School Safety Concerns In India: An Insight

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	The most significant substantial endeavour for preventing teenage violence and enhancing mental health is shown to be in a holistic strategy for school safety, which incorporates the best scientific resources and knowledge with good implementation strategies. This approach is repeatedly found to offer the most significant potential. However, schools and communities have great hurdles when defining, synthesising, and implementing the many parts of a holistic strategy for school safety. The terminological difference between "Security" and "Safety" is thoroughly discussed here, focusing on the policies and legislations led by the Government of India to safeguard school-going students. This study seeks to close the gap between scientific data and its practical application in schools and communities by outlining the essential elements of a comprehensive strategy for school safety and providing schools with a framework to evaluate their readiness to adopt such an approach. Detailed implementational strategies are suggested to further a comprehensive and holistic approach to effectively implementing school safety and security measures. **Keywords:** School security and safety, Definition, Policies, Legislation, Comprehensive approach

INTRODUCTION

Security and safety are often utilised interchangeably, whether correctly or incorrectly. Although they share similarities, their meanings differ. This document seeks to delineate the differences between safety and security, particularly within educational environments. The primary questions will be addressed. What is the definition of "security and safety" in educational institutions? Are the definitions and uses of these phrases similar? Maintaining a safe and secure educational environment is paramount. It fosters optimal learning conditions, promotes student well-being, and enhances academic performance. A secure setting minimises distractions and potential threats, allowing students and educators to focus on educational objectives. Furthermore, it cultivates a sense of trust and community among all stakeholders, which is essential for effective teaching and learning processes. Factors contributing to the safety and security of a school include physical infrastructure, access control measures, emergency preparedness protocols, and the presence of trained personnel. Fostering a positive school climate and implementing effective communication strategies are essential to ensuring a secure educational environment. Providing answers to these questions facilitates a deeper understanding of the implications of school safety and security, which in turn influences positive outcomes for staff, instructors, and students. This document will examine the definitions of these concepts to ensure a comprehensive understanding.

The term "safety" derives from the Latin word "salvus," signifying "uninjured" or "in good health" (Maddox, 2010). Its usage can be traced back to at least 1250. Safeopedia (2021) states that safety encompasses all actions and procedures designed to protect individuals' lives, health, and physical well-being. This refers to a state characterised by the absence of harm or negative outcomes. To achieve a manageable level of risk, safety involves the control of identified sources of danger or hazards.

Determining "security" presents challenges due to its varying interpretations across diverse cultures and historical periods. Ongoing discourse regarding its characteristics and scope persists due to the lack of a universally accepted definition. The Online Etymology Dictionary (2017) states that the term 'secure' was adopted into English in the 16th century. It is derived from the Latin word "Securus," which classifies liberty from anxiety and worry. "Security" refers to being free from danger or threat, encompassing the protection and safety of individuals and their possessions. This also involves the absence of risks to individual life and dignity.

Stone (2009) defined security as the absence of threats, the ability of governments to maintain distinct identities, and their operational integrity in the face of perceived adversarial forces of change. Security encompasses the absence of danger, oppression, dread, worry, and poverty. It also involves the essential elements of defence, protection, and maintaining fundamental principles in the face of threats. Security refers to the condition characterised by the lack of or the ability to withstand potential harm or unwanted coercive changes inflicted by external entities. Morgan (2021) clarified the difference between safety and security, stating that their definitions represent one of the key distinctions. The objective is to ensure that these external elements do not create problems or adverse conditions for the individuals and properties involved. Conversely, safety involves the protection against factors that cause harm.

