

**The Bill Blackwood  
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**

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**Lethal Violence in Schools:  
Can Society Prevent School Shootings?**

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**An Administrative Research Paper  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
Required for Graduation from the  
Leadership Command College**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Preventing school shootings is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because law enforcement officers have an obligation to engage in crises like school shootings. The oath of office taken by each law enforcement officer forces each of them to engage in situations where others may have a choice not to engage. This is what they do protect and serve the citizens of their communities. Officers engage when an active shooter is inside of a school on a killing spree; they are trained to take a life in order to preserve a life in some situations. An officer's goal is to get the shooter before the shooter gets him because that officer's plan is to go home at the end of his shift.

The purpose of this research is to make its information regarding the intervention/prevention techniques for school shootings and the characteristics and profiles of a school shooter and/or violent student available to the communities, the schools, the local and state law enforcement/government, and all other key players that interact with children. There are some vital key points in this research that can assist in the prevention of school violence/shootings. The method of inquiry used by the researcher included: a review of articles, internet sites, periodicals, journals, and a survey distributed to 30 survey participants.

The researcher discovered a trend across the nation that shows an increase in school violence/shootings. During this research, the participants indicated that they have seen an increase in school shootings/violence and believed that most school shootings can be prevented. There are various reasons for the increase of school shootings/violence, which will be discussed in this research. In order to gain control over this issue, it is going to take everyone joining in to combat this violent trend. Research

has proven that negative/violent behavior starts in the home. For example, the two shooters in the Littleton, Colorado school shooting, Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris, used their rooms at home to make the bombs used in the school shooting; they kept journals and documented the events leading up to the school shooting in their rooms. They also recorded videos of themselves acting out this violent event all under the roof of their parents' houses ("Columbine High School Massacre," n.d.). It is a strong possibility that parents who are aware of the activity occurring in their homes are able to save some lives.

The school's administrators and educators need to apply stricter policies to better deal with criminal activity in and around their school. The teachers need to be genuinely concerned about the students, get students the help they need, and, the most important thing, listen to what they have to say. It is beneficial to both the children and the educators to be available for students during stressful situations; the interaction between the two at this point may actually save a life. Preventing schools shootings is a very difficult task, but it can be accomplished by everyone working together.

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## INTRODUCTION

The problem or issue to be examined considers whether or not lethal violence in schools can be prevented. It is often stated that law enforcement is in a better position to implement and/or influence intervention for school violence. But parents, teachers, school officials, and friends are equally responsible and are sometimes in a better position than law enforcement to implement and/or influence intervention for school violence.

During the 1900s, violent school shootings took school violence to a whole other level. The crime is occurring more often, there are more fatalities as a result of shootings, more high powered weapons are being used, and the shooters are getting younger. From 1991–1999, there were approximately 17 secondary school related attacks and approximately three primary school related attacks. For the purpose of this paper, primary school ages are kindergarten through fifth grade and secondary school ages are sixth grade to twelfth grade. Children as young as 11 years old armed themselves with guns and explosives and entered schools, killing their teachers and classmates (“List of school related attacks,” n.d.). During this critically violent time, society believed that various music videos, video games, and movies like the film *The Basketball Diaries* caused this type of violent behavior to explode throughout the nation’s educational facilities (“School shooting,” n.d.).

Society immediately became concerned as to why the sudden increases in school shootings were occurring. There are many things that can contribute to the cause of school shootings. For example, a lack of a family value system: with children growing up in a single parent home, they may adapt to the family values they observe

on television or the friends with which they hang out. Some children allow violent music to control their behavior during their decision to commit a criminal act. When a decision is made to commit a school shooting and/or violent criminal act against others, the weapon often comes from the shooter's home or a friend of the shooter. It is typical for there to be at least one weapon in a household this day in time (Egendorf, 2002). Clear-cut answers are difficult to find and even the extent of the problem of violent youth has been hard to determine. Society is still concerned about their role in preventing violence/school shootings committed by and against children. Parents, students, educators, law enforcement, and community members need to work together and come up with a solution that will minimize the risk of such violence in the future.

The relevance of lethal violence in schools to law enforcement is that police officers have an obligation to engage in crises like school shootings. Youth violence is a crime that is occurring across the nation and is a concern not only for law enforcement but also for parents, educators, and the community as a whole. This type of crime not only affects the suspect and the victim but every parent that has a child growing up in today's society. Law enforcement has an obligation to intervene and go to great lengths in trying to work along with the community, schools, and parents in an attempt to decrease and/or deter this type of criminal behavior. Today's legal system is believed to be too easy in awarding punishment to juveniles offenders that commit and/or partake in criminal activity. In order to hold the offenders accountable for their actions, the punishment they receive must be able to get their attention and make them realize and feel that this is not a life they want to live. The punishment must be fair but, at the same time, the crime should not outweigh the punishment itself. Again, law enforcement

should always be working along with the stakeholders in the community to stay abreast of this type of behavior and have a prevention/intervention tactic in place to engage before it happens.

