Gun Violence in Schools

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Introduction to the Issue

- Gun violence is an epidemic + public health crisis with health, safety, and financial ramifications (Katsiyannis et al., 2018)

- "Gun violence has severely compromised safety, learning outcomes, social development, and psychological well-being in many high school communities" (Lunn et al., 2021, p. 486)

- Risk factors of school shooters:
  - Previously bullied
  - Substance abuse
  - Refusal of medication
  - Common profile:
    - Young white male
    - Socially marginalized
    - average to above average intelligence
    - Depression/ suicide ideation
  (Hicks et al., 2019)

- Student performance is directly impacted following exposure to a homicidal shooting, decreasing probability of achieving a "proficient-level result" by as much as 10% in Math and 4% in English.
  (Beland & Kim, 2016)

Statistics

- 1914 K-12 school shootings from 1970 through 2021
  - 251 in 2021 alone
  - 191 active shooter situations
  (Riedman & O'Neill, 2022)

- 14-20k schools have School Resource Officers (armed and trained to work in schools)
  - roughly ⅓ of public schools
  (Katsiyannis et al., 2018)

- As many as 81% of attacks were "telegraphed", with at least one friend, schoolmate, or family member knowing it was planned
  (Gerard et al., 2016)

- As many as 30-40% of children exposed to a mass shooting incident meet clinical definitions for PTSD within three months of the incident.
  (Shultz et al., 2014)

What are the concerns?

- Impact of gun violence in schools on psychological well-being, personal development, and academic performance of students (Lunn et al., 2021)
- Ease of access to high-powered firearms (Katsiyannis et al., 2018)
- More funding needed for implementation of tiered approach to address school violence (Katsiyannis et al., 2018)
- "extended healing process" (p. 486) required following occurrence of a school shooting (Lunn et al., 2021)

Role of the School Counselor

- Establishing relationship with students, parents, faculty, administration, and community members
  - facilitating this connection between students and stakeholders allows all parties to feel heard and important
  - More likely for students to turn to school counselor instead of harming others
- Participation on crisis teams
- Development of programming
  - Crisis prevention programs
  - Socio-emotional programming: healthy communication, conflict resolution, mental health issues
  (Hicks et al., 2019)

- Cultivating resilience and gratitude in posttrauma interventions
  - "Individuals high in gratitude may be able to convert higher post traumatic stress (PTS) into post traumatic growth (PTG)" (p. 66)
  - Those with higher levels of resilience experience less PTS
- Resiliency training programs can be preventative measures for PTS
  - Master Resilience Training (MRT)
  - Penn Resiliency Program
  (Vieselmeyer et al., 2017)

- Train school staff and faculty in the process of guiding Post-Traumatic Growth:
  - Enable students to question and evaluate assumptive world views
  - Provide opportunities to examine views other than their own
  - Encourage students to experiment with new ways of thinking and new perspectives
  (Lunn et al., 2021)

Best Practices

Legislation

- Gun-Free School Zones Act of 1990: crime to possess or discharge firearm in a school zone
- Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994: states receiving federal funds must have law requiring school districts to expel for 1+ year any student carrying gun to school
- More legislation needed to make more difficult for adolescents to acquire high-powered firearms

(Katsiyannis et al., 2018)

PBIS Tiered Approach:

- Tier 1: protect individuals from gun violence via universal approaches for all
- Tier 2: targeted approaches for risk factor reduction & promoting protective factors
- Tier 3: individual interventions for individuals at great risk for perpetrating violence

(Katsiyannis et al., 2018)

Readiness - Response - Recovery

- Readiness:
  - Establish a compassionate and youth-focused environment
  - Network with family and community partners
  - Establish supportive policies and programs with defined crisis responses
- Response:
  - Be compassionate, calm, and respectful
  - Ensure safety, stability, and comfort
  - Offer practical assistance and provide direct services and information
- Recovery:
  - Staff are role models of recovery, and have to make sense of events/ learn to cope with them (with all necessary support made available)
  - Adapt the language used to discuss events, normalize/ destigmatize thoughts and emotions surrounding the events

(SAMHSA, 2019)

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