A variety of definitions exist regarding the criteria that define a secure school. A secure school is characterised by the absence of violence and is defined by an environment free from perceived fear regarding the institution or its disciplinary actions (Hernandez, Floden, and Bosworth, 2010). This signifies that within a secure educational environment, students, educators, staff, and visitors can interact in a supportive manner, free from the fear of threats, thereby fostering an effective teaching and learning atmosphere. Hull (2010) suggested a definition of school safety that emphasises a practical and management-oriented perspective, explaining that it encompasses the school's culture and the necessary training and resources to address threats effectively. Squelch (2001) proposed a safe school as an environment which is free from danger and injury, allowing the teachers and learners to interact through teaching and learning without fear, ridicule, bullying, humiliation, or harassment. Educational institutions can protect their communities and surrounding areas from disaster threats by implementing strong building and infrastructure standards while fostering a safety culture. Safe and Sound School (2014) defined safety within school communities as follows: "Safety" is a broad term that includes initiatives to preserve the security of the school community and its environment. This term serves as a comprehensive descriptor for the various challenges and crises a school community faces in ensuring its members' overall well-being. Safety concerns include various factors such as health, mental well-being, school environment, fire safety, weather-related hazards, building security and so on.

Despite creating a secure and safe atmosphere for students, "School safety" includes measures to protect against psychological issues, violence, abuse, and both natural and man-made disasters, such as transportation hazards and fires. Students, educators, and personnel can engage in instructional activities without concern in a secure educational environment. An educational institution focused on security primarily addresses internal threats within the school environment. According to McGuire (2017), a school is classified as unsafe when students perceive threats and fear from their peers, teachers, administrators, or the school's physical environment. A school is deemed unsafe if it has experienced incidents of violence among students or between teachers and the community. A plan established within the school policy aimed at addressing situations that may pose a threat to students serves as a key indicator of a secure educational environment, as noted by McGuire (2017). An educational environment that is secure and nurturing is essential for the success of students and staff alike.

As defined by the California School Boards Association in 2018, a school is safe as an institution that supports continuous teaching and learning without disruption. In this institution, issues including violence, substance abuse, bullying, and fear are absent. Students are provided with equitable treatment, free from discrimination, and are informed of clear behavioural expectations. Furthermore, consequences for violations are applied consistently and fairly. A comprehensive and coordinated strategy is essential for establishing secure and supportive school environments, integrating practices from schools, districts, and the community.

BACKGROUND STUDIES FOR SCHOOL SAFETY

The research conducted by Morrison et al. (1994) sought to propose a school safety paradigm for preventing violence in educational institutions. The model included educational and developmental principles from preventative and school effectiveness frameworks. Johnson, S., Burke, J., & Gielen, A. (2011) present evidence from African-American students in Baltimore City high schools regarding the significance of the school environment in preventing school violence, specifically in inhibiting its onset and mitigating its severity. School climate has become the aggregate of students' education and a crucial element of secure and nurturing educational settings where all students can prosper. Çalık, T., Kurt, T., & Calik, C. (2012) addressed the notions of safe schools and school atmosphere as fundamental to enhancing school safety. A favourable school climate influences student outcomes, whereas the repercussions of a hostile school climate are extensive. Students who harbour negative opinions of the school atmosphere are more prone to report instances of peer victimisation, less inclined to continue their education, and more susceptible to mental health issues, including depression and anxiety (La Salle, George, McCoach, Polk, & Evanovich, 2018). Rose, C., Simpson, C., & Ellis, S. (2016) hypothesised that students with disabilities reported more excellent rates of bullying, fighting, and victimisation at school, highlighting the significance of creating a safe and inclusive environment for school-aged children. Su M. et al. (2022) propose that a culturally inclusive, socially supportive, emotionally and physically secure school environment correlates with academic achievement and reduced engagement and behavioural issues at the institutional level. Astor, R. et al. (2021) advocate for novel research, intervention, and policy strategies that concurrently tackle the opportunity and school safety disparities shown in their study.

A study by Sindhi, S. A. (2013) addresses how schools in India may guarantee a secure learning environment, empowering kids to build resilience to fortify their ability to handle changes and situations in the classroom and society. What challenges must be overcome to empower principals and create a secure school environment

by developing school administrators' capacity? The Department of School Education & Literacy issued the guidelines on children's safety and security in response to school safety incidents in 2017. They include recommendations for preventive measures that should be implemented in educational institutions to relieve and redress such incidents. "A good educational institution is one in which each student feels welcomed and cared for, where a safe and stimulating learning environment exists, where a wide range of learning experiences are offered, and where good physical infrastructure and appropriate resources conducive to learning are available to all students," states the NEP 2020, which lays out the goal of every educational institution, from preschool to university. Every educational institution must aim to achieve these attributes. With the release of the report on Guidelines on School Safety and Security, 2021, the Department of School Education and Literacy, Ministry of Education, Government of India, has taken a commendable step to raise awareness among all parties involved—including parents and students—of the importance of jointly establishing a safe and secure school environment for children's overall development.