The purpose of this research is to make this material available to the communities, schools, the local and state law enforcement/government, and all other key players that interact with children. It is time to form a partnership to address the root of violence; schools should be safe for all children. Most school-based attacks were stopped through intervention by school administrators, educators, students, and/or by the attacker stopping on his own (U.S. Secret Service et al. 2002). Therefore, society must do everything within its power to identify young people who need help and then get them the help they need.

The main research question to be examined focuses on whether or not school shootings can be prevented. Other topics discussed within this research will consist of defining a school shooting, the profile and characteristics of a school shooter with violent tendencies, whether there is a correlation between bullies and school shooters, and the different types of intervention/prevention techniques that are available and being implemented to help combat school shootings.

The intended method of inquiry includes: a review of articles, internet sites, periodicals, journals, and a survey distributed to 30 law enforcement officers/employees. The intended outcome or anticipated findings of the research is to implement and make the public aware of prevention and intervention techniques and strategies to assist in combating school shootings and/or school violence. This

information will be made available to school officials, parents, caregivers, law enforcement agencies, and citizens that interact with children/students.

The field of law enforcement will benefit from the research because this research and its findings will be made available to the public, which will also make them more aware of this topic. With the public having access to this research, it will assist in creating a partnership within a community that will bond them together to fight against school violence. In order to be successful in this fight, it is going to take the participation of everyone that helps make up society. School districts will work in collaboration with their local law enforcement agency in order to create and implement a crisis plan tailored to their school and/or college campus, and parents should focus on producing a healthier family atmosphere within the home. With everyone working together, this will assist in addressing school violence.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Historically, society has viewed the schools as a safe haven from violence. However, over the past decade, school shootings have increased the fear of society and the concern for the safety of all youth. Violence on the streets has spilled over into the schools, which makes society feel that the schools are no longer a safe haven for children. Many educators, parents, and students are aware of bullying and violent threats made against students occurring in school, but they do not view this type of behavior as serious, so it goes unreported. The level of youth violence has escalated to killings over the past decade. The next few paragraphs will discuss why teens/youths kill and the believed profile and characteristics of a school shooter.

School shootings are the focus of this research. For the purpose of this research, a school shooting is defined as a shooting that takes place in an educational facility and claims the lives of several students/people along with many injured. This type of spree killing may be aimed towards a specific student and/or a group of students or it could be a random shooting. American media describes a school shooting as gun violence at an educational institution. The shooters in these shootings are often current and/or former students that were once bullied during their school years. The perpetrator's goal is to first kill his target victims and then as many more students as he can kill before turning the gun on himself or being shot by a law enforcement officer.

School shootings do not occur as often but are always more violent than the everyday criminal offenses that take place in schools such as fights, assaults, or bullying. In the United States, a specific area of town may dictate the type of crime that occurs in this area. For example, more gang related crime, like cuttings, assaults, and shootings, may occur more often in the inner-city schools, which are more densely populated and in impoverished sections of cities. Most school shootings often occur in heavily populated white, middle class, non-urban areas, such as small towns and suburbs like Littleton, Colorado; Pearl, Mississippi; and Jonesboro, Arkansas. Between 1966 and 2008, an estimated 9,000 people were killed during a school shooting incident ("School shooting," n.d).

When it comes to school shootings, a popular question asks why these students end up becoming shooters. The response to this statement is often speculated upon by the media or some acquaintances of the so-called shooter. However, most times, it would take the shooter himself to answer this question (Fox, 2007). The increase in

school shootings is believed to be an indication that people are becoming more violent towards the human race. According to Fox (2007), it is possible that man has grown more evil and bloodthirsty in the past years. It is still discussed, but many researchers have speculated as to why school shootings have become more common over the past couple of decades.

One change that impacted school shootings is the availability of weapons for young people. Weapons are more accessible to young people now than they have been in the past. The choice of weapons is even more powerful than they have been in the past, and they are often more powerful than most law enforcements officers' duty weapons. Years ago, the weapon chosen would be the average pistol or shotgun. Pistols and shotguns are not primarily the weapon of choice in this day and time; today, semiautomatics are the weapons of choice and are very easy to access by youth and criminals.

Not only has the choice of weapons changed, it is also believed that a change in society has played its part in the increased incidence of mass killing. According to Fox (2007), several factors exist in virtually all cases. According to Fox (2007), one factor is that the "perpetrators have a long history of frustration and failure and a diminished ability to cope with life's disappointments" (p. 1). An example of this would be boys who perceive they fail at manhood. Seeking status, performing for peers, finding an identity, and dealing with meddlesome adults are tasks that face all adolescents. However, it is also a gender process. The challenges play out differently for boys and girls. All of the rampage shooters are boys. This is no accident; not only are they failing at adolescence, in their eyes, they are also failing at manhood.

