Trying on the Shoes of Medical Detectives: The Roots of School Shootings
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The Executive Summary

One of the most daunting phenomena in American history is the appearance of rampage school shootings. Of the developed countries in the world, the U.S. has one of the most prominent occurrences of gun violence issues. What in American society fuels a person to commit the extreme act of a school shooting? Journalists, scientists and American citizens reach to understand these events by exploring various societal factors: the history of past shootings, the shooters’ lives, media, and scientific evidence. These factors are used in order to develop policies to prevent future school shootings.

The nation has continued to remain in a state of constant fear and unease of the ever looming possibility of a mentally unstable person with a gun on school grounds for over a century in and around the United States, however these uneasy feelings are even more prevalent and amplified today in our nation and its current state. With the rise in cases and diagnoses, mental illness has sparked a lot of attention of how these mental illnesses can be a key component being an influence on motive. A stark marker to pin around the beginning of the boom of school shooting incidents in the U.S. is the 1999 Columbine High School Massacre, where two students, Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris, killed a dozen students and a faculty member and injuring nearly two dozen (“Columbine”). In the aftermath of the massacre, there was speculation and discussions revolved around the mental stability of both Dylan Klebold, a “rage-filled, egotistical, lacking conscience” sociopath, and Eric Harris, a “psychotic” teen “suffering from paranoia, delusions and organized thinking,” and how their conditions played a significant role in the conduction of the shooting (Associated). The realization of mental health as a traceable factor in patterns seen in school shooters allows people to have a chance to prevent any violent scenarios by taking precautions with people with violent tendencies as a side piece to their mental illness. Although prevention efforts and protocols have been developed and placed in learning institutions around the country, they cannot guarantee protection from these tragedies from happening, such as the Virginia Tech shooting in 2007 and the Sandy Hook Massacre in late 2012, both resulting in a number of casualties and wounded with the shooters also having personal ties to mental issues. School safety has become a priority in today’s society with an increase in mental instability and the accessibility to firearms, calling for necessary changes for school safety protocols and prevention tactics.

Behind each of these tragedies are the people that held the gun that ended many lives. It is a conundrum of what influenced these young people to feel the need to take the lives of classmates or teachers. It is evident that each shooter is different and have different influences but there are some commonalities that research has found to be on average common in school shooters. The demographics of school shooters are typically caucasian males, of average to above average intelligence and come from a middle class family (McGee). These are adolescents that don’t fit the typical young criminal stereotype of coming from a lower socioeconomic status and attending an inner-city school (Pitarro). Research has also found a
number of risk factors that can influence a person to go to the extent of conducting a school shooting. Some of these risk factors include biological or psychological influences, family characteristics and the influence of the social construction of violence in America (Pitarro). Influences of school shooters can also be understood through the lens of Travis Hirschi’s Social Bond Theory that states that deviant behavior occurs when social bonds are weakened or broken (Pitarro). This relates to the isolation feature commonly discussed in a typical school shooter. To see the significance of how these risk factors and social influences are common in school shooters one may look at specific cases such as the Columbine and Virginia Tech shooters.

With the shooters being the main focus, journalists arrive on the scene in order to come to a conclusion as to why this terrible issue keeps recurring. With the principal reasons being violent media, guns and mental illnesses, coming from an article by Jaclyn Schildkraut and Glenn W. Muschert, journalists have a brief start on this intense phenomena. In order to narrow down the reasonings as to why this continues to happen, the journalists talk to students and staff at the scene to get background information and find out more about the school. For example, during the Columbine shooting, journalists came to the conclusion that the two shooters were on prescribed medications, and they were bullied for being outsiders, which could both lead them to lash out(Leavy and Maloney). Also, once local communities realized how easy it was for teenagers to get ahold of guns, people started demanding stricter gun laws and safety precautions(Leavy and Maloney). Information, such as the findings from the Columbine investigation, is critical to journalists in figuring out what motivated such kids to follow through with their plan.

Scientific evidence focuses on the effects of school shootings, and how the up and coming issue ties into data and observation. It is true that there is an “increased frequency in recent years” of school shootings (Livingston). The traumatic effects that students face, however, are made worse by the constant, consistent reporting from mass media (Muschert). This does not offer any aid, since distressing, violent circumstances like these can already lead to mental disturbances in students, such as possible brain damage (Beland, Kim). Scientific literature looks into the fear produced by large coverage of school shootings, as well as statistics for students affected by school shootings. Data clearly shows the negative impact of school shootings on children through decreased enrollment, performance, and increased student absences.