DIMENSIONS

The definitions presented a range of perspectives on what makes a secure school and demonstrated how contextual and relative the phrase is. In our endeavours to clarify the notion of school safety, it is essential to recognise that its meaning may vary depending on the location. Depending on their specific environment, different schools may have different safety concerns. Compared to a school on a plateau, one in a floodplain will face different safety issues. Mayer and Cornell (2010) emphasise how difficult it is to define school safety because it encompasses several ideas. This intricacy can lead to problems distinguishing rhetoric from reality, making distinguishing between subjective beliefs and research supported by facts more complicated. According to Srichai et al. (2013), despite varying definitions, the literature frequently acknowledges several essential elements of school safety, including environmental, social, psychological, and physical components. Regarding the physical aspects of school safety, researchers frequently look at issues like bullying, corporal punishment, and physical violence. Dunlap (2013) focused on school violence as a key component of school safety. Most of the current literature points to school violence as the primary setting for research on school safety to create effective crisis response plans (Kingshott & McKenzie, 2013; Mubita, 2016). The psychological aspect of school safety is how staff and children feel safe in the school setting (Mooij & Fettelaar, 2013). Research on the perception of safety in schools has sparked discussions about personal feelings of security (Kutsyuruba, Klinger, & Hussain, 2015; Mubita, 2016). Furthermore, it has examined the relationships between school safety and climate and how these elements affect students' general well-being and academic achievement (Fleming, 2012; Vega, Crawford, & Pelt, 2012). Additionally, it has looked into the causes of disability (Boon et al., 2011; Mubita, 2016).

According to the Social Safety Theory, one of the fundamental principles of human behaviour is developing and maintaining friendly social relationships. It suggests that social safety issues are significant psychological stressors that increase the likelihood of illness. According to the Invitational Education Theory (Purkey & Novak, 1996), educational establishments can foster a welcoming environment by highlighting the five essential components of the "5 Ps": people, location, processes, policies, and programs. Both concepts emphasise the importance of creating a safe learning environment that includes the school's facilities, grounds, and surroundings. This is in line with Mubita's (2021) paper, "An Assessment of the Provision, Quality, and Adequacy of Welfare Facilities in Selected Schools of Lusaka," which highlights the importance of having enough good welfare facilities to ensure students' safety and health in learning environments. Another crucial element of school safety is the physical environment, which includes the possible hazards and disasters inside the school. Within educational institutions, emergencies, disasters, and natural hazards can happen anytime. When such situations arise, all parties involved—students, teachers, parents, and school staff—must be prepared to act quickly and safely. By working together, these organisations can improve safety and lessen the impact of crises and other dangerous situations. Natural hazards and calamities, including extreme heat, strong winds, fires, floods, thunderstorms, lightning, landslides, and debris flows, can affect educational facilities. Each of these hazards has the potential to seriously compromise the security of the learning environment, affecting both teaching and learning.

Public health is seriously affected by physical injuries, especially those that children sustain. These injuries are complex phenomena arising from the interaction of children, the products they use, and the settings in which these incidents occur, all of which are positioned within the larger context of regulatory systems. Residential areas, public roads, educational institutions, and recreational areas can all result in injuries. Addressing two key questions—"What is our current status?" and "What is our desired destination?"—requires an understanding of the scope of the problem, its causes, and current tactics and initiatives. Child safety and injury prevention aims to ensure children's safe, healthy development, survival, and growth in the present and future. Injury prevention and treatment aim to guarantee children's ongoing safety and protection. To significantly lower the risk of mortality and impairment in the event of an injury, every attempt must be made to ensure that the kid receives the best possible medical, surgical, and rehabilitative treatment.

