

Active Shooter Situations in Academic Environments:
Recommendations and Considerations for Patrol Officers

A Seminar Paper

Presented to the Graduate Faculty

University of Wisconsin – Platteville

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree

Masters of Science in Criminal Justice

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December 2014

Under the Supervision of Dr. Susan Hilal

Abstract

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Statement of Problem

The term active shooter is an all too common phenomenon that is happening at an alarmingly frequent rate in today's society. Environments for these situations have varied from malls to movie theaters to airports to workplace settings. One of the most common places for an active shooter situation to take place is in an academic institution. From Sandy Hook Elementary School to Virginia Tech University, all types of schools have faced situations involving active shooters. With active shooters, it is nearly impossible for police to predict if and when another incident will happen. Before the first rounds are even fired, the shooter has the upper hand (Phillips, 2007). Because of this, it is extremely important for police departments to have protocols and policies in place in addition to formal, specific trainings to address such situations. The purpose of this paper is to examine past incidents and base recommendations and provide considerations for responding police officers to active shooter incidents in academic environments.

Method of Approach

Information in this study came from a comprehensive review of secondary scholarly sources. There is not a lot of generalizable data provided in the area of police response to active shooter situations. As a result, case examples were examined and best practices were

determined. The same process was used in successful responses in addition to responses that could have been improved upon. Additionally, through the use of the Strain Theory and Routine Activities Theory, a framework for the response plan was reinforced with a theoretical approach. From this research, best practices and current training trends were recommended for patrol officers to consider when responding to an active shooter situation.

Results of Study

The findings of this seminar research paper show that there has been a drastic transformation in ideology and tactics in reference to patrol officers responding to an active shooter situation in an educational environment. Additionally, the need for a response plan, with cooperation from all potential responding parties is essential in establishing. Just as formulating a response plan is important, constant review and training of that plan is critical for reducing the potential threat. The research shows that it is not realistic to expect to eliminate the threat of an active shooter situation in an educational environment, but with trained officers and a comprehensive response plan, the potential for an active shooter situation can be minimized.

Acknowledgements

Many people have helped me along my journey of obtaining my Master's Degree. I would first like to thank the students and staff of the University of Wisconsin – Platteville. I thoroughly enjoyed the discussions and dialogue of the classes I participated in. I would like to give a special thanks to my faculty advisor Dr. Cheryl Banachowski-Fuller for helping me with class selection and guidance. I would also like to recognize Dr. Susan Hilal, who without her feedback and communication, this paper would not have been possible.

I would also like to thank the Madison Police Department. The support, both financially and motivationally has been overwhelming. I would especially like to thank my co-workers for their continued support, listening and pretending to care when I went on and on about my paper. The continual interest and comments have kept me motivated and working when I was struggling.

Finally, and most important, I would like to thank my family. I would like to thank my mom and dad for their continued support and encouragement to continue my education. I would like to thank my wife, Jamie and daughter, Kendall, who have been with me for my entire Master's journey. I want to thank my middle son, Tyler, who has been with me for half my excursion. Finally I would like to thank my little guy, Teddy, for being with me for my final semester and providing me with the late night opportunities to work on my paper!

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SECTION I: INTRODUCTION

Statement of Problem

Active shooters are an all too common phenomenon that is occurring at an alarmingly frequent rate in today's society ("Active Shooter," 2014). While there is no clear cut definition of an active shooter, many elements are common across most definitions, including an active situation, potential for mass casualties, and a target rich environment. The FBI defines an active shooter as an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area ("Active shooter," 2014).

Environments for these situations have varied from malls to movie theaters to airports to workplace settings. The second most common place for active shooter situations to take place, behind business or commerce settings, is in an academic institution ("Active Shooter," 2014). From Sandy Hook Elementary School to Virginia Tech University, all types of schools have faced situations involving active shooters. The one common thing about these situations is the response of police officers. Local and state law enforcement officials are virtually always the first to arrive on scene. Fifty-seven percent of the time the shooting will still be underway when police arrive and in 75 percent of the cases there is a need for some sort of police intervention (Schweit, 2013). For the purpose of this paper, the focus will be on active shooter situations in academic environments.

With active shooters, it is nearly impossible for police to predict if and when another incident will happen. Before the first rounds are even fired, the shooter has the upper hand (Phillips, 2007). Because of this, it is extremely important for police departments to have protocols and practices in place and trained to address such situations.

Each active shooter situation creates a great deal of outcry and demand for change by society. Media coverage of these horrible events creates dialogue and often times emotional cries for help. Change is demanded in terms of stricter gun laws, increased mental health screenings and resources, police responses, and school responsibilities to create a safe learning environment. The essential question that arises from each incident typically formulates along the lines of “why didn’t we see that coming” or “what can be done to prevent future acts of school violence?”

Many school districts have practiced fire and tornado drills for years so students and staff would be ready to react appropriately in case of a fire or tornado. Dave Grossman, a recognized expert in the field of school violence, cites that few, if any students are killed yearly as a result of a fire in a school setting. Grossman and Christensen (2008) attribute this to the fact that educational institutions continually and constantly practice fire drills. Mandated by the government, these types of drills have proved to be very effective. Using this same ideology, Grossman strongly advocates for the improvement of school safety plans in regards to active shooters (Grossman & Christensen, 2008).

