

## Stop killing our kids at school: Problem, prediction, and prevention.

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### Introduction

What is happening in our public areas and schools? A Tops grocery store in Buffalo; an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas, left 19 children and 2 teachers dead; 4 people shot dead at a July 4th, 2022 on American Independence Day parade in suburban Chicago. This article addresses how often perpetrators could have been stopped before these kinds of episodes. We also deal with the reasons these school shootings occur. We deal with the fact that the U.S. has higher rates of deaths by school shootings than any other country in the world. The gun possession and mental disturbances are related. The importance of paying attention to social media which both stimulates the shooters, but also warns of impending disaster is described and may include newspapers, journals as well as various social media outlets such as TikTok, Instagram, Facebook and others. The responsibility of teachers and other students to report when evil lurks in these messages is stressed and answers to how this can be controlled are expanded.

### Prediction

There have been over 900 school shootings in America this past year. National Association of School Resource officers said school officers had prevented many instances of violence that do not gain media attention. The data show 120 cases of averted school violence between 2018 and 2020. The history is not good. Dating back to Kent State University, 1965- 4 students shot dead during a protest of the Vietnam War [1]. Uvalde, Texas shooting at another elementary school killed 19 innocent students and their two teachers.

### Prevention

Limit access to weapons. Why are war-weapons AR-15 rifles and others available to public?

- 1) Be aware of your child's social media posts. Many of these killers had warned about what they were going to do.
- 2) Mental health counselors at each school.
- 3) Protect school access. Lock doors...
- 4) Train teachers and practice hiding. Do not arm untrained teachers.
- 5) Promote School drills for safety. Where to hide to avoid active shooters.
- 6) Shooters often told someone or put it on social media what they planned to do.

- 7) Encourage kids to tell on each other ...it's okay to tattle...or share concerns with parents.
- 8) Prevention- School dogs sniff explosives...and are trained to alert authorities.
- 9) Hire former police officers to serve as surveillance while classes are in session.
- 10) Congress not only has the authority to decide what weapons civilians can have and use, it has the duty to do so.

### Social media

This must be paid more attention to in understanding threat assessment. The two boys who committed the Columbine shooting of 20 kids had planned to be dead shortly after the weekend. Eric's dad had been a decorated air force test-pilot and retired as a major after 23- years of service. They had watched the carnage of Waco Texas and Oklahoma City on TV. The scenes of devastation of McVeigh's killings played over and over again. Although McVeigh set his alarm for the bomb and moved away, Eric had bigger plans for his execution. The boys bragged about how they were going to outdo McVeigh's killings. They called it Judgment Day. They found the recipe for bombs on the internet, "The Anarchist Cookbook". Eric drew detailed diagrams. They had used computer modeling and field tests to determine that the bombs would collapse the second floor of a class building and he could watch the library and its inhabitant's crash down upon the flaming lunchers. Their plan must have taken weeks to construe. Each of the boys had weapons, and bombs were built. They carried bombs in duffel bags, and each had rifles and a shotgun. Between them they'd carry 80 portable explosives "crickets". They had sawed the barrels off the shotguns for concealment. Molotov cocktails were also brought along with freakish knives in case it came down to hand-to-hand combat. They would wait armed in infantry web harnesses, strapping ammo, and explosives to their bodies. Each had a backpack and a duffel bag to hump more hardware into the attack zone. These two boys had been considering a killing spree for at least a year and a half. The day they chose may have had significance for them as the anniversary of Oklahoma City [2].

These boys knew they would be dead, so they left an extraordinary cache of material to explain themselves. Perhaps they sought fame even after they were no longer in existence. They kept schedules, budgets, maps, drawings and all sorts

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of logistic artifacts, along with commentary in notebooks, journals and Web Sites. A series of videos were specifically designed to explain their attack. The Basement Tapes and the videos disturbing explain the attack so that the sheriff's department would choose to hide them from the public. Eric's 20-page journal devoted to his thinking was so disturbing they were hidden from the public. The boys committed suicide in the library 49 minutes after they began the shooting.

### ***Under prior red flags***

**Columbine shootings:** Eric and Dylan had been arrested in their junior year. They were breaking into a van to steal equipment. They had received a 12-month Juvenile Diversion program with rave reviews. This program ended just three months before they pulled off the massacre at Columbine. Eric had made ten pages of murderous threats online to a friend Brooks. And then warned him to leave so he wouldn't be in danger.