Injury prevention and safety tactics have evolved from traditional epidemiological techniques to the more modern safe systems approach. Haddon's matrix, developed in the 1970s and highlighting the significance of comprehending damage and energy transfer pathways, is the main foundation for these developments. By examining injuries from the viewpoints of the kid, the product being used, and the environment, we can now

identify several elements that affect them before, during, and after they occur. According to the safe systems approach, adults and children make mistakes for various physical, physiological, psychological, social, and environmental causes. Crucially, these errors should not cause harm. Since children are more susceptible to danger, precautions should be taken to keep them safe. In order to accomplish this shared objective, the safe systems approach also encourages continued collaboration between all sectors. The strategy's primary goal is to make the environment safe for kids, especially regarding transportation. Although the secure systems method is mainly used in road safety, its concepts equally apply to preventing and managing other kinds of injuries.

SCHOOL SAFETY IN INDIA - POLICY GROWTH

The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) introduced in India has garnered significant attention for its provisions regarding school safety, which extend beyond the scope of compulsory education. About one-third of the cash is designated for infrastructure development inside the SSA, incorporating safety into the school development plan. Integrating Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan with the catastrophe risk management program, an endeavour between the Government of India and the UNDP conducted collaboratively, further emphasised safety. This effort includes the formulation of school-level emergency management plans, the execution of mock exercises, and the enhancement of capacity building. The SSA framework has enabled the execution of disaster management techniques within educational institutions.

In 2005, the Bureau of Indian Standards issued the National Building Code of India as a standard code for school infrastructure initiatives. The code emphasised structural design according to the structure's intended function, thereby, underscoring the threats of its failure. The Honourable Supreme Court of India mandated the adherence to NBC standards for the specifications and construction of school buildings to ensure school safety. The Court elaborated that the "Right to Education" includes the establishment of safer schools, which must include the fire safety protocols, the provision of training for educators and personnel, and the adherence to safety-related construction standards, approvals, and certifications. The National School Safety Project was subsequently launched by the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) in 22 states. In order to enhance the safety and preparedness of schools, a National School Safety Policy was implemented, which was supplemented by capacity-building initiatives.

The Department of Education issued guidelines for the welfare and security of children in schools in 2014. It is recommended that state governments implement these guidelines in their respective jurisdictions. The Child Safety Manual, which was developed by the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR), has been implemented by the state government entity, Sarva Shikshana Abhiyan. The manual has been published on the official website in the school initiatives/programs section.

It is imperative to prioritise the prevention of deliberate injury and the promotion of safety in light of recent school incidents. Numerous state governments have implemented measures to enhance the safety of educational institutions. The Government of Assam has mandated that all schools in the state develop a Disaster Management Plan and conduct monthly mock exercises. Two initiatives, the Gujarat School Safety Initiative I and II, were implemented by the Government of Gujarat to foster a culture of calamity preparedness in educational institutions and to mitigate risks through structural and non-structural measures. Such initiatives have been implemented in Delhi, Haryana, Tamil Nadu, and Himachal Pradesh. Additionally, the states of Karnataka and Delhi have implemented protocols for regularly assessing school safety standards. However, state-level policies and procedures continue to be somewhat restricted. In order to ensure the safety of minors, Karnataka has implemented a comprehensive guideline that is supported by policy and legislation. A notification was issued by the state in January 2018 that outlined new regulations aimed at the safety and security of students. The notification included a checklist titled "Measures for Safety and Security for Students." The POSCO Act, which was enacted in the United States, reinforces legal measures that safeguard minors from sexual abuse and exploitation (intended injuries). The Act establishes specialised tribunals to adjudicate offences and imposes severe penalties. It also encompasses protocols suitable for children, including those for reporting, documenting evidence, and investigating and prosecuting violations. The legislation sets forth a procedure for the relief and rehabilitation of impacted children and mandates that the Central and State Governments increase awareness of the Act.

❖ Policies and Legislation in India

Child safety and injury prevention policies establish a foundation for governmental initiatives aimed at enhancing awareness, directing actions, and fostering consensus for the execution of a strategic framework. This framework delineates roles and responsibilities, engages stakeholders, and concentrates on the requisite activities to be developed.

