Chapter 10

Potential Causes of Mass School Shooting Incidents: A Look Into Bullying, Mental Illness, and Zero–Tolerance Policies

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ABSTRACT

Over the past several years, American educational institutions have seen an increase in gun violence by students. This increase has erupted calls for stricter gun control and larger gun-free zones at institutions of learning. There have been many theories to why American schools have become a place of fear instead of institutions of learning. Some explore the cause of mental illness; some investigate bullying, and a few acknowledge the lack of administrative follow-up on in-school incidents. This chapter will explore the relationships and correlations between the shooter, the victim(s), school zero-tolerance policy and how previous incidents of violence or threats of violence were/are processed in the school systems where these incidents have occurred.

INTRODUCTION

Violence in schools is a hot topic in America today. Many citizens believe that school violence (especially the use of weapons) is relatively new, dating back to the Columbine shootings. However, there have been documented cases of school violence for many years (Keehn & Boyles, 2015). We currently live in a society which tends to skew the actual impact of violence by how is often portrayed violence in...
television shows, movies and interactive video games (Leary, Kowalski, Smith and Phillips, 2003). In years past, violence was not permitted on television until after 9:00 PM (Mulvey & Cauffman, 2001). Presently, anyone can turn on the TV at any time of the day and view acts of violence, especially with the availability of online streaming services and the lack of parenteral supervision.

In contrast to the United States, citizens of Japan view as much violence as we do in the United States. However, Japan does not have a similar crime rate as the United States. Furthermore, in the United States, the nuclear family has diminished, and more single parents, and increasingly grandparents are raising children than previously. Thus, more unsupervised latch-key children are alone viewing these violent acts on television and in video games (Mulvey & Cauffman, 2001). Many will argue that the deterioration of cultural values has paved the way for the birth of violence to move into our schools and become the norm. However, this has yet to be proven across cultures.

In this chapter, the reader will explore several theoretical causes of school and mass shootings. Additionally, the aftereffects of bullying on an individual, the subculture, and societal norms that lead to violence, and mental illness issues will be covered. The response to which the schools, in general, have reacted to the violence and the implementation of zero-tolerance policies will be examined to determine effectiveness. Furthermore, the reader will discover what schools do to intercept and prevent bullying of students. Lastly, the internal appearance of many schools has changed over the years. Historically, metal detectors and law enforcement officers were rarely seen, but are now becoming the norm in all schools, not just the urban inner-city schools.

CAUSES OF THE INCREASE IN SCHOOL GUN VIOLENCE AND MASS SHOOTINGS

Bullying

Bullying in schools is not a new form of aggression. Bullying has been present in society for decades. However, it appears that bullying has become more in today’s society and has increased with the use of social media. Bullying exists at almost all age and groups within the community; however, schools are where bullying is most common and is an area of grave concern because of the stage of human development in which adolescents are, as they are solidifying their identity and sense of self (Casebeer, 2012; Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005; Olweus, 1978). Other countries experience bullying in their school systems, but due to the easy access to guns, the United States has a more profound concern because of the mass casualties that are often the result of school shootings (Casebeer, 2012; Vossekull, Fein, Reddy, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2002). There are signs, parents, school administrators, and teachers can observe, and they can act on those signs to reduce the number of bullying incidents. On average, over 30 percent of students report some either engaging in or experiencing some form of bullying each year. (Andreou, 2011). Because bullying has evolved over the years, and with the addition and popularity of social media, bullying now poses a significant issue for school administrators to combat. Often, it may be difficult for teachers and administrators to identify who is the bully and who is reacting to being bullied. In several instances, classmates may stand up to the bully on behalf of the individual being bullied. This noble behavior of the classmate may hinder school personal in determining who is the actual offender and who is reacting to the actions of the bully.