Purpose of Research

The purpose of this research is to provide a model and areas of considerations for police officers responding to active shooter situations. The study examines past police protocols when dealing with these types of situations and identifies the current best practices. By examining what has worked to minimize casualties and situations where the response could have been better, trends and common practices should emerge. Based on this information,

recommendations are made on the best appropriate response for police to an active shooter situation in a school setting.

While the majority of the research and recommendations will be focused on police response to active shooter situations, it would be remiss to omit a section on the schools responsibility in such situations. The problem of an active shooter is so large and has such potential for casualties, the research shows that police departments, responding officers, and schools must work together to try and eliminate or at least minimize the potential destruction of an active shooter situation.

Variations of active shooter situations are becoming an all too common situation in the world today. As a result of recent incidents and reviewing police protocols, a drastic shift in ideology has occurred in terms of what is expected in a police response. Gone are the days of holding a perimeter and waiting for the SWAT team to come in and take care of the situation. More common in training now is for responding patrol officers to form small “action” teams, enter the building and eliminate the threat as quickly as possible.

There is not a lot of generalizable data provided in the area of police response to active shooter situations. As a result, individual responses will be examined and best practices will be determined. The same process will be used in successful responses in addition to responses that could have been improved upon. Additionally, through the use of the Strain Theory and Routine Activities Theory, a framework for the response plan will be reinforced with a theoretical approach. From this research, best practices will be proposed for patrol officers for future incidents.

A key to minimize the potential negative result of active shooter situations is the response of patrol officer in coordination with the response of the school. Therefore, the significance of this study is to outline and provide recommendations mainly for police departments, but also for schools to deal with such situations to minimize harm, including casualties. The research provided in this paper will be beneficial and in the best case scenario save lives.

Limitations

While the paper will attempt to provide recommendations and considerations for responding patrol officers to an active shooter situation in an educational environment, the researcher understands there are limitations to the study. One limitation is the lack of data on school shooters themselves. Because the majority of school shootings end in death of the suspect, either by police or suicide (“Active Shooter,” 2014), accurate motives are left to be extrapolated from the evidence left.

Another potential limitation is the variation of schools that are affected by school shooters. From elementary schools to colleges and universities, school shootings have occurred at all levels in educational environments. As a result, much of the information provided, is specific to a specific school. What works at one location, with a certain style of school and age of students, might not be at all applicable to a different school with a different environment. As a result, the recommendations and considerations will be more general in nature.

SECTION II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The following review is divided into five sections. The first section looks at a history of active shooter situations in academic environments. The second section looks at noteworthy shootings, to include the University of Texas Bell Tower shooting, Columbine High School, Virginia Tech University, and Sandy Hook Elementary. The third section looks at the evolution of police officers response to an active school shooter. The fourth section examines if it's possible to profile a potential school shooter. The fifth and final section of the literature review explores school resource officers and their benefits.

HISTORY

Recent shootings in schools and academic institutions in the United States has resulted in widespread fear and panic among both students and parents in addition to school administrations. These types of incidents create an enormous amount of public outcry and demand for change. Unfortunately, these instances seem to be happening at an alarmingly frequent rate. However, empirical data suggests that despite the recent shootings, schools remain extremely safe places for children. Additionally school violence occurs at a lower rate in recent decades that it has in decades past (Burns & Crawford, 2009).

So while the data suggests that overall schools are safer today than they have ever been, most would argue that one more school shooting is one too many. The question becomes what can be done to prevent future school shootings? Before being able to attempt to determine what can be done to prevent future shootings, it is important to understand the history and evolution of active shooter incidents in academic environments.

Shootings that have taken place in school environments are not a new phenomenon. Known single acts of violence in schools date back to the mid 1800's (Ebner, 2008). There are no known mass or multiple school shootings in the first three decades of the 20th century (Ebner, 2008). Ebner (2008) goes on to state the more violent attacks during this time period were as a result of arson or other explosions, which led to the fire drill which is still practiced in schools today.

There have been numerous active shooter incidents in academic environments over time, all having a great impact on the school, community and others. On August 1st, 1966, Charles Joseph Whitman was responsible for the first mass shooting, or active shooter situation, on an academic institution (Ebner, 2008). After this, the mid to late 1970's is considered the second most violent period in US school history at the University of Texas (Ebner, 2008). From the mid to late 1980's to today, acts of school violence involving active shooters specifically, is on the rise. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (2014), there is now an average of 11.4 active shooter incidents that occur annually in academic environments. The number of incidents has increased annually from 2000 to 2013. Over the last seven years, the average rate of active shooter incidents is 16.4 incidents annually ("A study of," 2014).

NOTEWORTHY EVENTS

The following four school shooting incidents are highlighted for their notoriety and because of the lessons that were learned from a patrol response standpoint.

University of Texas – Bell Tower Shooting

As summarized by Lavergne (1998), Charles Joseph Whitman was an American engineering student, and former United States Marine, enrolled at the University of Texas.

Whitman was born on June 24th, 1941 in a rural Florida community. Shortly after graduating high school, Whitman joined the Marines and was assigned to an 18 month tour at Guantanamo Bay. Upon completion of his tour, Whitman enrolled at the University of Texas and majored in architectural engineering. While in college, Whitman got married and lived with his wife off campus. Also during that time, Whitman's parents divorced and his mother and younger sister moved from Florida to Austin, TX, to be closer to Whitman and his wife.

