

TOGETHER AGAINST SCHOOL SHOOTERS: COMMUNITY ACTIONS THAT WORK

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ABSTRACT

School shootings are a grave concern, affecting the safety and well-being of students, teachers, and communities. There is little research that has identified traits and characteristics that can reliably distinguish school shooters from other students. If we don't know who is likely to obtain guns, we have little prevention efforts. This paper attempts to emphasize the multitude of reasons why and how a person would plan, carry-out and often kill themselves to earn fame and legacy. It is clear that social media produces, predicts and must be scanned to minimize the threat of future shootings. National Center for Analysis of Violent Crime (NCAVC) organized by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (1999) included 160 NCAVC staff members, and law enforcement officers who were involved in investigating each of the shootings. There were also individuals who claimed to know the shooters personally. In 1999, the FBI's NCAVC included 160 staff and law enforcement officers investigating shootings, alongside experts in adolescent violence, mental health, suicidology, school dynamics, and family dynamics. The inclusion of shooters, their families, and friends is crucial for understanding motivations. This article explores effective community actions to mitigate this threat. By fostering collaboration between parents, educators, law enforcement, and mental health professionals, we can create a safer environment for our children.

Keywords: Community Action, Safety, Prevention, Collaboration, Mental Health, Law Enforcement, Education, School Shootings: Predictions, Social Media.

INTRODUCTION

School shootings have become a tragic reality, necessitating a unified response from all community members. One of the most effective strategies involves fostering strong communication and cooperation among parents, educators, law enforcement, and mental health professionals. Most threats are made anonymously or under a false name. However, the Life Hacks research (Baker Institute, 2018) did come up with a threat assessment relying heavily on evaluating the threatener's background, personality, lifestyle, and resources, prior criminal charges and access to weapons. School violence, a form of youth violence, surged in the late 1980s with juvenile homicide rates doubling. Despite fears of a rising juvenile crime wave, it never materialized. However, with over 50 million students, even low violence rates create many victims, making school safety a crucial concern for administrators (Dewey R. 2006).

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Media coverage has made U.S. schools seem perilous. The National School Safety Center tracks school-related homicides, but most didn't occur on school grounds (Dewey, s G.

2006). High-profile shootings like Columbine amplify fear, though worse tragedies, like the Bath, Michigan massacre, occurred. The Secret Service studied attacks involving students using lethal weapons at schools. Parents play a crucial role by staying engaged in their children's lives, recognizing warning signs of distress or unusual behavior, and ensuring firearms are securely stored. Educators can implement comprehensive safety plans, conduct regular drills, and create an inclusive school environment where students feel safe to report concerns.

Law enforcement agencies must work closely with schools to develop and practice response protocols. They should also be involved in threat assessments and provide training on recognizing potential risks. Mental health professionals are essential in offering support to students and staff, conducting assessments, and providing interventions when necessary.

Communities can further support these efforts by advocating for policies that address gun control and mental health funding. Public awareness campaigns can educate citizens about the importance of vigilance and reporting suspicious activities.

Together, these community actions create a robust defense against the threat of school shootings, ensuring that our schools remain safe havens for learning and growth.

METHOD

An adolescent's peer group plays an especially crucial role in influencing attitudes and behavior. Information about a student's choice of friends and relations with his peers can provide valuable clues to his attitudes, sense of identity, and possible decisions about acting or not acting upon a suspected threat. In addition, access to guns needs to be assessed. Families need to be told to lock disarmed weapons out-of-reach.

The National Center for Analysis of Violent Crimes (NCAVC's) extensive experience in assessing threats for over two decades, including current cases of threats made in schools. These ideas presented in 1999 are too old and this needs to be addressed with scanning methods of social media to identify which may encourage aggressive responding by students feeling bullied or lacking parental/sibling models of contributing to society and joining peer groups involved in fun oriented games. Parents of young children need to be involved in their selection of interactive games with their peer group 4.

There has been a collaborative research effort Furlong, Morrison, Skiba & Cornell (2004). They did examine reliability, data screening procedures to identify the potential perpetrators and discuss many aspects including, student risk behavior surveys and administrator training. The discussion of school safety perceptions even by the students attending schools is also presented.

INTERGENERATIONAL CONTACT THEORY

Intergenerational Contact Theory is another theoretical approach which may have a positive influence upon children's behavior. The majority of intergenerational contact research tends to focus on the effects of intergenerational interactions that take place during day-to-day life, and reveals that positive intergroup contact is related to more positive outcomes, including a decrease in explicit and implicit negative attitudes towards older adults and tend to lead to more positive behavioral intentions, such as intentions to donate to charities that support older people, and agreeing to spend more time with older adults (Hutchison et al., 2010). This is particularly the case when young people's experiences were frequent and of good quality.

REPORT OF THE FEDERAL COMMISSION ON SCHOOL SAFETY

Following the February 14, 2018 Parkland shooting, President Trump formed the Federal Commission on School Safety. The Commission's report, based on input from various stakeholders, offers recommendations to prevent, protect against, and respond to school violence, and includes a comprehensive list of federal resources for school safety (DeVos, 2018).

In fact, in 2022 the Biden administration issued a rule regulating ghost guns, untraceable firearms assembled from separately acquired parts and frequently used in crimes. Surprisingly our gun happy Supreme Court recently ruled 8-1 in favor of a 1994 federal rule which bans firearms for people under restraining orders for domestic violence.

