

# Chapter 1

## Understanding the Antecedents of School Shootings: The Case of the Robb Elementary School

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### **ABSTRACT**

*On May 24, 2022, nineteen students and two teachers in Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas lost their lives and several students and staff were injured due to a mass school shooting perpetrated by an eighteen-year-old assailant. Applying the social-ecological framework, this chapter explores the antecedents of the Robb Elementary School shootings within the individual, relational/interpersonal, community, and societal contexts. The antecedents of the shootings at Robb Elementary School identified in this chapter are male sex and violent and narcissistic behaviors at the individual level, parent-child conflict, and lower social status in peer groups within the relational context, poor school performance within the community context, and living in poverty and permissive gun laws within the societal context. Implications for practice, policy, and future research are also discussed.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

On May 24, 2022, a tragedy befell students and teachers in two classrooms at Robb Elementary School, along with the entire community of Uvalde, a town in Texas located 80 miles west of San Antonio and 54 miles east of the United States-Mexico border. An eighteen-year-old former Robb Elementary School student entered two classrooms and opened fire using his newly purchased AR-15-style rifle, leaving nineteen students and two teachers deceased and dozens of students and teachers injured (Jacobsohn & El-Bawab, 2022). Days leading up to the shootings, the shooter purchased AR-15-style weapons and 1,740 rounds of ammunition (Astudillo et al., 2022). On the day of the shootings, the suspected shooter shot his grandmother after an argument and drove her truck to the school where he had embarked on a shooting spree (Mayer, 2022).

Robb Elementary School shootings, along with other high-profile school shootings, such as the ones in Columbine High School in 1999, Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012, Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in 2018, and Oxford High School in 2021, have garnered a significant amount of media and scholarly attention over the years. Although research on school shootings has increased substantially (e.g., Leary et al., 2003; Muschert, 2007; Newman et al., 2008; Towers et al., 2015; Verlinden et al., 2000; Wike & Fraser, 2009), there remains a critical need to understand better the antecedents of recent school shooting incidents, such as the one that occurred in Robb Elementary School. Similar to many other school shootings, it has been reported that in the case of the Robb Elementary School shootings, warning signs were missed, leading to this tragedy (Burrows et al., 2022; Davis, 2022). A 77-page Texas House Committee Report indicated several warning signs about the shooter that were overlooked, such as, for example, unstable home life (Burrows et al., 2022). The shooter was described as an isolated individual who became obsessed with school shootings as he struggled at home and school but received no mental health support (Davis, 2022). Consequently, such shooting incidents have also raised public concerns that the existing policies and procedures might be insufficient to ensure that students, teachers, and personnel are safe in their schools (Wike & Fraser, 2009). Likewise, the rate of poverty is high in Uvalde, and a lack of resources, such as school security systems and safety protocols, tends to be problematic in impoverished schools, such as Robb Elementary School (Meyer, 2022). Findings from research on the antecedents could shed light on ways to prevent future massacres in low-resourced schools, such as the Robb Elementary School, and could inform the design of school-based violence prevention strategies by specifically pinpointing areas where interventions are needed.

The focus of this chapter is to identify antecedents of the Robb Elementary School shootings within multiple contexts. School shootings tend to be influenced

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