On August 1st 1966, Whitman cashed in approximately \$250 in checks and went to a local hardware store to purchase an M1 Carbine Rifle and eight boxes of ammunition. Whitman made two other stops along his way, a local gun shop where he purchased more ammunition and Sears, where he purchased a 12 gauge shotgun before returning home.

Once at home, Whitman shot and killed both his wife and mother before packing up a total of seven guns and over 700 rounds of ammunition and headed to the university bell tower. Once there, posing as a research assistant, Whitman was easily able to gain access to the top of the bell tower. The first shots fired by Whitman from the tower's outer deck came at approximately 11:48 AM. About 20 minutes after the first shooting, Whitman received his first return fire from police and other armed citizens. Then, at approximately 1:25 PM, two police officers and a civilian entered the tower and engaged Whitman, eventually killing him. After all the dust settled, Whitman had killed 16 people and wounded 32 others in the 97 minute attack.

Columbine High School

As summarized by Cullen (2009), on April 20th, 1999, Columbine High School, located in Columbine, Colorado, was responsible for one of the most notorious active shooter situations that changed the way police responded to such incidents forever. After all the events were said

and done, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold murdered a total of 12 students, one teacher and injured 21 others before committing suicide as police entered the school.

Harris and Klebold developed a highly complex and planned attack that involved diverting resources to explosions they created elsewhere in the city. Additionally, an estimated 100 propane tanks converted to bombs were found in Harris' vehicle which was parked outside of the school cafeteria. The number of casualties could have been far greater, but many of the converted bombs failed to detonate. Had the bombs exploded with full power, experts predicted they would have killed or severely wounded all 488 students in the cafeteria at the time of the attack.

When the initial bomb in the vehicle parked outside the cafeteria failed to detonate, Harris and Klebold armed themselves with multiple guns and headed towards the school. At 11:19 AM the shooting spree began. The first call to police came in at 11:22 AM, and was made to a school resource officer stationed at the school. The school resource officer responded to the cafeteria and engaged Harris in a brief gun battle before Harris went back inside the school. At 11:29 AM Harris and Klebold moved from shooting in the cafeteria to the library where they remained until 11:36 AM. For the next 36 minutes Harris and Klebold wandered the building shooting randomly at students and teachers. At 12:08 PM, Harris and Klebold committed suicide approximately 2 minutes after the first SWAT team entered the school. All and all, the event lasted a total of 49 minutes.

Virginia Tech University

As outlined by Agger and Luke (2008), on April 16th, 2007, on the campus of Virginia Tech University, in Blacksburg, Virginia, Seung-Hui Cho, a student at the university, shot and

killed 32 people and wounded 17 others in two separate attacks in what resulted in the deadliest active shooter situation in United States history. Cho used two handguns in carrying out his attacks. The shootings occurred in two separate incidents, the first in a residence hall where Cho shot and killed two people. Cho entered the room of a female freshman and fatally shot her. He then shot a resident assistant who responded to the scene after hearing gunshots.

After the shooting in the residence hall, Cho went to a nearby post office where he proceeded to mail a video and letters to NBC News. The package was received a few days after the incident. Approximately two hours after the shooting at the residence hall, Cho entered Norris Hall, which housed the engineering, science and math programs. Upon entering, Cho chained the main exit doors shut to prevent students from escaping. At approximately 9:40 AM, Cho began shooting. Cho proceeded to enter multiple classrooms shooting at both students and faculty. Roughly 10-15 minutes after the second attack started, Cho killed himself. In total, 174 rounds were fired by Cho and each victim was shot multiple times. Police units were on the second floor of the building with Cho when they heard his final gun shot.

Sandy Hook Elementary

On December 14th, 2012, 20 year old Adam Lanza entered Sandy Hook Elementary School and proceeded to shoot and kill 20 students and six staff members. Prior to the school shooting, Lanza shot and killed his mother at her home in Newton, CT. The active shooter incident remains the deadliest school shooting in an elementary, middle or high school and the second deadliest shooting in United States history after the Virginia Tech Massacre.

Sometime before 9:30 AM, Lanza shot and killed his mother with .22 caliber bolt action rifle. Lanza then drove himself to Sandy Hook Elementary. The school, which recently updated

its protocols, had its perimeter doors locked and required guests to show identification if they wished to enter the school. Shortly after 9:35 AM, Lanza shot his way through a glass panel located next to the locked front door. The school principal, psychologist and another teacher initially contacted Lanza immediately after he entered the school. It's reported the three began yelling "Shooter, stay put" which was trained by staff and alerted other teachers and staff to secure their rooms (Lysiak, 2013).

Lanza then entered a 1st grade classroom and killed 15 individuals. Lanza continued on to another 1st grade room, shooting and killing 5 more. Police, who were just outside of the building ready to make entry, heard the final gunshot at 9:40 AM, which was believed to be a self-inflicted gunshot wound, killing Lanza. All in all, the total time of the event lasted just five minutes. Police arrived on scene 3 minutes after the first call to 911. Lanza ultimately fired 156 shots in the five minute rampage. Everyone was killed by a high powered rifle; except Lanza who killed himself with a handgun. The final report on the incident concluded Lanza acted alone and there was no connection as to why Lanza choose Sandy Hook Elementary (Lysiak, 2013).

Other Locations

There have been a total of 160 active shooter incidents that have occurred between 2000 and 2013 in the United States ("A Study of," 2014). Incidents where innocent children or young adults are the victims generate a great deal of media attention and social outcry. However, academic institutions are not the leading environment for active shooter situations.

