ABSTRACT

Roughly a decade after the substantial spike in the middle and high school massacres that occurred in the ‘90s, we have now seen this disturbing phenomenon arise anew on American college campuses. Overall, these horrifying, high profile acts of violence on college campuses remain relatively rare, nevertheless, academic administrators are required to manage threats of violence on an increasingly regular basis. As colleges and universities face the realities of today’s educational environment, preparing for an active shooter event has become a necessity. The mass shooting at the University of Texas at Austin in 1966 has been hailed as the first major college campus-shooting incident. Since then, years of active shooting training and protocol development and evolution has taken place. A description of four of the deadliest college campus shootings (University of Texas at Austin, Virginia Tech, Oikos University, and Umpqua Community College) and the progression of the related active shooter protocols is provided.

INTRODUCTION

Managing emergencies on college campuses is a top safety priority for every administration. A mass murder refers to the antisocial and non-state sponsored killing of multiple victims during a single episode at one or more closely related locations. Prior to the mid-1990s, social scientists who sought to understand mass murder tended to focus on episodes in workplaces, families, and public places, such as shopping malls and restaurants (Levin & Madfis, 2009). In the mid- and late 1990s, a string of shootings occurred resulting in multiple injuries and deaths at middle and high schools located in obscure, rural communities, such as Littleton, Colorado. Roughly a decade after this substantial spike in middle and high school massacres, our society has now experienced an unfortunate resurgence of this disturbing...
The phenomenon on American college campuses. The shooting tragedy at Virginia Tech, which led to the deaths of 33 people including the shooter, brought attention to a number of issues affecting safety and security on our nation’s campuses (Foster, 2007). An active shooter is an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area; in most cases, active shooters use firearms and there is no pattern or method to their selection of victims (Brinsfield, & Mitchell, 2015).

Although there are no definitive characteristics of a potential active shooter, the FBI has identified potential qualities, such as a personal grievance, recent acquisitions of multiple weapons, recent interest in previous shootings, increased weapons training, and experience of a perceived or real personal loss (FBI, 2013; Healthcare and Public Health Sector Coordinating Council, 2015).

Unfortunately, mass shootings on college campuses are nothing new. However, because of the extensive reach the media now has to greater numbers of people, these incidents have become more well-known and publicized than in the past. In the wake of a school shooting there is often an outcry for an immediate response in the form of more stringent security precautions in schools or stricter laws aimed at school violence. However, these demands have been accompanied by little concerted and organized efforts to understand the roots of school shooting incidents. How does a particular student come to the point of feeling that shooting fellow students and teachers is in some way an answer to their problems or emotional needs? After a violent incident has taken place, retracing an offender’s past and identifying clues that, in retrospect, could have been signs of anger can often yield significant and useful information (O’Toole, 2000).

This chapter will explore four of the most deadly college campus shooting events in the history of the United States: University of Texas at Austin, Virginia Tech, Oikos University, and Umpqua Community College. Each shooting incident, the perpetrators’ backgrounds, any events that may have acted as precursors to the shootings, as well as an examination of the aftermath of each tragedy are reviewed. A discussion surrounding college active shooter policy development and implementation is also included.

**UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN**

On August 1, 1966, after stabbing his mother and his wife to death the night before, Charles Whitman, a former Marine, took rifles and other weapons to the observation deck atop the Main Building tower at the University of Texas at Austin, then opened fire indiscriminately on persons on the surrounding campus and streets. A total of 16 people were killed and 31 others were injured at the time; one final additional victim died in 2001 from lingering effects of the wounds sustained during the shooting (Lavergne, 1997). While many people are not aware of Charles Whitman and the University of Texas at Austin incident, historically, it is what many consider the first of the most well-known college shooting occurrences.

**PERPETRATOR**

Whitman was born on June 24, 1941, in Lake Worth, Florida, the eldest of three sons born to Charles Adolphus “C. A.” Whitman Jr. and Margaret E. (Hodges). Whitman’s father was raised in an orphanage in Savannah, Georgia, and described himself as a self-made man. In 1940, he married Margaret, then 17 years old. The marriage of Whitman’s parents was marred by domestic violence; Whitman’s father was an admitted authoritarian who provided for his family but demanded near perfection from all of them. He was known to physically and emotionally abuse his wife and children (Levin & Fox, 1985).
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