In addition to the previous factor, the perpetrators often externalize blame (Fox, 2007). They often feel that they have less of a chance than others in life. Sometimes ethnicity, race, religion, gender, and/or sports have an effect on decision making. For example, Columbine High School shooters Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris targeted and plotted against all those persons who they found offensive: jocks, girls that said no, and other outcasts or anybody they thought did not accept them (“Columbine High School Massacre,” n.d.).

Another factor is that these perpetrators generally lack emotional support from friends or family (Fox, 2007). According to Lanata (2003), “Most are from “troubled” families and view themselves as “different” when compared to general student population at their schools” (p. 22). Lanata (2003) mentioned that a number of school shooters were bullied at some point in their lives and depression played a part in their decisions. According to Fox (2007), “the perpetrators also generally suffer a precipitating event that they view as catastrophic” (p. 1). Catastrophic for some could be a break up in a relationship, a verbal disagreement with a loved one, and, most of all, not being accepted by their peers. For example, Dylan and Eric were said to be loners and not accepted by their peers. Some of the common signs of depression went unnoticed in both Dylan and Eric, leading up to the year of the event. But after reading and learning more about both shooters, their signs of depression were expressed through their writing.

A final factor regarding the perpetrators according to Fox (2007) is “that they need access to a weapon powerful enough to satisfy their need for revenge” (p. 1). Something has really gone wrong when the choice of weapons used by the shooter

outweighs the power of force used by today's law enforcement officer. When looking at why shooters commit this type of violent act, the home is the first thing that comes to mind. It is often said that the parents are not taking on the responsibility of raising their children. According to Lantana (2003), "the vast majority of the school shooters come from broken homes and/or troubled families" (p. 22). Christianity is lacking in the home environment and prayer has been taken out of the schools. The number one supporter in a child's life should be his family, and family's should make the child feel more important than any other person in that child's life. Whenever a child is mistreated and/or abused by a family member, it impacts their ability to successfully cope with life changes. To sum it all up, a dysfunctional home life will cause a child to display negative behavior (Fox, 2007).

However, even more than determining the type of student who becomes a shooter, it is necessary to evaluate what steps any school can take in preventing these types of incidences. Society needs to recognize that children in America's violence-saturated suburban environments are growing up in war zones. Many discussions have come about when talking about the increases in youth crime. Children and violence do not mix; at least that is what society would like to believe. Society often thinks that children should not be the victims of serious physical force intended to injure, damage, or intimidate them. It is generally believed that they deserve better, and adults rightly feel obliged to give it to them (Goldstein, 1997).

Youth believe that adults perceive them negatively. They feel that adults do not value, trust, or treat them with respect, much like their peers. Adults must understand that even when youths are identified as "at risk" or viewed as beyond risk and into

destructive patterns of behavior, it is important for adults to not treat them different from other youths. During this time, it is very important that adults cling to and build upon the common things that this “at risk” child may have compared to its peers. This timeframe is very vital to the youth, and the adult’s demeanor and choice of words will greatly impact the decision making process during this time (Goldstein, 1997).

Some intervention techniques discussed in the above paragraph can be used by adults when dealing with at-risk violent youths. The schools are one of the primary stakeholders in the community and often have a different view than society when dealing with at-risk violent youths on their campuses. According to Sexton-Radek (2005), “More than 90% of schools have strict policies in place to deter school violence” (p. 93). The next section will show some ways that teachers, community leaders, and law enforcement can assist in the eradication of school violence and shootings.

According to Lanata (2003), parents, school officials, law enforcement, and other community stakeholders should consider listening more to what young people say. Adults should assume that any threat is a serious threat, and they should consider reporting it to the appropriate people. According to the U. S. Secret Service, et al. (2002), 81% of the shooters told at least one person that the violent attack was going to take place, but no one reported it. Schools should consider taking a more proactive approach in identifying potential problems. Law enforcement and schools should consider implementing the community policing model in the schools by establishing police presence. They should also consider establishing a telephone tip line, where crime related messages can be left, like the Crime Stoppers program. A positive partnership with local law enforcement agencies is the start of a community coming

together to combat violence. Participation in seminars and community meetings for the stakeholders within the community encourages partnership for those that are interested in combating youth violence. Some points of interests to focus on could be issues such as gangs, drugs, and school violence. Educating the public on issues such as gangs, drugs, and school violence is a positive step towards correcting ones behavior. A school mentoring program consists of caring individuals that are willing to go that extra mile to ensure that youths receive proper guidance to assist them in everyday life. These individuals may be coaches, civic groups, and church-sponsored programs. This specific program is a very vital asset to any young individual growing up in a single parent household. A crisis plan and zero tolerance policies are an indication that the education establishment has plans in place to address and react to violent situations on their campus (Lanata, 2003).