A recent FBI (2014) study showed that of the 160 active shooter incidents, 39 (24.4%) incidents took place in an education environment. Of those 39 incidents, 27 took place in a kindergarten to 12th grade environment and 12 took place in institutions of higher learning. The

most common environment for an active shooter situation was commerce or business settings, which totaled 73 events, or 45.6%. Other locations noted in the study showed government environments (16 events), open spaces (15 events), residences (seven events), houses of worship (six events) and health care facilities (four events), as other locations where multiple active shooter situations took place (“A Study of,” 2014).

Based on the definition of what an active shooter is, an individual actively engaging in killing or attempting to kill people confined in a public area, the above mentioned locations are not surprising. All of the above locations are target rich environments with the possibility to create mass casualties in a short period of time with relative ease. Additionally, more often than not, the location chosen is not at random. An FBI (2014) study concluded most workplace shootings involve a disgruntled or former employee, most school shootings are done by current or former students and most house of worship shootings or government related shooting have to deal with a difference of opinion. Events such as the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, Fort Hood Shooting, The Washington Navy Yard Shooting and the Sikh Temple Shooting in Wisconsin all support that theory.

There are, however, incidents where the targets and environments appear to be random. Both the Sandy Hook Elementary shooting mentioned earlier and the Aurora (Colorado) Cinemark Century 16 Movie Shooting are as such. While Lanza went the Sandy Hook Elementary for a very brief time as a young boy, investigators found no direct link as to why he chose Sandy Hook Elementary to carry out his heinous attack. Similarly, the Movie Shooting appeared to be random in that the shooter had no ties or affiliation to the location where the tragic events unfolded (Frosch, 2012).

EVOLUTION OF POLICE RESPONSE TO ACTIVE SHOOTERS

While the locations, weaponry and surrounding environments all play an important role in police tactical response to an active shooter situation, the goal remains universal, to eliminate the threat as quickly as possible. Unfortunately, it took numerous incidents and unnecessary deaths for this realization to occur. Policing, like almost all professions, learns from experience. Early on, specialized units or teams were used to defuse intense, potentially violent situations. Specialized Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) teams were formed with the purpose of having a group of highly trained and highly skilled officers ready to handle such situations as an active shooter.

Early on, patrol units were trained to arrive on scene, set up a perimeter and contain the threat to one location (Kelling & Moore, 2010). The SWAT team, if available, would be called to the scene and hopefully resolve the incident. While in theory the use of SWAT teams seems like the best way to end an active shooter situation, in practicality it doesn't typically work (Clark, Jackson, Schaefer, & Sharpe, 2010). While most SWAT teams today are highly trained to handle an active shooter situation appropriately, the problem arises in the response time to the event. In best case scenarios, partial SWAT teams can arrive on scene in as little as 10-15 minutes. However once on scene, getting prepared, briefed on information, setting up a plan and other details can take an additional 20-30 minutes (Clark et al., 2010).

Two of the incidents discussed earlier in the paper, the University of Texas Shooting and the Columbine High School Shooting, perimeters were held by patrol units and waited for SWAT teams to make entry to the location the shooting was taking place. After the Columbine High attack, a noticed and need for police tactical response was needed. All told Harris and

Klebold had 49 minutes from the initial shot until they committed suicide to carry out their attacks. Only once in that time period did they come under fire (Cullen, 2009). Police departments, both large and small, noticed a need for a change tactically to eliminate these threats sooner. Because of the frequency in which active shooter in school environments is occurring, new plans and strategies were formulated. The current most popular techniques will be discussed later in the paper.

PROFILING ACTIVE SHOOTERS

An active shooter situation in an academic institution is a complex problem. Because of the complexity, a combination of solutions must be in place in order to tackle the serious issue of school shootings. One such solution is profiling. The idea of profiling students was often proposed in order to gain a better understanding of who a “typical” student was who would be responsible for an active shooting situation. The idea behind profiling is to attempt to identify potential behavior, of a school shooter, based on an individual’s behavioral and physical characteristics.

In addition to profiling students, many scholars often argued that students and teachers need to have better communication and trust in schools (US Secret Service & US Department of Education, 2002). Since schools are made up mostly of teachers and students, it seems applicable that the teachers play a very important role in minimizing an active shooter situation. By using a combination of profiling students and improving student-teacher relationships, active shooter situations in schools have the potential to decrease in frequency.

Profiling Potential School Shooters

After a huge uptick in school violence in the early 1990's, society, politicians and the media demanded something to be done. As a result, many large organizations attempted to generate profiles for potential school shooters. Institutions such as the American Psychological Association (APA) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) attempted to provide assessments. The APA pamphlet and the FBI Threat Assessment were certainly well intended documents. The issue was they mixed together a certain degree of empirically valid information, common sense and nonsense, such as physical characteristics or certain clothing tendencies, together resulting in documents that are widely unreliable (Ferguson, Coulson & Barnett, 2011).

One main issue with attempting to gain a better understanding of the “typical” shooter is that while they generate a lot of media attention, overall school shootings are very rare when put in perspective. Coupled that with the degree to which many of the perpetrators are killed or commit suicide during the event limits the pool of participants for research. A report compiled by the US Secret Service and the US Department of Education (2002), analyzed 37 school shooting incidents from 1974 to 2000, comparing 41 attackers. While the report still has shortcomings, it is often viewed as the best available research on school shooters. The report finds and makes clear there is no reliable profile of a potential school shooter. While some commonalities emerged, few were universal. The stereotypical image of a school shooter as a socially inept loner experiencing constant bullying until they “snapped” simply did not emerge (US Secret Service & US Department of Education, 2002).