**Sandy Hook shootings:** The reality of prevention if previous abnormal behavior was attended to can also be said of the shootings at Sandy Hook elementary school. Adam Lanza, whose mom had bought him his rifle, first he killed her with it, then went to the Sandy Hook Elementary School which he had attended. He massacred 20 first-graders and six educators before taking his own life in 12 minutes. Why did he do it? He struggled in that middle school and had been diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome, a diagnosis Adam refused to accept. He was obsessed with prior shootings. His bedroom was closed with shades. Neighbors said he played loud aggressive and violent videogames. Now we have evidence of clippings communicated with others about his upcoming plan. He destroyed his hard drive before he started out. While the radio host of InfoWars.com, Alex Jones, the right wing conspiracist and antisemitic voice, said it never happened, claiming Sandy Hook was a fake scene, a government hoax to take away guns. Now the families hurt emotionally once again, are fighting for stronger gun laws and mental health reform with SandyHookPromise.org. The jury ordered Jones, who has now admitted his hoax, to pay \$49.3 million in damages to Scarlett Lewis and Neil Heslin, the parents of 6-year-old Jesse Lewis, for the mental anguish caused by his lies about Sandy Hook. This trial will proceed. Hopefully more retribution will happen. Social media does need to be modified both to pick up danger signals, but also not to stimulate the potential perpetrators by focusing on killing scenes. Our technology should allow the FBI to monitor and pursue potential shooters.

### ***Why do kids shoot kids at school?***

1. Gripes with one's own school experience. i.e. bullying .
2. Hate crime.
3. To become famous.
4. Mental disturbance.
5. Bad experience with teachers or peers.

These clues are serious. Newman's (2004) five factor theory, however, cautions that we need to identify mental health evaluations by whom, how and what comes of this? [3]. She identifies the importance of the shooter's perception of him

as extremely marginal in the social worlds that matter to him. Among adolescents whose identities are closely tied to peer relations and position in the pecking order, bullying and other forms of social exclusion are recipes for marginalization and isolation, which in turn breed extreme levels of desperation and frustration. She feels that school shooters must suffer from psychosocial problems that magnify the impact of marginality. "She believes that "cultural scripts" provide models for problem-solving. The shooter must believe that the unleashing an attack on teachers and classmates will resolve his dilemmas. When we see films featuring macho heroes or villains who shoot their way to greater notoriety...we are looking at the traces of a cultural script that links manhood and public respect with violence. This view of masculinity attracts the attention of boys who have suffered ridicule from their peers for being insufficiently strong or socially capable. These blueprints for the masculine self may help explain why rampage school shooters direct their anger and hopelessness outwards, rather than inward.

There has also been an acceptance of corporal punishment in school. The federal 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled against Clayton, a boy brutally injured by his teacher's punitive behavior, citing the 1977 U.S. Supreme Court decision *Ingraham v. Wright*. That ruling rejected the argument that corporal punishment against school children violated the Constitution's Eighth Amendment prohibition of cruel and unusual punishment and the 14th Amendment's guarantee of due process.

In the wake of *Ingraham v. Wright*, approximately 70,000 K-12 public school students receive corporal punishment annually across the 19 states where the punishment is still legal, according to records from the U.S. Department of Education's Civil Rights Data Collection for the 2017-18 school years. Southern states are home to the bulk of these instances. These incidents encourage the use of violence in reaction to frustration.

1. More robust red flag legislation defining who has reason to be denied a weapon due to age, previous assaultive record, mental illness.
2. Stronger restrictions on sales to all those convicted of domestic violence or other crimes, background checks for all firearms transactions, the regulation of untraceable "ghost" guns and their production, and safe gun storage.

Buy-back programs where guns can be turned in for a fair value refund. This plan worked in Australia. There's another study of mass shootings showing that this kind of law seemed to have a protective effect. David Hemenway, director of the Harvard Injury Control Research Center, worked with colleagues to examine the effect of banning large-capacity magazines on almost three decades of mass shootings in different states. "The states which had bans did much better in terms of having fewer mass shootings, and the mass shootings that occurred were much less lethal in terms of the number of people dying," says Hemenway. Also having a ban on automatic guns which require a shooter to stop and reload, allows victims to escape or fight back.

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### **Other prevention programs**

1. A licensing process requires someone to, you know, directly apply and engage with law enforcement, sometimes there's safety training and other requirements
2. Education in the schools about safety procedures in emergencies.
3. School officials employed by the schools who are trained to keep away strangers, preferably former police officers. Special training including safe evacuation procedures for the children. Equipment should be installed which would allow the immediate treatment by physicians in case of violent wounds and bleeding which may affect life itself.
4. Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, which passed in the Senate with a strong 65-33 vote on June 23, 2022 and was signed into law by President Biden on June 25, 2022.
5. Federal enforcement of state-by-state enforcement needs to be decided.
6. Those individuals who continue to own guns to improve their rifle skills or to shoot animals for food or recreation should be required to have their guns/gunpowder registered and under lock and key.

In summary, weapon detectors (metal detectors video-cameras if in a school located in area where weapons are plentiful). A ban on large capacity magazines. A licensing process requires someone to, you know, directly apply and engage with law enforcement, sometimes there's safety training and other requirements. Another approach that seemed to reduce deaths from mass shootings was state bans on buying large-capacity magazines or ammunition-feeding devices for semiautomatic weapons.