Many have tried to pitch the perfect solution to this crisis, but it has always been surrounded by controversy. Taking away the guns is a very commonly held notion among American citizens, but it would violate the protections in the Bill of Rights. This action would fall under the ATF, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms department of the United States government. other side of the coin would be a less hands on approach such as more of a community based actions that reflect the current state of that region and its citizens. Cheryl Lester, an author for American Studies, has created an idea for an annual meeting of citizens that would further their knowledge of the community “...for building and maintaining relationships that cross campus and state lines and that can serve to inform us about one another and about our
region.” (Lester) In this way they can prevent the next shooting from happening without any violation of rights.

As a result of the exploration into the history of the shootings, the shooters’ lives, media and scientific evidence, society can begin to understand what influences the occurrence of school shootings. Through our research we propose a solution based upon education of school officials and parents as well as preparation in case a school shooting happens. Bearing in mind that mental health and psychological stressors are risk factors (Pitarro), it is necessary to educate parents, students and officials on these warning signs. Another feature to our proposed solution is for schools to create a community that is welcoming to everyone with a goal of no one feeling isolated. Unfortunately, the chances of a shooting remain so it is also imperative to train teachers and students the safest measure in the event of a school shooting. Based upon our discussions and findings it is most conducive to base a solution upon educational and preventative measures to help society influence in the right direction.
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Social Epidemiologist #1: The History of School Shootings

School shootings within the United States have gripped the minds of society by the hands of fear with instances occurring as early as the 19th century. Grudges against an old schoolteacher, mistreating of a parent’s child, and even reasons unknown to anyone have been repeatedly seen throughout the past century. The dispersed and sporadic nature of school shootings throughout the United States has been a concern of uncertainty in education systems around the nation, a number occurring “without death, by accident, and during fights between students” (Katsiyannis). As time passed along with moving forward industrially, school shootings became deadlier with fast-firing, accurate weapons that were of easy access to the shooter while the motives behind the attacks began to become almost nonexistent with often no justification or explanation. Within the past couple of decades, the likelihood of school shootings have become a stigma pinned against the U.S. by the rest of the world, mocked for the lack of security of gun control and prevention within the education system.

Incidents of school shootings have occurred in a widely dispersed range around the U.S., with large amounts of the shooting occurring within the Midwest, East Coast, and West Coast regions within the past two decades, depicted in the picture above, with the size of the circle representing number of casualties and the color representing the type of shooting, such as targeted, indiscriminate, and accidental (Zara). In the nation’s recent past of 20 years, there have been upwards of 230 school shootings since the Columbine High School shooting in April 1999 (Zeggers). Adolescent shooters, according to data collected from a majority of the larger school shootings in the country since the start of the 21st century, seem to target high schools with a male-oriented majority as well as acting alone in almost every instance (Katsiyannis).

Most of the shootings result in a range from no fatalities or wounded to over two dozen killed with many injured. In April 1999, two Columbine High School students killed a dozen people and a faculty member and injured nearly two dozen in what was infamously known as the Columbine High School Massacre (“Columbine”). The shock from this by the rest of the nation pushed for many reforms involving gun control as well as safety and prevention of another one of these tragedies within education systems around the world. This tragedy, along with the Virginia Tech shooting in April 2007 and the Sandy Hook massacre in December 2012, brought about many policy reformation ideas and progress in gun control, however it began raising questions and ideas on the role of mental stability and its correlation with these shooters.

Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris are some of the most notorious murderers for their mass shooting spree at a Colorado high school, mercilessly killing students left and right, all with a grin on their faces and laughter in their throats. Both students of Columbine High School located south of Denver, Colorado, Klebold and Harris dressed in long black trench coats began their shooting rampage under an hour before noon in the cafeteria after waiting for their two propane bombs to detonate, which both failed (“Columbine”). They weaved throughout the cafeteria, hallways and the library, gunning down anyone in their sight. 12 students and a teacher were killed while upwards of 20 were wounded from the indoor shooting spree. Both were speculated
to have gone through with the killings due to being apart of “a group of social outcasts called the Trenchcoat Mafia,” supported by their attire including a trenchcoat, as well as being targets for continued bullying (“Columbine”). They modeled a portion of their attack to that of the Oklahoma City bombings 4 years prior. In the aftermath of the Columbine massacre, there was speculation and discussions revolved around the mental stability of both Dylan Klebold, a “rage-filled, egotistical, lacking conscience” sociopath, and Eric Harris, a “psychotic” teen “suffering from paranoia, delusions and organized thinking,” and how their conditions played a significant role in the conduction of the shooting (Associated). The mental health of both boys played a large factor into their disgusting, merciless mentality as they stripped the lives of their classmates away from their friends and families.