While no external factors emerged, there were some internal tendencies that were much more common across the board. A large proportion (71%) perceived themselves as “wronged”

or persecuted by others. Another commonality that emerged was the issue of mental health. Almost all (98%) of perpetrators had experienced some major loss prior to the incident. Despite not receiving services, the majority had a history of suicide attempts or ideation (78%) or documented history of significant depression (61%) (US Secret Service & US Department of Education, 2002).

What emerged as a result was a picture of a mentally disturbed person who has not received adequate services and is depressed and /or suicidal. Not surprisingly, this is remarkably similar to what data is available on adult perpetrators of mass shootings (Holmes & Holmes, 2009). The physical profile that so many seek is simply not there. What information can be taken from, albeit on a smaller scale, is a psychological profile which is much more difficult to identify.

Role of Student-Teacher Relationships

While creating a profile for potential school shooters has many shortcomings and falls short on reliability, the student-teacher relationship provides greater promise. In most all of the school shooting incidents, the attacker developed the idea to harm the target(s) well before the attack (McWhirter, McWhirter, McWhirter, & McWhirter, 2007). The big takeaway from this is the individual did not simply snap as a result of a negative interaction or situation, rather they took a long, planned path towards violence. Additionally prior to most instances, the shooter told someone else about their plan. More often than not, a sibling, friend or classmate was aware of the potential for violence prior to the incident taking place. The main question then becomes, why aren't teachers notified of the potential plans?

A 2004 study aimed to determine the importance with which students regard teachers as a source of coping with major problems might answer this question. The results indicated students rank teachers rather low on a list to which they will turn to help cope with their problems (Kniveton, 2004). While the results of the study were hardly encouraging, the potential it creates is. With most shooters taking time to execute their plans and providing potential details to others, the opportunity to prevent school shootings exists with improved student-teacher relationships. Student-teacher communication and trust needs to improve so students feel they can turn to and trust teachers to cope if they obtain knowledge of a potential school shooting.

SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS

Police officers have been in school since the mid 1970's, with the original goal to foster relationships between students and police. School based officers were often seen as friendly, maybe a bit over the hill and counting the days to retirement. If anything serious happened, they were to lock the building and wait for backup officers to arrive.

However the recent trend in school shootings, dating back to Columbine High School, has changed the school resource officer position and considerations substantially. As a result of multiple incidents, a rethinking of the position and tactics in crisis has emerged. Gone are the days of simply locking down the building and waiting for back up to arrive. Radical shifts in tactics have swept the field, calling on officers to rush towards attackers, without backup if necessary (Elkhorn, 2014).

Fifteen years ago, before the mass killings at Columbine High School were even a thought, school officers were trained to seal off a building with an active threat inside and wait for the SWAT team to arrive to eliminate the danger. Now, unfortunately, after repeated

instances of how a lone gunman can kill multiple victims in a short amount of time, officers are taught to engage the threat as quickly as possible, alone if necessary. While school lockdown drills are still a school house staple, federal and security experts have declared the tactic too passive. Federal education and law enforcement agencies have encouraged school to shift from an all-purpose lock down policy to training staff and students to run if they can, hide if they must and as a last resort, divert or even fight back (Elkhorn, 2014). Deciding whether to flee or hide requires an instant judgment by staff members and students alike. Jumping out of a window risking injury, even from a second story, can make more sense in certain situations than sitting quietly as the gunman approaches.

Effectiveness of School Resource Officers

Although violent crime rates in schools have steadily declined over the last decades, cases of school shootings continue to fuel a moral panic across the country. These rare, yet extremely violent incidents have raised serious questions about the effectiveness of school security measures to ensure the safety of everyone on a school campus. Considering adolescents engage in more violent criminal activity than any other age group, it's easy to understand why schools are perceived to serve as hot spots for criminal activity (Felson, 2008).

Education and law enforcement agencies have begun to take serious action toward preventing school crime. Thousands of schools have modified the way they protect their students and employees through “target hardening” techniques (Garcia, 2003). Garcia (2003) explains examples of these safety measures include increased use of school resource officers, implementation of dress codes, the installation of video cameras and close circuit television systems, random searches of student lockers and restricted access to the buildings themselves.

According to Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics (LEMAS), more than one third of all sheriffs' offices and almost half of all local police department have sworn officers assigned to serve in schools (Hord, 2008). In addition to the potential deterrent effect, school officers have the unique ability to foster relationships with students on a different level. The school resource officer is a unique position in that it often requires the officer to serve in a multifaceted capacity, regularly performing the simultaneous duties of police officer, counselor, and mental health professional.

Although results have been mixed regarding school resource officers overall effectiveness, encouraging evidence exists in that the presence of school officers were negatively and significantly associated with school violence (Jennings et al., 2011). Consistent with other research, this is perhaps an indication that the presence of school resource officers may to some degree serve as a deterrent for serious crime. The difficulty in measuring effectiveness in preventing an incident such as a school shooting is very complex. It's extremely difficult to accurately measure how effective something was at preventing an intangible or measureable event. It's quite possible that the presence of a school resource officer, in addition to acting as a deterrent, may encourage positive interactions between police and students. This direct and positive communication with an authority figure other than their parents may serve as a mechanism to reduce student's likelihood from becoming involved in serious and violent crime (Jennings et al., 2011).