When it comes to school shootings, a popular question asks what type of young person would commit such a violent act toward his peers. Personally knowing the shooter still does not provide the answer as to why this violent act was committed. Having an understanding about youths and why they commit the crimes they do is the first step towards being able to influence their behavior. In most of the school shootings that have occurred, many questions that may come up go unanswered. The profile developed for one shooter/perpetrator does not always fit the next shooter/perpetrator profile. Without any knowledge or signs at all, every school in this country could be harboring a potential mass killer (Dowd, Singer, & Wilson, 2006).

Although there are various reasons why school violence occurs, it can almost always be narrowed down to one previous incident. When problems arise for children,

they may not have the emotional coping skills to understand the situation or the necessary interpersonal skills to deal with the situation. Some personal traits/issues that may affect their decision making process are unskilled/unconcerned parents, the lack of knowledge in knowing how to deal with stress, and being unable to control their emotional/angry behavior and a cycle of violence. For example, according to Dowd, Singer, & Wilson (2006), personality conflicts are one of the most common and apparent cause of school violence. Each person has their own unique set of personality traits. These traits and behavioral patterns are developed at a very young age and progresses in style throughout one's life. Conduct disorder is one of the most common syndromes of childhood and adolescence. When diagnosed in childhood, they are more likely to be physically aggressive, tend to have few friends, and will be more likely have an antisocial personality disorder once they become an adult. Children with these types of behavioral patterns can easily be labeled as a bully (Dowd, et.al. 2006). According to Egendorf (2002) and U.S. Secret Service et al. (2002), other things that lead to school shootings are bullying, violence in video games, and through movies, books, and the media.

When comparing a violent student to a school shooter, it is often believed that a potentially violent student shares the same profile and characteristics of a school shooter. It is believed that 76% of the general profile of a potentially violent student is a white male ranging from the ages of 11 to 21 years of age. Eighty-five percent of violent students were between the ages of 13 and 18 at the time of attack. Sixty-three percent of these students have experienced a troubled home life with two-parent families and a few were in foster homes. Seventy-one percent of those with mental health problems

showed signs and/or demonstrated suicidal activity. They used psychotropic drugs and were often bullied by others and felt threatened and/or injured by their peers. It is often believed that violent students experience poor academic performance. However, the U.S. Secret Service, et al. (2002) discovered that grades should not be a determining factor when comparing the shooter because their grades range from excellent to failing; just like any other average student. Very few were rejected by peers, and very few were suspended from school. Sixty-three percent of violent students were rarely in trouble at school. Thirty-four percent were self-characterized as a loner or others characterized them as such, and they had a fascination with weapons. Sixty-three percent had a known history of weapons use, but only 44% were fascinated or showed an excessive interest with weapons and a fascination with killings. Twelve percent had harmed and/or killed an animal during the course of their lives. They often experienced problems with depression. At one time or another, during the course of their lives, many students would fall into this profile of a shooter, but these profiles are only used as guidelines, not an absolute (U.S. Secret Service, et al., 2002).

In a number of cases, bullying has played a key role in school shootings. Some of the attackers as well as the victims talked about how the shooters were the target of bullies and how longstanding and severe some of these attacks were. According to the U.S. Secret Service et al. (2002), “the experience of bullying appeared to play a major role in motivating the attack at school. Bullying was not a factor in every case, and clearly not every child who is bullied in school will pose a risk” (p. 14).

Before going further, it is vital to define bullying for the purpose of this research. Bullying is a negative act committed from one child to another. This act can consist of

teasing that is physical and/or verbal in nature, like hitting, kicking, and taunting. Bullies manipulate friendships and purposely exclude specific children from gaming activity, etc. (Lumsden, 2002). In the work place, bullying would be viewed as a form of harassment. Because bullying has played such a significant role in school shootings/violence, the schools should take a firmer stance against bullying and strongly support awareness in prevention of this behavior. The responsibility sometimes falls solely on the schools shoulders because the bullying starts in school and often goes unnoticed and/or ignored by the teachers and administrators. There have been times when the school staff neglects to intervene and/or investigate bullying, which cause the student to take matters into their own hands. According to the U.S. Secret Service, in studying 37 school shooting incidents, they learned that most school shooters have experienced bullying and harassment that has been longstanding and severe in their lives (U.S. Secret Service Safe School Initiative, 2000).