### **Prevention of recurrences**

Peterson and Densley (2021) in the Violence Project describe how to prevent recurrence. They point out that more than half of American teenagers worry about a mass shooting at their school, and a lifetime of active shooter drills, locker searches and locked school doors has engendered in them an overwhelming fear of imminent death. There are now more guns than people in the country [4]. They reveal that 98% of mass shooters are males and 63 % had a previous violent history. With the onset of COVID-19, schools were mostly closed, and the masses were removed from mass shootings. The coronavirus also stopped the contagion according to the authors, as prior to 2020 mass shootings fueled one another in three ways:

1. One mass shooting provided social proof for another mass shooting-so the next mass shooting inevitably followed the last whether in style or substance.
2. Intense coverings of mass shootings led to people seeking to become copycat killers
3. Endless discussion and excessive worry over risk of mass shootings led to daily routines such as active shooter

drills, which planted the seed that mass shootings were a legitimate way of handling grievances if someone was angry and struggling.

COVID-19 broke this cycle because everyone was angry, thus keeping attention to mass shooters out of our heads.p.146. But Columbine retains its history with the building of New Hope Columbine Library over the torn-up library where much of the shooting occurred, now memorializing the students who were killed on April 20th, 1999.

The Justice Policy Institute wrote a paper on School House Hype: School Shootings and the real risks kids face in America [5] showing that the best data on the very specific school-related death of kids is less than one in one million chances. Other data showed that the number of school shootings has declined slightly since 1992. The number of children killed by gun violence in schools is about half the number of Americans killed annually by lightning strikes. The American Psychological Association provides resources for coping with mass shootings and understanding gun violence [6].

### **Corporal Punishment**

Models rather than protects: The use of corporal punishment in this country as a means of disciplining schoolchildren dates back to the colonial period...At common law a single principle has governed the use of corporal punishment since before the American Revolution: Teachers may impose reasonable but not excessive force to discipline a child. The prevalent rule in this country today privileges such force as a teacher or administrator "reasonably believes to be necessary for [the child's] proper control, training, or education." To the extent that the force is excessive or unreasonable, the educator in virtually all States is subject to possible civil and criminal liability. Against this background of historical and contemporary approval of reasonable corporal punishment, we turn to the constitutional questions before us. There is also evidence that poverty level influences the occurrence of school shootings [7,8]. In studies of high poverty areas there are more firearm-related youth deaths. There is a need for more data on racism as a pathway to poverty but also on mediators between poverty and firearm-related death.

The study of where, how, and why racism operates as a factor in both poverty and firearm-related death must continue, especially considering the disparities consistently documented in Alaska Native or American Indian, Black, and Hispanic communities. The editorialists wrote: "Key potential mechanisms for reducing the consequences of poverty for firearm-related death are often denied to racial and ethnic minority groups through a variety of structures, policies, and systems in health care, employment, housing, transportation, and education," they emphasized, the impact of racism, not only on the pathways to poverty, but also on mediators between poverty and firearm-related death, must be explored.

### **Costs due to violence**

There is a recent special issue of Psychology of Violence which spells out the most recent approach to ending gun violence before it happens [9]. Dr. Zirui Song and colleagues

(2022) described (MSNBC August 6, 2022) a new study from Harvard Medical School which looks at the long-term costs of gun violence. What researchers found: the roughly 85,000 survivors of non-fatal gunshots each year were far more likely to develop substance abuse and mental health disorders. Their healthcare costs, too, increased significantly, costing the survivors thousands of dollars in medical bills. And it's not just those who were shot: their families were more likely to develop psychiatric disorders, too.

## Growth after Trauma

There is a need to understand that the kids who survived their teachers, their friends and families need immediate psychological understanding to promote emotional well-being. M. Waller Exec. Dist DOJ and Ana Di Girolamo, Director of Center for Excellence for Childrens Health. Karen Manyard and Linda May M.D. director of Yale Child Study Center. So, there is a scientific literature as psychologists we all need to espouse. Poor health and potential PTSD disease is related to our anxiety, stress, and loneliness [8]. Therefore, the best way to help ourselves is to help others and stay Connected whether through facetime, iPads or Jitterbug phones. Help our kupuna (elders in Hawaiian) live through the storms. No one deserves to die by themselves. The New York Times (Sunday, May 17, 2020) quoted Dr. Mark Rosenberg "There is a wave of depression, letdown, true PTSD and a feeling of not caring anymore that is coming." Yet Melamed (2020) projects a feeling of optimism encouraging students to embrace their connection with one another as we come back from the isolation of lockdowns and fewer places to socialize. We are all of value and we need to remember that sleep, exercise, prayer and even helping wash the dishes will pay off in dividends [10-12].

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