SECTION III: THOERITICAL FRAMEWORK

There are numerous criminological theories that explain why crime occurs. Elements of certain theories can be applied to help explain why mass shootings occur. Additionally areas of focus for prevention for future school shootings can also be taken from some theories. Two such theories, The General Strain Theory and the Routine Activities Theory, have theoretical frameworks that help explain why shootings in educational environments take place. The following reviews these theories and applies them to the crime of mass shootings.

General Strain Theory – General Principals

Agnew (2006) states that according to the general strain theory, people engage in crime because they experience strains or stressors. As a result, crime is a way to reduce or escape from these strains. Strains can include a wide range of things. They generally refer to events or conditions that are disliked by the individual (Agnew, 2006). The theory was developed, like many of the strain theories, from the idea that crime results from the inability to achieve monetary success or other positively valued goals through legitimate channels. As a result of this goal blockage, the individual feel frustrations, which increases the likelihood of committing crimes. The main difference with Agnew's (2006) strain theory is that he distinguishes between objective and subjective strains, as well as experienced, vicarious and anticipated strains. Agnew (2006) also contributes that strains lead to crime primarily because they increase negative emotions, such as anger and frustration, which create pressure for corrective action.

Three major types of strains are presented; People lose something of value, individuals may be treated in an adverse or negative manner, and individuals may be unable to achieve

goals. Additionally, the theory suggests that crime is a way for individuals to seek revenge against who have wronged them. .

One individual strain that might be closely related to a school shooting situation as it relates to the idea of strain theory is the concept of anticipated strains. Anticipated strains refer to the individual's expectation that their current strains (objective or subjective) will continue in the future or that new strains will be experienced (Agnew, 2006). Individuals then may choose to engage in criminal behavior to prevent these anticipated strains from occurring, to seek revenge against those who might inflict such strains or to alleviate negative emotions. Having an anticipated strains mindset, one in which things will always continue to be negative and have no possibility of improving, might also help explain why so many school shootings end with the shooter committing suicide.

General Strain Theory – Application and Prevention

While it does not directly apply to school shooting situations, elements of the general strain theory can be found in the reasons why individuals participate in school shootings. The constant and sustained strains that an individual is under can cause them to engage in criminal behavior. While certain types of strains might have an impact on why an individual chooses to participate in a school shooting, none are directly related. It should be noted that when an overwhelming majority of individuals are faced with strains, they do not choose to engage in a school shooting. Any number of strains could trigger someone, but as it relates to school shooters, the main strains are a result of being bullied, picked on and not fitting into certain peer groups and having their masculinity questioned by their peers (Estevez et al., 2008) (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003).

In the situation of Columbine High School, Harris and Klebold had a specific list of individuals, or targets they were specifically seeking out (Cullen, 2008). The reasons as to why specific students were targeted will never be known, but for whatever reason, the pair felt they needed to get revenge on certain classmates. Additionally, numerous school shooters have a plan developed where specific individuals, or a group of individuals are targeted (Ebner, 2008). Typically the presence of either ostracism, bullying and/or romantic rejection all play a motivating role for school shooters (Leary et al., 2003).

Strains on individuals tend to lead to negative emotion and lead to personality traits of negative emotionally and low constraints. Most adolescents do not have the coping mechanisms or strategies available to them to appropriately deal with strains when faced with them. As a result, an individual as such, with anticipated strains not ending, could be more susceptible to engage in a school shooting.

The question then becomes, can the general strain theory be used in any way to prevent an active shooter situation in a school? An argument can be made that by reducing strains, one could reduce the likelihood of someone deciding to engage in a school shooting. One of the main strains thought to cause school shootings are bullying and or kids getting picked on. Most schools today are hyperactive and have programs, classes and procedure in place to address this issue. So while the general strain theory does not directly translate, the fact that it is the only criminal theory to focus explicitly on negative relationships with others, elements can be related, applied and used to prevent active school shooters.

Routine Activity Theory – General Principals

The strain theory is one criminological theory that can be used to explain active shooter situations. While some elements of the theory apply, there are key missing elements. One such element is the consideration for the environment and victims, or targets, in an active shooter situation. Similar to strain theory, the routine activity theory does not perfectly fit in explaining why active shooter situations happen. However, unlike strain theory, routine activity theory accounts for much more and has elements that can be utilized when trying to prevent active shooter situations in academic environments.

Some people are more likely to engage in criminal behavior when the ability to, or benefits of are high, and the possibility of getting caught, or costs are low. The routine activity theory takes into consideration the factors that influence the range of choices available to individuals. According to this theoretical perspective, Cohen and Felson (1979) suggest three elements are necessary for crime to occur: a *motivated offender* must come in contact with *suitable targets* in the absence of *capable guardians*. The last two elements, suitable targets and lack of capable guardian, are the core dimensions of criminal opportunity and must occur concurrently for crime to be present. Additionally, the theory argues that the probability of criminal situations is influenced by “routine activities” of daily activities (Cohen & Felson, 1979).

