


Chapter 8

Long After the Sound of Gun Fire Is Silenced: The Impact of Shootings Still Echo the Halls

Kimberly Mudd-Fegett

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9136-9206>
Campbellsville University, USA

ABSTRACT

Teachers enter the helping profession to mold the lives of children and young adults, not to arm themselves against intruders or their students. Furthermore, teachers and administrators do not knowingly enter into their professions with the mindset that they will one day look into the eyes of their students as they lay before them shot, dying, or picking up the pieces from a traumatic event. In this chapter, the author will highlight data from interviews with three teachers who have vast levels of experience teaching and exposure to trauma. This author will use a narrative perspective in conducting these interviews to truly understand their experience, calling, and need for change. These interviews will highlight teachers who taught when active shooters were a foreign term and teachers who have taught throughout the longevity of their careers in a world where active shooting training and preparedness were a part of their required yearly training. The stark contrast between these participants' interviews will give insight into the vast difference in teaching in today's classroom.

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THE NEED FOR CHANGE

From the remote plains of Amish country in rural Pennsylvania to the mountainous town of Columbine, Colorado, no town or city in America is immune to the tragedy of school shootings. All students, teachers, administrators, and first responders should be prepared for the underlying crisis that could unfold without warning at any given moment. Disord (2023) states there was a sharp rise in school shootings in 2021 and 2022. An examination of these cases revealed that 100% exhibited warning signs, and in 75% of these cases, at least one person was aware of the plan beforehand. The year 2022 was the deadliest year for mass school shootings in the last five years (Disord, 2023). As of September 2023, there have been fifty-four school shootings thus far 2023, with thirty-seven of these being in primary K-12 schools (Matthews, 2023).

In America, social workers, teachers, first responders, and law enforcement officers must better prepare themselves and their students for the trauma they face in school hallways. There have been more than 2069 active school shootings, totaling 684 fatalities and 1937 injuries since 1970 in America's schools. For this chapter, a school shooting will be defined as a "bullet hitting properly for any reason regarding the number of victims" (Alexander, 2021, paragraph 4). The negative impact of these shootings includes initial trauma (physical, mental, and emotional), posttraumatic stress, depression, anxiety, stress, survivor's guilt, mood disorders, sleep disruption, eating disorders, flashbacks, and hypervigilance.

Studies show the need to balance student safety and emotional trauma (Draucker, 1999). Implementing safety measures should not cause students to feel fear, anxiety, or emotional trauma. Recent studies show that emotional harm can occur during active shooter training due to stress (ElSherief et al., 2021). Our educational communities need three-legged policies prioritizing education, students' well-being, and safety. Evidence-based practices should be assessed to determine the best course of action to safeguard the well-being of all students, particularly those negatively impacted by the environment in which they are expected to thrive. Brimstein (2000) suggests a balanced approach in which teachers and schools refrain from "heavy-handed tactics" by monitoring students for student changes in attendance, grade, drug/alcohol use, signs of depression, anxiety, or other signs of mental health indicators. Students who go to harm their peers often feel wronged in some way. When responders can intervene proactively before a violent incident, lives are saved.

Teachers enter the helping profession to mold the lives of children and young adults, not to arm themselves against intruders of their students. Examining the reasons why teachers entered into the teaching profession, Thomson & Turner (2009) conducted research compiling the following list: identity (wishing to help children/love of the subject), beliefs (perception of teaching based on personal or

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