The Virginia Tech shooting in April 2007 stripped the lives of 32 people at the hands of single perpetrator. Seung Hui Cho, South Korean-born and raised in Virginia, displayed signs of unusual behaviors as he began to get older, including allegedly stalking female students in 2005 as well as being admitted to a psychiatric hospital in late 2005, but was released on orders of “receiving therapy as an outpatient” (“Seung-Hui”). In April 2007, Cho killed students in a residence hall early in the morning on the 16th and continued his rampage by killing 32 people, including 27 students and 5 faculty, after locking the doors with chains and locks to an academic building and opening fire, ending the carnage by committing suicide with a bullet to his head (“Seung-Hui”). Two days after the shooting, NBC New York received a package from Seung-Hui Cho himself sent out before the shooting took place, containing “video clips, photographs” of himself and his weapons, and “a rambling document,” in which he references Columbine shooters Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris, also ranting about rich “brats” and hoisting himself up as an “avenger for the weak and defenseless” due to previously being bullied (“Seung-Hui Cho”). The significance of the Virginia Tech shooting shows how significant the stacking red flags and increasingly disobedient, radical behaviors to societal norms can be at predicting the path of a potential threat then containing and preventing any such incidents from happening. Cho’s actions and insightful pictures, recordings and documents helped develop the idea of these people who struggle with mental deficiency that primes their minds to not think twice about holding criminals and murders as role models because they see them as vigilantes for those who can’t defend themselves and achieve “revenge” on those who have hurt them in the past, paying for what they have done.

The aftermath of these prominent shootings of the past two decades has brought about questioning and changes in thinking of how these shooters were thinking and why they did the things they did. These are not the only people to have a mental deficiency to play as a factor in committing violent acts towards one individual or a larger group. Research has been done over these conditions and it shows that the mind of a mentally ill person often lacks self-control and common sense including acting out on radical behavior. Precautions and more effective methods of prevention need to be developed and set in place in order to likelihood of another shooter as much as possible.
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Social Epidemiologist #2: The Shooters Behind the Massacres

Behind all of the deaths, public outcry and mourning that accompany school shootings are the hands that held the gun that that started it all. Those hands that pulled the trigger are attached to a person. The most formidable question that faces politicians, researchers and even just citizens of America is how do these people commit such heinous acts and more importantly why do they do so? The reasoning and theories behind each shooter indubitably vary but commonalities are definitely apparent in each specific case. Each school shooter has been affected by societal influences as well conditions in their own lives.

When thinking of a common young criminal, one may think of the stereotypical kid from a rough home life, with parents that don’t care about them and come from a lower socioeconomic status (Pitarro). Although with school rampage shooters, this is not the case. According to Michael Pitarro, school shooters “don’t fit the typical American juvenile” (Pitarro). School rampage shooters are typically Caucasian males that come from a middle socioeconomic status and attend a suburban high school (McGee). The typical school shooter is also likely to be of average to above average intelligence (McGee). In order to plan and carry out a rampage shooting, it is logical that the shooter would need to be intelligent enough to methodically plan out the attack. The shooter is also often described as a loner and often experiences some sort of psychological stressor prior to killing (McGee). An example of this can be the feeling of isolation, bullying or a change in a life event such as moving schools.

Although those characteristics are the typical ones of a school shooter, what influences a person with those characteristics to actually become a school shooter? It is most likely that each person may be able to think of a kid that they went to school with that had those same characteristics but obviously did not become a school shooter. So, what pushes people like Seung-Hui, the Virginia Tech shooter, or Dylan Klebold, one of the Columbine shooters, to execute the horrendous acts that they did? This question is difficult for researchers to come to considering most school shooters commit suicide before law enforcement may reach them. Although, research done on these school shooters provide insight on what influences them. Michael Pitarro discusses certain risk factors that predispose younger people to potentially reaching that point based on characteristics of past shooters. A first of these risk factors are the biological and psychological factors such as neurological or psychiatric disorders (Pitarro). An example of this trend would be Dylan Klebold’s journal being found to have depressed or suicidal thoughts and expressions (Biography.com Editors, “Dylan Klebold”). Another common risk factor among shooters are family characteristics such as how the child grew up (Pitarro). An example of a family characteristics that may have influenced the loner mentality of a school shooter is Eric Harris’s background of being the son of an Air Force Pilot and moving around a lot as a child (Biography.com Editors, “Eric Harris”). This in combination with other influences may have caused Eric to have issues with connecting to others since he was always moving. Another important risk factor to note is how American society refers to violence as a way out of
conflict (Pitarro). This societal effect may influence someone who is hopeless and filled with rage to resort to violence because they have seen it socially constructed as a complete end to whatever internal or external conflicts they may be facing.

