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Scott Poland
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Lessons Learned From School Shootings Perspectives from the United States of America

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Lessons Learned From School Shootings

Perspectives from the United States
of America

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Abstracts

Lessons Learned from School Shootings: Looking Back and Beyond

Over the last three decades, school shootings have become a prominent concern that have gained significant public attention nationwide. High profile massacres such as those at Columbine and Sandy Hook have prompted calls for changes related to school safety measures and gun legislation. Response efforts have included growing research, increased prevention programming, and legislative modifications. As a result, current data reveal that schools continue to be one of the safest environments that youth spend their time in, and the risk of school shootings remains relatively low. Despite this, Americans continue to report heightened fears about the state of safety in our schools and myths regarding mass shootings reaching epidemic levels perpetuate. As such, it is pertinent that current and comprehensive reviews of school shootings are provided in order to inform the public and clarify misinformation. Further, given the continued occurrences of shootings in our schools, evolving response efforts and ongoing evaluation are necessary. This brief will investigate school shootings and their impact on individual, community, and societal levels. Additionally, it will include professional and personal perspectives from individuals such as school psychologists, teachers, and parents, all of whom have been directly involved in and impacted by school shootings. Such perspectives will provide valuable insight related to numerous aspects of school shootings. The authors aim to offer novel perspectives that can aid in informing best practices necessary to strengthen school safety measures, as well as prevention and response efforts. This brief will serve as helpful guide to better understanding the many factors surrounding school shootings, providing critical information and updated data that will be a meaningful contribution to the current literature.

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Contents

- 1 School Shootings: An Overview 1**
 - 1.1 Personal Perspectives: Introductions 2
 - 1.2 School Shootings Defined 4
 - 1.3 School Shootings Research 4
 - 1.4 History of School Shootings 5
 - 1.4.1 Dispelling the Myths of School Shootings 6
 - 1.4.2 Media Exposure 9
 - 1.5 Conclusion 10
 - References 11
- 2 School Shooters and Shootings 13**
 - 2.1 School Shooting Contexts 13
 - 2.1.1 School Types 14
 - 2.1.2 School Size 15
 - 2.1.3 School Location 16
 - 2.1.4 School Funding Source 16
 - 2.2 School Shooter Common Characteristics 17
 - 2.2.1 Langman’s Typologies 18
 - 2.2.2 Additional Common Characteristics 22
 - 2.3 Contributing Factors to School Shootings: Biological, Psychological, Social 22
 - 2.3.1 Biological 23
 - 2.3.2 Psychological 24
 - 2.3.3 Social 25
 - 2.4 Conclusion 27
 - References 27
- 3 Best Practices for School Safety to Prevent School Shootings 31**
 - 3.1 School Safety Efforts 31
 - 3.1.1 Security Measures 32
 - 3.1.2 Arming Teachers 33

3.1.3	School Resource Officers (SROs)	35
3.1.4	Active Shooter Drills	36
3.2	Threat Assessment	37
3.3	Responding to a School Shooting: Crisis Intervention	43
3.4	Best Practices for Prevention	47
3.4.1	School Safety Planning	47
3.4.2	School Climate	48
3.4.3	Socio-emotional Well-Being	49
3.4.4	Adequate Mental Health Support	51
3.4.5	School Safety Programs	51
3.5	Conclusion	54
	References	54
4	Legal Issues in the Context of School Shootings	59
4.1	Legislative Responses	59
4.1.1	Firearms	61
4.1.2	Mental Health Legislation	70
4.2	Other Relevant Legal Issues	71
4.2.1	Juveniles and Sentencing	71
4.2.2	Liability	73
4.3	Conclusion	76
	References	76
5	Key Recommendations, Final Thoughts, and Future Directions	81
5.1	Key Recommendations	81
5.1.1	Prevention	81
5.1.2	Aftermath of School Shootings	84
5.1.3	Media Exposure	88
5.1.4	Firearm Access	88
5.2	Future Directions	89
5.3	Resources	90
	References	90
	Index	91

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Chapter 1

School Shootings: An Overview



School shootings have gained significant attention over the last two decades, prompting heightened levels of concern and misconceptions about the related risks and current state of incidences. Further, the literature related to school shootings is inconsistent and reveals areas of mixed findings, some of which likely contributes to misinformation about the topic. For example, basic statistics of incidents and definitions of school shootings are variably reported, generating confusion about the trends and the current state of school shootings. As such, it is imperative that current data are updated and presented consistently, and that limitations to the way in which this topic is investigated are highlighted.

This brief will provide such information and clarify facts versus fears related to school shootings. Of particular importance is an examination of the history of school shootings, the related oversaturation of media coverage, and amplified concerns that school shootings are frequent occurrences. Despite the increased fear, the data continues to show that the risk of school shootings remains relatively low (Cornell, 2015). Moreover, trends indicate that school settings can be considered just as safe as other environments in which youth spend their time. While this brief aims to clarify misinformation, it also recognizes the ongoing occurrences of mass shootings in schools and their tragic implications, further justifying continued need for public attention, scholarly exploration, and evidence-based recommendations.

Risk factors and traits among the school shooter population will be explored. Specifically, commonly identified factors related to school shooters will be examined, including typologies, intrapersonal and interpersonal characteristics, and motives. Such knowledge is of vital importance, as it informs the public and, relatedly, the prevention process. While school shootings cannot be predicted, there a variety of methods for safety and prevention that should be implemented on individual, community, and societal levels. Currently, such methods are being executed inconsistently across schools, suggesting the need the for continued review and multidisciplinary collaboration. Best practices for school safety and prevention will be presented, including recommendations from relevant experts.