The routine activity theory accounts for, and puts an emphasis on, the environment in which crime is occurring. Despite difficulties in measuring, the routine activity approach specifies that house hold and family activities entail a lower risk of criminal victimization than “non-household” and “non-family” activities (Cohen & Felson, 1979). While it’s impossible to

suggest individuals should stay home or in family friendly environments all of the times, the theory does take into consideration the situations individuals find themselves. Certain environments are more suitable for crime to occur for any number of reasons.

Routine Activity Theory – Application and Prevention

The three tenants of the routine activity theory are applicable to active shooter situations in academic institutions. With that being said, it does not offer an all-encompassing explanation. At best, the theory helps explain how an active shooter situation can occur, not necessarily why it occurred. If one of the three major elements of the theory is not present, the ability for crime to occur becomes increasingly difficult and less desirable. If a motivated offender is absent, there is not one there to commit the crime. If there is no suitable target, there is not victim. Lastly, and most applicable to law enforcement, if a capable guardian is in place, the offender does not have a suitable target (Cohen & Felson, 1979).

The elements involved in routine activity theory are straight forward in such that all three must be in place for this theory to apply to active shooter situations in academic institutions. If a student becomes motivated enough, for whatever reason, whether it is bullying, questions about masculinity or something else, one of the three elements is now in place. Additionally, simply by the sheer design of most schools suitable targets will always be present (although things can be done to minimize this as will be discussed later). Academic institutions by nature create a situation where there are many potential “targets” in a small, often time confined area. Finally, the lack of a capable guardian, whether perceived or actual, plays an important role. If there is no perceived threat to stop a motivated offender, whether it is a school officer, security

personnel, administration or something else, the offender is more likely to carry out a violent act in accordance with the routine activities theory (Cohen & Felson, 1979).

While elements of the routine activity theory are definitely applicable to active shooter situations, it does have its shortcomings. First the theory assumes there will always be motivated offenders. The routine activity approach takes the supply of motivated offenders as a given. The difficulty when applying this theory to active shooter situation is that often times what “motivates” an offender to engage in such behavior often is unknown. Because of the large number of active shooter situations that end in the offenders death, either by suicide or from police, motivation are often unknown (“A Study of”, 2014).

Even though the routine activity theory is not all encompassing, it has many elements which can be taken from it to help prevent active shooter situations from happening. As mentioned earlier, motivations are often unknown and the sheer design of schools will always lead to suitable targets. The area for law enforcement and police officers to focus on obviously then becomes the lack of a suitable guardian. The biggest opportunity with regards to the lack of a capable guardian would be to implement school resource officers. A school resource officer often times increases the students and staff’s perception of safety in the school (Booth et al., 2011). Additionally, in times of crisis, having a school resource officer based in the school would reduce police response time.

Unfortunately having a school resource officer in every school is not realistic or cost effective for most police departments and school administrations. Because of this, it’s important for patrol officers with school in their beats to make routine checks of the schools and become familiar with the building layout, students and administration (Finn & McDevitt, 2008).

Another element of the theory, suitable targets, can also be somewhat controlled by law enforcement to help minimize or prevent active shooter situations. By making the target more difficult, a motivated offender might choose not to carry out their plan had the preventions not been in place. Target opportunities mostly lie in the environment of the school. Items such as metal detectors, surveillance cameras, and other security devices help with the perception of safety (Cohen & Felson, 1979). Additionally, controlling access and access points to the facility also help reduce the target. Obviously, the larger the academic institution, such as a college or university, where students come and go at different times, the more difficult restricting the target becomes. Many K-12 schools across the nation have gone to restricting access to theory campuses to eliminate unwanted guests or dangerous intruders (“A Study of”, 2014).

Additional Theories

Routine activities theory is grounded in rational choice theory. The rational choice perspective argues that crimes are broadly the result of rational choices based on the analysis of anticipated costs and benefits (Cornish & Clarke, 2006). The theory goes on to explain that individuals, then, choose to engage in crime in an effort to maximize their benefits and minimize their costs.

As it applies to an active shooter situation, while the offender might be able to maximize their benefits by killing or severely injuring fellow students and staff, they are not doing it while considering their costs. Since the majority of school shooters end up dead, costs are not minimized. Even for offenders who commit suicide, in theory placing a low priority on life, the cost/benefit analysis required by the rational choice theory is not applicable.

Psychological Theories

Some psychological theories might offer better explanations of certain situation or individuals, but similar to the criminological theories, they do not offer a direct complete account. The issue with psychological theories is in attempting to explain school shooter is that, as mentioned earlier, there is no clear cut school shooter profile (Ferguson et al., 2011). Because of the lack of a clear profile, psychological theories which are often very specific are difficult to apply in generality. According to Ferguson et al. (2011) it is extremely difficult to gain a great deal of research on school shooters, as they often commit suicide, which does not create a large sample to apply a diagnosis after an event.

For the most part, theory development for an active shooter situation in a school is still in its infancy. The most advanced explanations from a theoretical perspective rely on psychological factors. Interventions have generally been guided by situational crime prevention rather than theories about why shootings occur in schools (Rocque, 2012).

Attempting to explain why an active shooter situation in an academic environment takes place from a theoretical perspective is a difficult task. Currently there is no all-encompassing theory that has a complete explanation. Certain criminology theories, such as the general strain theory and routine activities theory, have many elements relatable to an active shooter situation. Psychological theories have the greatest ability to explain active shooter situations; however they are situation and individual specific.