Only a few ministries of Central government have taken the initiative to address these issues, as India lacks dedicated infant safety and injury prevention programs. The Ministries including Health, Social Welfare, Women and Child Development, Education and Transport have launched programs targeting children, as indicated below. Enhancing the capabilities of policymakers is essential to raise their awareness of child safety concerns.

Ministry	Councils/Legislations (directly/indirectly related to injury prevention and safety promotion)
Home Affairs	National Council for Protecting Child Rights
Women and Child Development	POSCO - Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act 2012, Juvenile justice (Juvenile Justice Act, 2000)
Labour	Child Labour Prohibition and Regulation Act, 1986, The Indian Factories Act
Education	Right to Education Act
Road Transport and Highways	Guidelines on Safety of School Buses, Motor Vehicles Amendment Bill 2019
Ministry of Health	Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK), Drugs and Cosmetics Act
Ministry of Home Affairs	Several provisions in Indian Penal Code

Source: Gururaj G., Gautham M. S. (2019).
Advancing Child Safety in India - Implementation is the Key. pp-65
https://www.readkong.com/page/fullscreen/advancing-child-safety-in-india-implementation-is-the-key-3099958

Some examples of recent guidelines and legislation are as follows:
➢ The "Guidelines for Safety and Security of Children," which were announced on October 9, 2014, by the Department of School Education and Literacy and the Ministry of Human Resource Development, encouraged states to authorise and implement them locally. The RTE Act of 2009, which guarantees all children the right to a free and compulsory public education, laid the groundwork for these regulations in Section 19. Section 19 of the 'Guidelines for Safety and Security of Children' lays out requirements for things like the school's location, the management of transportation, the standards for the school's buildings, the safety of the campus (including things like electrical wiring, playground safety, and monitoring of isolated areas), and the infrastructure of the classroom (including things like secure windows, sufficient ventilation, and safe flooring). The suggestions also included a section on first aid and safety training for school employees, detailing their roles in school safety management.
➢ A key component of the National Disaster Management Authority's (NDMA) school safety policy is the creation of advisory groups to help improve school safety on a district and state level. Schools that meet the requirements of the construction code are awarded recognition certificates.
➢ The Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) recommends the National Building Code of India as a document that provides thorough suggestions for the construction, maintenance, and fire safety of structures. It was mandated in April 2017 that all state governments incorporate and strictly implement "Fire & Life Safety" into their building laws. The fire safety features, smoke ventilation systems, emergency lighting, escape routes, fire alarm systems, firefighting equipment, and water and sand storage to prevent fires from spreading are all defined by these standards. The fire safety department must provide a safety certificate or a no objection certificate to educational establishments.
➢ In order to ensure that all citizens have access to high-quality education, the Rashtriya Madhyamik Siksha Abhiyan (RMSA) has released a set of rules for improving and constructing schools (also known as civil works).
➢ The 2018 School Safety Manual of the Council for Indian School Certificate Examination (ICSE) highlights safety planning, school-level crisis management strategies, safety subcommittees, strengthening school perimeters, and encouraging psychological and emotional well-being. Safeguarding children with special needs and preventing violence and abuse are also part of it.

IMPLEMENTATIONAL STRATEGIES
The safety and security of the school and the learners must be guaranteed by the administrators as well as the key stakeholders of the school. Following are the measures to be followed to ensure the safety and security of the school:
• Policy for the safety and security of the school must be formulated.
• Prevention of injuries to learners and safety promotion must be prioritised on the national agenda. India lacks a comprehensive national policy, program, or action plan for injury prevention. Child injury prevention

constitutes an essential element of the public health agenda at both the national and state levels and should be prioritised accordingly. Incorporate components that are dedicated to the prevention of child injuries into all national health initiatives that are relevant to children. Child injury prevention components should be incorporated into national policies and programs that prioritise child health, such as the National Health Policy, Integrated Child Development Services, Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK), and the Reproductive and Child Health program. This will expand the scope of injury prevention initiatives.