To help combat bullying, students should not partake in this type of activity at all and, like many other crimes, should not even be an audience to bullying behavior. Schools can put a policy into place, which will discipline not only the bully that is committing the act but also the third parties/bystanders that choose to observe this type of behavior. Many states have challenged the schools to adopt an anti-bullying policy. According to Lumsden (2002), students who bully are often disturbed and/or troubled individuals that need special attention from school, parents, community resources, and anyone who cares about children to step in and provide not only support but also any type of emotional/psychological help they can provide. It is often believed that perpetrators come from homes that display verbal or physical abuse. This abuse does

not have to be directed toward the perpetrator but another family member in the house. Observing this type of abuse may cause the perpetrator to take on the bully image (Lumsden, 2002).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The research question to be examined considers whether or not school shootings can be prevented. Society has seen a rise in lethal violence in schools over the past decades. There has been much research conducted over the past few years to address this question and the concern society has. However, this research will not only provide the reader with an answer, but will also provide several prevention and intervention techniques that can be used to help combat this epidemic of school violence.

The researcher hypothesizes that lethal violence and school shootings, in most cases, can be prevented. During the course of this research, a determination will be made and examples provided as to how a school shooting is preventable when community leaders and parents work in collaboration with each other. The method of inquiry will include a review of articles, Internet sites, periodicals, journals, and a survey distributed to 30 participants that will be referred to in this paper as focus group one and focus group two. Focus groups are often used in social science research to explore various aspects of a selected topic or issue. A focus group is a form of qualitative research. These groups of people are questioned about their attitude regarding a specific topic. The questions are asked in a group setting where the participants are encouraged to interact with other group members ("Focus Group," n.d.).

The participants of focus group one are all members and/or staff of the Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas (LEMIT) Class 74. The make-up of focus group one consists 22 students, of which 20 are mixed race males ranging from the age of 30 to late 50s, and two mixed race females ranging from the age of 40 to early 50s. There were also two white female staff members ranging in age from early 20s to early 40s. All of the students are law enforcement officers and are employed with one of the following Texas agencies: municipals police departments, county sheriff's departments, school districts and college police departments, and/or public transportation police departments.

The make-up of focus group two consists of two international males ranging between the ages of late 40s to early 50s, and three international females ranging between the ages of early 30s to mid 40s. The internationals all work in law enforcement as police officers in their respective countries. The countries that are represented are Germany, B.C. Canada, Australia, and the Netherlands. The participants in focus group one range in ranking from corporal to the chief of police and focus group two ranged from lieutenant to chief of police. Both groups provided some extremely enlightening information that greatly added to the knowledge base of the researchers.

The instrument that will be used to measure the researcher's findings regarding the subject of preventing lethal violence in schools will include a survey created by the researcher. The size of the survey will consist of ten open-ended/discussion questions and will be distributed to 30 survey participants. The participants will be members or staff members of LEMIT Class 74 and five individuals from various international law

enforcement agencies in four different countries. The geographic makeup of these participants includes 19 various cities and/or counties within the state of Texas and four international countries.

The response rate to the survey instrument resulted in a 90% return rate from the Texas law enforcement agencies and a 100% return rate from the international law enforcement agencies. The information obtained from the survey will be analyzed by running the frequencies on each survey question and denoting it in the findings section. The findings will be given for each question asked in the survey. For the questions that require a yes or no answer, the results will be given in the form of percentages. For the questions that require discussion, the researcher will read all the surveys, detect a similarity in the responses, and document the theme of that particular question for an overall response.

The participants will be asked if they believe there has been an increase in school violence and what they think causes the violence. They will also be asked whether they believe school shootings can be prevented and what course of action can the school take in preventing violent behavior. The participants will share their thoughts as to whether students can be taught non-violence and what the profile/characteristics are of a school shooter, if there are any. The participants will be asked if they believe schools can reduce violence caused by children with serious problems. They will also be asked if they believe bullying plays a role in school shootings and if so, how the schools can prevent this type of behavior. The participants final response will address their belief as to if there is a correlation between being bullied and being a school shooter.

## **FINDINGS**

Of the focus group one participants, 89% indicated that there was an increase in school violence, whereas 11% disagreed. When asked if school shootings could be prevented, 50% said yes and 50% said no. Approximately 89% of the participants agreed that students can be taught non-violence, whereas 11% disagreed. Seventy-eight percent agreed that schools can reduce violence by children with serious problems, whereas 22% disagreed. Eighty-three percent agreed that there is a correlation between bullying and school shooters, whereas 11% disagreed and 6% were unsure. Eighty-nine percent of the participants indicated that bullying did play a role in school shootings, whereas 11% indicated that it did not play a role.

Focus group two participants indicated in the survey that 80% agreed there has been an increase in school violence, whereas 2% disagreed. When asked if school shootings could be prevented, 60% said yes and 40% said no. Approximately 80% of the participants agreed that students can be taught non-violence, whereas 20% was undecided. A hundred percent agreed that schools can reduce violence by children with serious problems. Eighty percent agreed that there is a correlation between being bullied and being a school shooter, whereas 20% disagreed. Eighty percent of the participants indicated that bullying did play a role in school shootings, whereas 20% indicated that it did not play a role.