RESULTS

Fascination with Violence-Filled Entertainment

The students who killed had demonstrated an unusual fascination with movies, TV shows, computer games, music videos or printed material that focus intensively on themes of violence, hatred, control, power, death, and destruction. Themes of hatred, violence, weapons, and mass destruction recur in virtually all his activities, hobbies, and pastimes. On the Internet, the student regularly searches for websites involving violence, weapons, and other disturbing subjects. There is evidence the student has downloaded and kept material from these sites. Siblings and friends often know and need to be told to tattle-tale to save lives.

Access to Weapons

If family members own weapons and do not lock them away and hide ammunition, they may convey to their children that a weapon can be a useful and normal means of intimidating someone else or settling a dispute. Parents or other child caregivers must supervise, and monitor the student's television, computer use or Internet access, violent games, weapons, or other disturbing subjects. Help of psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers and other caregivers need to have an assessment tool and a plan of action. The Supreme Court in June, 2024 turned down a 2nd amendment challenge to an Illinois law banning the sales of semiautomatic rifles and pistols as well as large capacity magazines. This followed the shooting at a 4th of July celebration in Chicago in which a gunman killed seven people and wounded 48.

Access to Computers

The use of the Internet is often unsupervised and unmonitored. Student perpetrators may even use their school's computers to play violent computer games or to explore inappropriate web sites such as those that promote violent hate groups, overt sexuality, or give instructions for bomb-making. This needs to be monitored from school administrators and an outside law enforcement member familiar with high-risk threats. Parent's need to be held responsible.

Regarding the Trump assassination attempt

Jacob Ware (2023) from the Program on Extremism at The George Washington University provides analysis on issues related to violent and nonviolent extremism. The Program spearheads innovative and thoughtful academic inquiry, producing empirical work that strengthens extremism research as a distinct field of study. Last year in his report called "The Third Generation (after 2010) of Online Extremist " he wrote how the internet could radicalize by broadcasting their propaganda and communicate covertly. Now in this new social media, on-line allowed movements to exist and extremists could congregate in so-called echo chambers...closed spaces where alternatives are not dismissed with a simple unfollow. This internet format encourages normalizing and even celebrating suicidal ideation and glorifying members who claim that even the abandon's own life in an act of suicidal mass murder. Ware wrote, we might be seeing a narrowing of "the distance between a "terrorist" and more conventional, and non ideological American mass or school shooters. So, former President Donald J. Trump was almost successfully assassinated July 13, 2024 by such a young man. Thomas Crooks who had been bullied according to his former classmates appeared to have had a passion for gun culture (it was one of 17 guns his dad had lying around, which almost killed Trump) He often wore camouflage or hunting gear to school and wanted to join the rifle club. He was rejected as being a bad shot. When he attempted to kill our former president he was wearing a -t-shirt for Demolition Ranch, a gun-nut YouTube channel. Many extremist chat rooms now celebrate suicidal ideation where "going ER" is a term for ending one's own life in an act of suicidal mass murder. Ware wrote we might be seeing a narrowing of distance between a "terrorist" and more conventional and non ideological American mass or school shooters.

COVID Isolation

During Covid-19 pandemic the problem was exacerbated (Melamed, 2024). Data (Anderson, 2018; Dindo, 2023) showed a decline in well-being with substantial sleep problems and increased suicidal attempts. With the technology 90% of teenagers who used the internet and mental health crises was linked to lowered self-esteem, poor sleep (Lenhart,2015; Pahl, 2023). Smartphones are fueling a shift in the communication landscape for teens. Nearly three-quarters of teens now use smartphones and 92% of teens report going online daily — including 24% who say they go online "almost constantly."

The School Safety and Crisis Response Committee (SSCRC) manages projects related to school safety and emergency management's five missions: prevention, mitigation, protection, response, and recovery (Christina Conolly,2020). Comprising six subcommittees aligned with NASP's strategic plan, SSCRC's key areas of work include:

- **Curriculum Development:** Designs, revises, and conducts training with the PREPaRE Crisis Prevention and Intervention curriculum, including a Training of Trainers program.
- **Resources & Publications:** Develops resources and publications for National Association of School Psychologists. NASP members and the public, providing handouts on specific school safety and crisis response topics, available on the NASP website.

DISCUSSION

Five of the schools where school shootings occurred included: public schools including middle schools and thirteen were high schools. This research identified kids from families where there was absence of parental supervision, easy access to guns and severe

short-comings in home supervision, school attention to media selection. Psychotherapy provision to those children at risk for impulsive or pre-planned assaults needs to be provided within the school. Except for the Columbine school-shootings which did involve the collaboration of two students, most of the others were mentally compromised children, largely boys.

CONCLUSIONS

The school system must incorporate the means of identifying and treating children to improve their self-esteem and resilience to adverse behavior and threats of their classmates. They need to learn self-confidence by doing jobs which create useful products, such as feeding the homeless, working to rebuild gardening, and social interactions among themselves. Limiting the use of social media among teenagers and follow the research of webcrawling sites to identify potential killers.

I want to end this paper with a poem from "Song of Hope" N.Y. Vantage press 1992 by Eliezer ben Moshe:

Forget Your Fears
 Forget your fears
 The flowers said
 Forget your fears and shine!
 Forget your fears
 The birds all sang
 Do come with us and fly!
 And then the world will open up
 And happiness be yours;
 Then you will know what freedom means
 And you will **BE** at last!

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