involved in school violence. Additional research to collect and analyze such data would be of great value in achieving a better understanding of this problem.

Violence in schools is, quite properly, a matter of great concern. However, these findings indicate that the greater portion of school violence consists of personal confrontations that do not involve weapons and do not result in serious injury to the victims. These confrontations occur among juveniles and young adults of school age while school is in session. Hopefully, these findings will provide some additional level of understanding and insight into school violence.

## Appendix A

### Criminal Offense Definitions

**Aggravated Assault:** An unlawful attack by one person upon another wherein the offender uses a weapon or displays it in a threatening manner, or the victim suffers obvious severe or aggravated bodily injury involving apparent broken bones, loss of teeth, possible internal injury, severe laceration, or loss of consciousness. This also includes assault with disease (as in cases when the offender is aware that he/she is infected with a deadly disease and deliberately attempts to inflict the disease by biting, spitting, etc.).

**Forcible Fondling:** The touching of the private body parts of another person for the purpose of sexual gratification, forcibly and/or against that person's will; or not forcibly or against that person's will where the victim is incapable of giving consent because of his/her youth or because of his/her temporary or permanent mental or physical incapacity.

**Forcible Sodomy:** Oral or anal sexual intercourse with another person, forcibly and/or against that person's will; or not forcibly or against the person's will where the victim is incapable of giving consent because of his/her youth or because of his/her temporary or permanent mental or physical incapacity.

**Intimidation:** To unlawfully place another person in reasonable fear of bodily harm through the use of threatening words and/or other conduct, but without displaying a weapon or subjecting the victim to actual physical attack.

**Murder:** The willful (non-negligent) killing of one human being by another.

**Rape:** The carnal knowledge of a person, forcibly and/or against that person's will; or not forcibly or against the person's will where the victim is incapable of giving consent because of his/her temporary or permanent mental or physical incapacity. (This does not include statutory rape)

**Robbery:** The taking, or attempted taking, of anything of value under confrontational circumstance from the control, custody, or care of another person by force or threat of force or violence and/or by putting the victim in fear of immediate harm.

**Simple Assault:** An unlawful physical attack by one person upon another where neither the offender displays a weapon, nor the victim suffers obvious severe or aggravated bodily injury involving apparent broken bones, loss of teeth, possible internal injury, severe laceration, or loss of consciousness.

Sexual Assault with an Object: To use an object or instrument to unlawfully penetrate, however slightly, the genital or anal opening of the body of another person, forcibly and/or against that person's will; or not forcibly or against the person's will where the victim is incapable of giving consent because of his/her youth or because of his/her temporary or permanent mental or physical incapacity.

(FBI, 1996)

## **Appendix B**

### A Brief 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 premise used in this report is an example of such an additional element. Participation in NIBRS among South Carolina's law enforcement agencies has been virtually 100% since 1991. 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, that determination 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 version 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, that data file was not available at the time the analysis was started. These files were accessed using the internet-based extraction module developed by ASG as part of this project, which allows the user to define and then create for analysis flat data files.

## References

Federal Bureau of Investigation. *Uniform Crime Reporting National Incident-Based Reporting System, Volume I Data Collection Guidelines*, 1996.

South Carolina Law Enforcement Division, (Lt. Jerry Hamby). *SCIBRS: South Carolina Based Reporting System*, 1997.

South Carolina Department of Education. *Quick Facts About South Carolina Public Schools*, 1999.