Further influences of school shooters can be seen looking through the lens of Travis Hirschi’s Social Bond Theory at school shooters. This theory states that deviant behavior occurs when social bonds are weakened or broken completely (Pitarro). When a person has a strong attachment to something, in the case of the school shooter it would be school or classmates, there is passion and empathy (Pitarro). School shooters often feel detached from the rest of the school and classmates; hence the typical shooter being known as a loner. In the case of the Columbine shooting, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold had said they hated school and were isolated by the “jock culture” of their school (Biography.com Editors, “Dylan Klebold”). This means that their social bond with classmates other than each other and the school were severely severed. Although none of these are the sole cause of school shootings they are influences and risk factors research suggests these common factors among the lives of school shooters.

When looking at specific cases of school shooters and their lives, these trends in behavior and social influences are noticeably evident. Examples of this can be seen when looking in depth at the Virginia Tech shooter, Seung-Hui Cho. Seung-Hui Cho killed thirty-two people on the Virginia Tech campus (Biography.com Editors, “Seung-Hui Cho”). He was born in South Korea and moved to America at age 8, something that made him already a bit different and isolated from other children (Biography.com Editors, “Seung-Hui Cho”). He came from a middle-class family like the typical school shooter and was bullied at a young age with later developing mental health issues, even making a suicidal statement causing him to be placed in a psychiatric hospital two years before the Virginia Tech shooting (Biography.com Editors, “Seung-Hui Cho”). This shows the trend of psychiatric issues being a risk factor. He also had an affinity for writing abhorrent violent stories in school (Biography.com Editors, “Seung-Hui Cho”). Seung-Hui Cho had his own signatures as all the others do such as his manifesto and even referencing the Columbine shooters in a video he took about the shooting (Biography.com Editors, “Seung-Hui Cho”). Although he didn’t have all of the exact statistical trend markers of a school shooter, he still remains an example of how all these risk factors and societal influences may come together.

To define the typical school shooter is a way that researchers hope to possibly recognize these characteristics in others and prevent future school shootings. Although not all school shooters are alike, research has shown typical patterns in behavior. The average school shooter is known to be things as a white male typically from a middle-class family (McGee). Then there are the researched risk factors such as biological and psychological factors, home life of the person and even the social construction of violence by American society (Pitarro). Not a single one of these factors is a cause for a person to become a school shooter. Hence not every person with a mental health issue is at risk to become a school shooter nor every person whom is bullied. It is how their personal health and societal influences come together in a perfect storm
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Many people wonder what a person's motive is when they hear about school shootings. They want to know why, as well as how, a teenager could follow through with such an act. In order to help people feel a bit more at ease, journalists gather all the information they can from the scene to try and answer the mysterious question of “why?” According to an article by Jaclyn Schildkraut and Glenn W. Muschert, they predict that violent media, guns, and mental illness, also known as the Three Ring Circus, is a major cause of school shootings. Although those are just assumptions, backed up by evidence of course, the underlying cause of school shootings is still being investigated every year. With the leading cause of school shootings being unknown, journalists help gather information at the scene so people can be more informed about the situation at hand.

The mass media has become such an important way that people find out about news, interact with others, and watch videos/movies, but it can also negatively impact young adults as well. On average, about 96% of citizens rely on media to hear about their daily news (Paolini). Violent media is said to be one of the main causes of school shootings in the U.S. According to an article called, “American Reporting of School Violence and ‘People Like Us’: A Comparison of Newspaper Coverage of the Columbine and Red Lake School Shootings,” journalists reported that Heavy metal music and Marilyn Manson promoted violence during the Columbine and Red Lake shootings. With high school kids still being young, violent media such as music videos, scary movies, and even talk shows can alter their way of thinking, creating a violent mindset in kids. Teenagers listening to this type of music and watching those types of movies, can make them want to reenact such movie, or they can be motivated by such music to undertake in the act of school shootings. On another note, journalists can push their limits a little too much which can lead to copycat crimes. If too much information about the shootings is released, there is a fear that teens will imitate such crimes in the future. If the teenagers do reenact the shootings, the journalists can be at fault for the casualties; therefore, they need to be precise in how they go about informing people of the shootings.