• Implementing targeted and precise child injury epidemiological research is essential. This research should encompass surveillance, product safety assessments, risk factor analyses and other relevant domains. Furthermore, it is crucial to incorporate these findings into the current health management information system.
• Encourage the development of beneficial policy frameworks that facilitate the manufacture, distribution, and accessibility of high-quality safety equipment designed for children. High-quality safety solutions for residential, educational, recreational, automotive, infrastructural, and communal applications may require significant resources, limiting their widespread implementation. Promoting policy and taxation reforms that facilitate financial access to technologies can improve compliance throughout all sectors of society. Social marketing can be utilised to enhance community engagement with the technology.

• In response to the increase in transportation-related injuries, physical injuries and intentional injuries such as child sexual abuse, it is imperative for each Indian state to develop and execute specialised programs that integrate engineering solutions, safer product initiatives, enforcement measures, educational efforts, and emergency care protocols. Implementing existing rules, regulations, and standards requires enhancing relevant authorities' capabilities to deliver visible, uniform, random, and user-friendly methods.

• The administration should conduct regular school risk assessments, implement a robust visitor management program, and educate students and staff about sustaining the safety and security requirements of the school.
• Knowledge of the emergency protocols of the school is essential. Learners, staff, and parents must be aware of safe travel routes to and from the school. Adherence to the school's security and safety measures is also essential. Maintaining a uniform dress code, primarily through implementing uniforms, is essential.
•Involving all stakeholders in the planning and assessment of safety and security measures for the school is essential. This involves verifying that the students, teachers and staff should carry a picture identity for identification. Furthermore, establishing a positive school environment is essential. Provide orientation for learners and staff regarding safety and security protocols. Furthermore, it is essential to communicate health and emotional concerns to school staff.

• Allocation of dedicated funding is critical. In India, the potential for coordinated action is constrained by the lack of dedicated budgeting for road safety initiatives and the prevention of injuries among juveniles. During the fiscal year 2018-19, 3,150 million rupees was allocated for road safety, representing 0.4% of the total budget of the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways. It is essential to increase targeted funding and expenditures related to safety measures.
•The government and the judiciary have implemented legislation, regulations, and guidelines to safeguard children's safety and interests. The response has exhibited fragmentation and inconsistency over time. However, the enforcement and execution processes have presented considerable challenges. There is an urgent requirement for innovative, comprehensive, technology-driven, and acceptable solutions to enforce and implement current laws, regulations, and programs.
• A designated safety coordinator should be appointed by each school to oversee, implement, and evaluate safety initiatives. It is essential for all educators to undergo formal training in basic safety principles, including first aid, to ensure their qualification as first aid responders. Each educational institution is required to possess a functional and operational kit for administering emergency first aid. Emergency telephone numbers are required to be prominently displayed in critical locations throughout each school. Establishing connections with local law enforcement and nearby medical facilities for prompt trauma care is crucial. All educational institutions must maintain student health records, with greater emphasis on the details of each child's medical conditions.

•   Rehabilitation services for children affected by trauma require enhancement through the establishment of continuous and coordinated initiatives across the departments of social justice, education, and health at a national level. The school should maintain a data bank regarding children's disabilities, as the effectiveness of rehabilitation services is essential across all levels to support the implementation of evidence-based programs, primarily Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR). It is recommended that all schools implement school-based rehabilitation programs to the maximum extent of their capabilities.
•Monitoring and evaluation are critical components for assessing programs. All programs and activities require comprehensive evaluation, employing high-quality data to measure progress effectively. The actions outlined must emphasise quality as the primary objective rather than solely focus on program implementation to reduce fatalities and injuries.

CONCLUSION

By comprehending the significance of school safety and security, stakeholders can engage in meaningful discussions and enhance their decision-making processes. The implementation and prioritisation of school safety and security are influenced by its definition in the educational context. As previously stated, it is imperative to establish a secure and safe learning environment in the classroom to help students achieve their academic, social, and emotional objectives. The school administration is obligated to ensure the safety of all individuals on the school premises at all times. Regardless of the school's location, no one should experience any feelings of unease or insecurity while attending. Parents and educators worldwide should prioritise the safety and well-being of their students. The school has implemented an exceptional security system, which provides parents with the assurance that their children are always safeguarded. Students may rapidly become distracted while attending school. Nevertheless, students are considerably more inclined to prioritise their academic pursuits when they experience a sense of security and comfort in their dormitories, classrooms, and playgrounds.

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