The above paragraphs indicated the results of the open-ended questions for both groups. The participants were given the opportunity to expand on the discussion questions by adding their personal opinions. The responses in this section will be a reflection of focus group one with an overall consensus of all participants. The increase

in violence is occurring because of the increased media coverage glamorizing violence, easy accessibility to weapons, lack of parental guidance/involvement, permissiveness in society, and a decrease in social morals and values. When participants were asked the causes of violence in schools, they believed that games, the media, the negative attitude of society, bullying, gangs, peer pressure, lack of communication skill, lack of discipline, cyberspace bullying, mental illness, and lack of respect for authority and each other caused the violence.

When participants were asked if school shootings could be prevented, they believed that scanners, metal detectors, and conflict resolution could be a solution for prevention. School counselor awareness and practice with students is also a prevention tool that could be very effective. Lastly, just the mere fact of working with and paying closer attention to students who are marginalized and appear to be loners would also be great help. The participants that responded no felt that school shootings can only be deterred and not prevented; they believed if the shooter wanted to do it, it was going to happen regardless of any prevention techniques. The participants were asked to give their personal knowledge of the profiles and/or characteristic of a school shooter. Many stated that the shooter is often a white male, 13-19 years of age, a loner, socially unacceptable by his peers, is in the middle to upper class family range, has mental issues, is bullied in school, has a personality disorder, and is unsuccessful in the school setting.

When participants were asked if schools could reduce violence caused by children with serious problems, they agreed that self-control can be taught, and by providing constant adult supervision and specialized schools, it would assist in curving

violence in schools. Other participants felt that if children with serious problems could be kept out of the public school system, this would be the only way to reduce violence. When participants were asked what can schools do to prevent bullying, they believed that quick and severe discipline, more parent involvement, teaching students how to respect each other, zero tolerance approach on handling bullies, and teaching the teachers/parents/counselors awareness on this topic would assist in the prevention of bullying.

In this section, the international participants expanded on the discussion questions in the survey. There was not much difference between the two groups in regards to their responses. The Australian participant saw an increase in school violence from the gang culture and felt that bullying plays a vital role in this situation. The causes of violence in schools are gang culture copied from the media, the general acceptance of violence due to watching/playing video games, and lack of communication skills. To prevent violent behavior, schools can set a strong example that violent behavior is not tolerated or accepted and teach respect and more effective communication skills. School shootings can be prevented by engaging students in non-violent solutions for their issues. The common profile/characteristic of a school shooter is male, no race specifics, isolated, bullied, and introverted youths. Schools can encourage respect and set firm policies regarding no tolerance towards bullying.

The Netherlands participant saw an increase in school violence and contributes it to society becoming more aggressive and there being a lack of parental involvement. The survey participant from the Netherlands felt that school shootings could not be prevented. The cause of school violence is games on the internet, the media, and the

attitude change in society. Schools can deter violent behavior by prevention programs and more parent involvement. The schools can reduce violence by children with serious problems by working closely with the stakeholders in the community like churches, parents, child protective services, and the school district. To prevent bullying, schools can provide special prevention programs and encourage the students to act in a better way.

The Canadians have not see an increase in school violence because of proactive programs they have in place, such as DARE, increased school liaison profiles, and many educational programs for all stakeholders in the community like parents, children, citizens, and police. They agreed that there is a correlation between bullies and being a school shooter. They felt that a prevention method for bullying should be open lines of communication between parents, students, teachers, police, and other state agencies, like child welfare. The profile/characteristic of a school shooter is white male, middle class, a loner, and a victim of bullying. Counseling and training reduces violence by children with serious problems. In order to prevent bullying in schools, people need to be educated and counseled.

The German participant saw an increase in school violence when different social groups gathered. The German participant also felt that most school shootings could be prevented but did not see the correlation between being bullied and school shooters. The profile/characteristic of a school shooter is a person of the male gender who is not successful in school and is isolated from others. To prevent violent behavior, schools should focus on being more detailed when providing the education and not just covering the contents of the literature. Teachers should focus on taking care of individual pupils'

needs and consider team building and awareness building for specific topics that youth face on a daily basis. The cause of violence in schools is the availability of weapons, models from media, and lack of parent involvement.

It should be noted that the findings listed above are not a reflection of the individual law enforcement agencies, but are only a personal opinion of the individual participants responding to this survey.

## **DISCUSSIONS/CONCLUSIONS**

The issue examined by the researcher considered whether or not lethal violence in schools and/or school shootings is preventable. The Bible verse Proverbs 22:6 states “Train up a child in the way that he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” The fact of the matter is that it takes a lot more than some are willing to give in regards to raising a child. There is an old saying that comes to mind when speaking of raising youth in today’s world: “It takes a village to help raise a child.” The village could consist of teachers, caring parents outside the home, church members, and many other loving stakeholders in a community. Most youths are away from home more than they are at home. During the time they are away, parents can only hope they are interacting with other positive, law abiding adults and are being taught the right things to do.