Ever since school shootings have occurred, there has been talk about changing the gun laws to ensure safety. Journalists reported talk of teachers carrying guns in their classrooms for when school shootings do happen, but is that really going to keep all the kids safe? When looking into the Columbine shooting, according to the “American Reporting of School Violence and ‘People Like Us’: A Comparison of Newspaper Coverage of the Columbine and Red Lake School Shootings,” article, the Littleton community wanted stricter gun laws since the shooters easily bought their guns at a gun show as minors. When we compare Columbine to the Red Lake shooting, the Red Lake community didn’t look much into the gun laws being changed, nor was there a lot of press. With Columbine being the first major school shooting, the press was jumping at it to get a good story, but once Red Lake occurred, it was smaller and people were not as surprised. This proves that the only way there will be a significant amount of political or
social change is if there is a lot of press at the scene to investigate and publish the issues at hand. As well as there being talk about changing the gun laws, there was also some conversation about better surveillance within schools. Whether there be more cameras to keep an eye on the school grounds or clear backpacks so others cannot hide weapons in their backpacks, people within the community thought this might help ensure the safety of their kids at school. When it came to these safety precautions, journalists were not so much in the mix. It was more of other civilians chatting about what they thought would be the correct route to go in in regards to this issue as well as overall safety.

In the past, mental illnesses were not heavily focused on because they were hard to study, as well as diagnose. Recently, mental illnesses have become a major focus for things such as school shootings. At the scene of a school shooting, journalists get first hand evidence about bullying and how the other students are treated. According to the article “School Shootings and Student Mental Health: Role of the School Counselor in Mitigating Violence,” when it comes to mental illnesses, the two main points to think about are bullying and psychiatric drugs. Bullying can cause teenagers to want to get revenge if they have been getting humiliated. Psychiatric drugs are also an important motive because if the teen is not taking the prescribed drug, it could cause them to lash out. The drug could also have negative side effects which could lead to violence. In the Columbine shooting, journalists reported that Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris were on medications while also seeing a Psychiatrist. While being on prescribed medications to help your illness/disease is a perfectly normal ordeal, doctors need to be careful when prescribing them to teenagers because of the side effects or effects of the teens not taking them in the first place. According to the National Association of School Psychology (2006), students who receive social-emotional and mental health support are more successful academically and personally (Paolini).

People are becoming troubled over the fact that school violence is becoming more of a “common place,” and parents don’t want to worry about sending their kids off to school. Schools are even placing metal detectors and security guards at the main entrances of schools to ensure overall safety. After the first school shootings occurred, people became frantic about ensuring safety which is what led to the talk of changing gun laws and safer school policies. Without the help of journalists and the mass media, people would be left in the dark about serious issues like these. At the end of the day, journalists do a good job at gathering the information needed for people to be up to date on what is going on. With the help of first hand evidence, journalists try to make people feel more at ease with this recurring issue. With the help of journalists, people believe the current motives are mass media, guns, and mental illness, which creates a clearer view on why teens decide to follow through with the act of school shootings.
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Social Epidemiologist #4: Scientific Literature

Scientific literature has a plethora to offer when it comes to school shootings. One data-based observation has been a point of focus for several scientists: how these fatal, tragic events may affect the students in witness. Scientific evidence displays that school shootings have a negative impact on student performance, students’ feelings of safety within a school environment, and the enrollment of new students into a school where a similar incident occurred. Even in schools where no shooting has taken place nearby, students may feel uneasy. Mass media coverage is the culprit of this phenomenon.

When a mass shooting occurs, such as Sandy Hook, for example, the first place people see it is on the news. With several ways to access news, such as the internet, television, and newspaper, it is very easy to find information quickly on traumatic events. This information to the ones who experienced the incident, however, is agonizing. After events like school shootings occur, “mass media presence… may exacerbate the trauma experienced by the communities (Muschert). Undergoing the shooting is difficult as is, but when people are aware of how much attention they receive because of said shooting, it makes the situation more difficult to handle. Because the shootings are so heavily reported, people that were not there may believe it is a large issue, while the witnesses will constantly be in the spotlight for a scenario they would be better off forgetting. In short, media makes the mental toll on them much worse. From the news’ viewers perspective, since mass shootings are talked about in various news reports, there is a rising exaggerated ‘public perception of school shootings as an emergent and increasing social problem’” (Muschert). A study by Victoria N. Iannuzzi of the University of South Florida “...concluded that incidents of the school-related mass murder type are significantly more likely to receive more media coverage than other incidents” (Iannuzzi 71).

The trauma people experience from school shootings, something internal and not reported on the news, is still something that needs coverage. There also needs to be a clear definition in what kind of shooting is addressed. In comparison to mass shootings where the perpetrator is someone who is committing violent acts towards others, cases where it may be “suicidal shootings have no significant impact on our variables of interest” (Beland, Kim). Simply put, this statement implies that when studying effects from a traumatic event, suicide and school shootings yield different results, therefore they are not related. To better understand how school shootings can cause negative effects in turn, many scientists study the impacts on students and education. For students in school, “exposure to trauma can result in damage to the hippocampus” (Beland, Kim). The hippocampus is an area of the brain heavily associated with learning and memory. Damage to it will definitely bring a learning impairment, as memory is a vital tool to help students learn; student performance due to this will be negatively affected. Research proves “the proficiency rate decreases after homicidal shootings in those schools…” (Beland, Kim). Every year, states test students on their math and language abilities. In schools where mass shootings have occurred, “the proficiency in math is reduced by 4.9 percentage points” and the proficiency in English is “3.9 percentage points lower” (Beland, Kim). According to the same
study, “...the negative effect of school shootings is aggravated with multiple deaths” (Beland, Kim). This means that even though suicides or single shootings are terrible events, they show no relation to a drop in academic performance. Mass shootings, however, show a significant effect.

Moreover, school shootings do not only affect academic performance for the students enrolled at these schools, they may also lead to mental illness, as it may “cause PTSD and poor mental health that diminish academic achievement” (Beland, Kim). Since the traumatic incident itself is enough to produce highly negative effects, including the possibility of mental illness, mass shootings leave a permanent scar on the survivors.

On the topic of how students are affected in school shootings, feelings of safety are also important to consider. “Violence,” like that of a school shooting, “negatively affects children’s formation of relationships by reduced capacity to form secure attachments” (Beland, Kim). Attachments to others help one feel a sense of safety. If students are unable to form relationships, they may feel unable to belong in a school environment, and therefore unsafe.

Parents will also take into account whether or not their children feel safe, as they usually make decisions regarding where to send their children to school. In the instance an incident occurs like a school shooting, the amount of new students a school will receive will decrease. As shown in a study, data states at a high school, “enrollment in Grade 9 (the high school entrance grade) drops following a deadly shooting” (Beland, Kim). With violence and gun crimes being a highly covered news topic, it is not surprising to see that parents would not enroll their children at a school where a school shooting took place, as the news establishes fear that a similar incident could happen in the near future. The study illustrates a “5.8% decline in Grade 9 enrollment for the average school experiencing a shooting” (Beland, Kim). Data for children above the entrance grade, or coming back for the next few years (in grades 10-12) does not change following a shooting (Beland, Kim). This brings about the conclusion that only enrollment of new students is affected. This, however, does not change whether or not children may feel safe following a shooting.

Moreover, shootings, and similar violent acts, “may result in absenteeism, which could lower enrollment and diminish student achievement” (Beland, Kim). Absenteeism implies that children may be afraid of further coming to school, which means that a place they once regarded as “safe” can now be a prime source for danger. Students with high absentee rates struggle to maintain a high level or performance in the classroom.

To summarize, scientific research shows that mass school shootings have a significant impact on many individuals. Analysis proves that media outlets are much more likely to cover school shootings than other events, which may cause exaggerated feelings of fear in students. Mass school shootings also generate a decrease in student achievement in math and English in the schools where the shootings occur. Additionally, they spawn mental health issues for the survivors of these events and limit students’ ability to form relationships after the shootings. Furthermore, mass school shootings cause a decline in enrollment and may lead to an increase in absenteeism.
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Social Epidemiologist #5: Solutions

In recent times, school shootings have become so common that some don’t even make the news anymore. This has divided the country into many groups about what we should do to protect children and the staff of schools around the United States. While there are many people who have flooded the media describing how they want to arm the staff in the school there are others who believe this would be a terrible idea since we are bringing guns into the school already making it less safe. People freely share their opinions on this controversy since its so relevant to this day and age.