It is apparent that a problem exists with school violence, juvenile crime, and gun laws. The purpose of this research paper was to make a determination as to whether lethal violence in schools can be prevented. The review of literature within this research has made a determination that most school shootings can be prevented. Littleton, Colorado is a valuable example to look at regarding a school shooting that could have been prevented. There was some misunderstanding regarding exactly how the propane

tanks/bombs and other explosive devices made it inside the school. From the researcher's understanding, these items were brought inside by the two shooters upon their initial approach into the school's cafeteria the day of the shooting. Many were concerned and thought that Dylan and Harris manipulated the school's alarm system the night before and placed bombs in specific areas of the school without setting off the alarm. Unfortunately, this was not the case; but in a situation where an alarm system is manipulated, the school district should immediately reevaluate their security system ("Columbine High School Massacre," n.d.). A very high-tech alarm and surveillance system are measurements that can be put into place to prevent and/or deter the entry of unwanted guests. Some school districts are able to view a monitor and see what is going on inside the school from a remote location. This allows the viewer to determine if the alarm is false or if there is an actual intruder inside the school. This system allows local law enforcement to set up a perimeter around the school and actually catch the intruder(s) coming out. This system also allows the local law enforcement agency to view from his patrol unit computer the activity inside of the establishment in which the criminal activity is occurring.

The main question that is examined in this research focused on school shootings. There were several other factors looked at that lead up to school shootings and other school related violence, like bullying, which was also discussed in this research. Law enforcement officers or school resource officers that work directly in the schools and communities in which young people live are able to give a lot of insight and firsthand knowledge as to youths' behaviors, attitudes, why they do some of the things they do, and a multitude of issues that youth are faced with on a daily basis that

interferes with their decision making. Bullying plays a big role in school violence and has traditionally been looked upon as a perverse sort of child's play, which is summed up in the common phrase that states, "Kids will be kids." Today, bullying is recognized for what it really is: an abusive behavior that is inflicted upon children that appear weak and/or passive in nature. Bullying deserves special attention by teachers, parents, and law enforcement and should be taken serious and never ignored.

The researcher hypothesized that school shootings can be prevented. In this study, the researcher shared many prevention and intervention techniques that assisted parents, students, schools, community leaders, and law enforcement in preventing school shootings. When talking about prevention/intervention techniques, it is always important to explain to the reader how the success of these techniques is going to be measured. One of the best approaches is to measure how often violence occurs prior to implementing the prevention program and then again after the program has been put into action. If there is a decline in violence between the time of implementation of the prevention techniques and the initiation of the program, then the success rate appears to be effective. It is believed that the best way to measure the effectiveness of prevention/intervention programs is to conduct a survey. The survey would require one group to utilize the prevention/intervention techniques mapped out in the program, whereas the other group will not use any prevention/intervention techniques.

The researcher concluded from the findings that more than half of the participants in both groups one and two agreed that school shootings could be prevented, which is consistent with the researcher's hypothesis. For those participants that disagreed, they basically felt that no matter what, if the suspect wants a school

shooting to occur, it is going to happen regardless of who has knowledge about it. This may be the one school shooting out of many that is not preventable.

According to the United States Secret Service (2000) and victims of past school shootings, at least one person knows about the attack prior to it taking place. The shooter would share his plans with siblings a close friend or someone they know. They often brought weapon(s) used in the shooting from their homes. Whenever a school shooter and/or troubled youth have an opportunity to talk and share their thoughts with caring adults, the adult should listen and take the shooter/trouble youth very serious.

In looking at the Littleton, Colorado school shooters, both Dylan and Harris had a dark side to their lives. According to Columbine High School Massacre (n.d.), Dylan kept journals and writings in a math homework notebook about his violent thoughts and talked about not fitting in and hating his life. He was suicidal and often thought other were conspiring against him. He reached a point in his life where he talked about soliciting someone to purchase a weapon for him, which he would use to take his own life. This was all written in his journal/homework notebook. Assuming that Dylan brought his math homework notebook to his math class to use during class, teachers that walked around their classrooms and interacted with the students may have a better chance in noticing the information written in Dylan's notebook. Being mobile within a classroom setting allows the teacher to observe the actual actions of students and allows them to see exactly what is being written during class. The mobility of a teacher within a classroom setting could be used on a daily basis as a prevention technique ("Columbine High School Massacre," n.d.).

A prevention technique that parents can use is to become more observant of their child's school material that is brought home because, at some point during the school year, students should bring folders, books, etc. home for homework/study purposes. The parents that are involved in their child's education will take advantage of this opportunity to read the material, statements, letters, drawings, etc. that is written on books, folders, and backpacks/book bags. Being a nosy and concerned parent may actually save a life one day. Parents should start looking at their kids' "My Space" websites to see what is on there and who they are communicating with while on the internet, which is also another prevention technique.