In high school, one of my teachers had been a friend that was shot and killed in a school shooting so she decided to have an open debate between my class. Our arguments ranged from strict laws on control to some more unrealistic ideas such as buckets of rocks under teachers desks in case of an intruder. Although this debate was small and informal it still reflected the ideas and emotions of our nation. Within the first article there was a woman who claimed that we should be looking more into the emotional and psychological aspect of these shooters and “regions”. As the author, Cheryl Lester, said in her article,”For one thing, we might consider ways to organize our annual conference so that it would address the goal of increasing our knowledge and understanding of our region, its people, and their concerns. For another, we need to develop more avenues for building and maintaining relationships that cross campus and state lines and that can serve to inform us about one another and about our region.” (Lester) As Lester’s approach of looking into the community and their minds of its people this would seem as this is a great idea since many of the shooters have a history or neglected mental health issues by the community or family members. Lester’s idea goes along with prevention of the next shooting, not a concept that has to be rushed and have immediate effect. This would be considered a theory piece since it is a concept that hasn’t been put in motion. As to go with the question asked in the rubric, you can classify Lester an opinion leader so this can have a negative effect on her ideas since some may just brush off her ideas since he doesn’t have a PhD attached to her name and she isn’t a commonly known politician or other figure of power.

To illustrate the difficulty or presenting your ideas or solutions, Corwin Smidt included a reasoning behind this within his article published by The Oxford University Press. He said,”The media give more attention to powerful political figures, but it is unclear whether the bias translates into such actors having an equivalent influence.”(Smidt) This is why politician’s ideas are so easily taken apart. These figures are constantly in the spotlight under immense pressure from the public which will pounce onto anything they say. Take for example how slanted or divided this can make the public based on political views/parties alone. In general Democrats want more gun control so any idea proposed by them will immediately have less power since the nation is divided into separate political parties. This would contribute to the formation of gun control rallies on the east coast after shootings such as Parkland, Florida. For a solution to
happen there would need to be a “coming together” of sorts in order to establish the best possible outcome.

As a fact piece would go, as stated in Anthony Braga’s article published in *Journal of policy analysis and management*, “It is the responsibility of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF), often working with state and local law enforcement, to investigate criminal firearms trafficking, arrest the perpetrators, and refer them to U.S. attorneys for prosecution.” (Braga) This is the other side of the coin for this national controversy. Braga depicts this as government responsibility and involvement to take the weapons out of the hands of these dangerous people in order to protect their kids. This concept would go along with when people want to “take away” the illegal guns from people so that they won’t be able to use them in a way such as a school shooting. The ATF would have to take aggressive hands on approach to physically remove the firearms from people, in turn, this approach would cause much more controversy since it would violate the second amendment and people would most likely revolt by hiding or refusing to give up their firearms. When a school shooting happens there is almost nothing to be done to settle it without violence. The idea of taking away the guns that would be done by the ATF is set in place as a preventative measure instead of active measures such as arming teachers with some sort of defense.

To go along with the power battles of public figures in the US, an article published by *Social Science Quarterly* which stated, “News making and policy making involves not only the competition among problems for attention, but also competition among aspects of those problems...Many scholars across disciplines agree that public problems and multifaceted constructs of social understanding that are shaped through politics.” (Lawrence) This quote expresses multiple issues that have become attached to gun control and school shooting solutions. Breaking down the quote, the “competition among problems for attention” is reflected in the media as when certain school shootings receive more media and national coverage than other ones for a variety of reasons. These can be based on fatalities or advocates such as celebrities and politicians that have a connection to the most recent event. This leads into the second issue of social construct of the problems. Political parties could easily argue that these shootings happened because the other party had established or not established a law that would have changed the outcome of this shooting and in turn propose their own. This leads to another divide as to what the shooting was truly influenced by and how it can be stopped.

In conclusion there is no clear cut way for the nation to stop this phenomenon that has been plaguing us for many years. The multilayered events and problems have sprouted out into so many different strains and lives that just picking what side you believe in may be difficult for some. In order for real change to happen there needs to be a push for political party acceptance of both sides for the safety of the citizens and children of the nation.
Work Cited