A prime example of this is Eric Harris of Columbine who made reference on his webpage about making and detonating pipe bombs and using them against people. The local law enforcement agency in which Eric lived was informed about his website but stated that there were no legal grounds to support a search warrant or arrest warrant for Eric once they viewed the website. There may have been no legal grounds for a search/arrest warrant, but there were legal grounds for law enforcement to investigate and share their findings with surrounding law enforcements agencies like Columbine's SRO and/or patrol officers who patrol the area of the school. There was a reason to involve the school counselor. There was enough suspicion to contact the parents and make them aware of the allegations being brought against their son. Making contact with the parents may have provided the officer with more information to further their investigation. The parents could have even given consent for the officer(s) to search their son's room. Communication opens up doors with people, which may eventually

lead officers in the directions that will assist them in their investigation (“Columbine High School Massacre,” n.d.).

The parents of the Columbine shooters seem to have been in denial. There were signs documented in literature indicating that both Dylan and Eric had some issues that should have raised a concern to the parents, teachers, and students/classmates of Columbine High School. For example, according to the Jefferson County Sheriff’s Department of Colorado, the parents of Dylan and Eric told the story that both boys were gentle boys and never gave any indications of a violent nature. The investigators spoke with friends and teachers of both boys who described them as “nice, normal teenagers” (“Columbine High School Massacre,” n.d., p. 2).

But, there was another darker side to both boys. Dylan’s 1997 journal declared, “Fact: People are so unaware....well, Ignorance is bliss I guess... that would explain my depression” (“Columbine High School Massacre,” n.d., p. 2). On March 18, 1998, the Jefferson County, Colorado sheriff’s office received a call indicting that Eric had threatened death upon a former friend named Brooks Brown, a Columbine High School student. Because Brook’s family wanted to remain anonymous, the sheriff’s office stated they were not able to follow up on this incident. Eric talked about making pipe bombs and using them to harm others. After the sheriff’s investigators reviewed this information, it was determined that nothing could be done because they were not able to access the webpage and they could not locate reports confirming the pipe bombs. Because they were not able to substantiate this allegation and Brooks Brown’s family requested to remain anonymous, Dylan and Eric were not contacted (“Columbine High School Massacre,” n.d.).

The findings of the research did support the hypothesis. The reason why the findings did support the hypothesis is because research has proven that school shootings can be prevented and have been prevented in the past. There are measurements that can be put into place that may have a major effect on school violence/shootings. For example, parental involvement is one of the most important measuring techniques. It is a key factor in establishing a healthier home life for kids. Parental involvement allows parents to spend more quality time with their kids. This time allows parents to teach their kids morals and values, anger management, and various ways to divert their anger. Most of all, research suggested that a well developed spiritual system is effective with kids, but that is not limited to Christianity; other major world religions also have viable moral codes.

Some measurements that the schools can take to prevent school shooting is to develop a positive school climate by having caring staff members create and participate in establishing a positive relationship with students and their families. Having teachers and staff members in the hallways during passing periods and walking the halls along side of the students increases the adult visibility, which is another prevention tool. Principals should visit the classrooms while they are in session, and most of all, they should make themselves and other caring adults accessible and available to talk with students that are dealing with a life crisis and just being a teenager in this day and time. If a teacher or school staff member becomes aware of a rumor that involves threats, violence, or any criminal activity, the school resource officer (SRO) or local law enforcement officer should be immediately informed. Both school officials and the police could have stopped the Columbine shooters from fulfilling their plan. As talked about in

this research, Eric had a webpage where he threatened to blow up the school, and the police department planned to search his house but never followed through with the search. Both shooters were investigated for making pipe-bombs and downloading the how-to instructions from the internet. They even threatened to kill students at Columbine High School, and no action was taken on these subjects. There were opportunities to prevent this school shooting if the information would have been acted upon more seriously. In order for school violence preventions to be effective and work, schools, law enforcements, parents, and the stakeholders within the community will have to establish a working partnership with no limits and/or boundaries.

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## APPENDIX

### QUESTIONNAIRE

#### LETHAL VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS: CAN WE PREVENT SCHOOL SHOOTINGS?

- 1). Has there been an increase in school violence?      Yes    No  
If yes why?
  
- 2). What causes violence in schools? (List some)
  
- 3). What can schools do to prevent violent behavior?
  
- 4). Can school shootings be prevented?    Yes    No  
Yes how/No why not:
  
- 5). Can students be taught non-violence?    Yes    No
  
- 6). From past school shootings, what is the profile/characteristic of a school shooter? (i.e. gender, race, age, mental problems, etc.)
  
- 7). Can schools reduce violence by children with serious problems?    Yes    No  
  
Yes – How?  
  
No – Why not?
  
- 8). Does bullying play a role in school shootings?      Yes    No
  
- 9). Is there a correlation between being bullied and a school shooter?
  
- 10). What can schools do to prevent bullying?