SECTION IV: RECOMMENDATIONS

While an active shooter situation in an academic institution is still rare, relatively speaking, it is becoming a reality that law enforcement agencies need to address and be prepared to respond. There are many stakeholders that have a direct interest in determining ways to prevent future incidents of these tragic events. This section will review how law enforcement agencies, both from a patrol standpoint and a policy standpoint, need to establish protocols and train for the possibility of encountering an active shooter situation in an academic environment. Additionally, school districts and administrators would have a vested interest. The following section examines and provides recommendations from a patrol response, policy implications, and school considerations to an active shooter situation in a school environment.

PATROL RESPONSE

Since the tragic events at Columbine High School in April of 1999, the terms active shooter and active shooter on campus have become part of the common vernacular. Addressing the potential of an active shooter in an academic environment is a complex undertaking for any school including colleges, universities, high schools, middle schools, and even elementary schools. There are many objectives school officials and law enforcement should adhere to. The difficulty lies in that school administration and law enforcement must strike a balance between rhetoric, action and exacerbating fear (Greenberg, 2009). Greenberg (2009) goes on to explain that objectives such as developing student profiles, developing and implementing policies, and reinforcing the stability and safety of educational environments are all important, making prevention should be a top priority.

Unfortunately, no matter how prepared a school and law enforcement may be, an active shooter situation can still take place if a motivated offender is intent on doing harm. An example of this would be the case of Sandy Hook Elementary as discussed earlier in the paper. Sandy Hook school practiced active shooter drills with staff and law enforcement, restricted access to the building and yet still, the offender was able to do a substantial amount of harm in only five minutes time (Lysiak, 2013). School administration and law enforcement did everything as they were trained, yet the incident unfortunately still occurred. The offender, Adam Larza, committed suicide shortly after police arrived on scene. Data shows that the majority of active shooter incidents end quickly after police arrival, either by suicide or a confrontation with police (“A study of”, 2014). So while it’s extremely important for police to arrive on scene as quickly as possible, being prepared for an active shooter situation starts prior to the actual incident itself.

Police Training and Equipment

Well-equipped, but poorly prepared criminals can wreak havoc on police officers who are not equally equipped. Recent social outcry about the militarization of police forces has brought the use of rifles and other defense weapons into the limelight (Kraska, 2007). The issue in which a criminal can obtain a high powered assault rifle with the ability to create mass casualties in a short amount of time with relative ease is alarming. Police officers need to, at a minimum, be equally equipped if not more so. High power body armor, rifles with optics and body cameras are all pieces of equipment that can help prevent an active shooter situation from continuing (Dorfsman, 2014).

In addition to the equipment necessary, training is critically important to ending active shooter situations. There are numerous trainings and courses offered to help better prepare

officers responding to an active shooter situation. The Department of Justice established the Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training (ALERRT), a 16 hour basic active shooter course, born out of the concerns about patrol officer's response following the incident at Columbine High School (Schweit, 2007). Classes are offered in seven locations across the United States and are available for any tactical team or group of patrol officer's interest in expanded training. Many police agencies utilize the ALERRT training to train officers on basic and advanced tactics. Many private companies, such as Blackwater, 360 Tactical Training, G-1 Tactical Solutions, among others, have also emerged with trainings for police, military and security officers with similar tactics. While the specifics of the tactics may differ, the ideologies behind them are all very similar. Gone are the days of setting up a perimeter, locking the building down and waiting for specialized units to arrive.

Today, with minor variations, patrol officers are taught to form "action teams" and march towards the sound of gunshots (Garrett, 2007). These dangerous and unpredictable situations require swift and immediate law enforcement action, training has shifted to a situation where first responders head directly to the sound of gunshots to neutralize the threat. As a result in the shift in ideology, many of the nation's police agencies have engaged their officers in ultra-realistic training regimes aimed at eliminating and minimizing casualties by preparing patrol officers to go where they typically have not gone before (Garrett, 2007).

Traditionally officer safety has always been put first in any police training. New training techniques place a greater emphasis on victim safety and placing officers in harm's way if necessary when attempting to eliminate an active shooter as quickly as possible. Because of the quickly evolving situation of an active shooter, police must react quickly or innocent people are going to die (Garrett, 2007). Additionally, the concept of bypassing victims that are in need of

medical attention is also now trained. Police have forever been trained to ensure officer safety first, preservation of victims second, and catching the suspect third (Williams, 2013). Williams (2013) goes on to say that now officers are trained to put their lives at risk, stepping over victims in need of assistance, and rush to the threat as quickly as possible to minimize the total number of casualties. Once the threat is eliminated, officers are taught to do a secondary search to eliminate any additional threats, and then assess victims.

While the physical training is a huge element that contributes to patrol officers training and preparedness to respond to an active shooter, the mental aspect needs to be trained as well. “Mental reps” or preparing oneself mentally is equally as important as the physical aspect of training for any scenario. Every police officer should prepare mentally and tactically for the rare, dangerous and dynamic event of being confronted by one, or more, active shooters who are armed, have been shooting, and continue to shoot even in the presence of responding police (Williams, 1999).

Police Response to the Incident Itself

To accurately prepare for an active shooter situation, police departments need to train for the worst and hope for the best. In most cases, the training received on active shooters will go unutilized. For the few officers that have to rely on their training, it is important they remain calm and let their training take over.

Police need to utilize their advantages, such as equipment, training, the use of radio tactical channels and such (Nichols, 2010). Once on scene, officers need to form quick entry teams and most importantly, communicate with one another. Communication on locations and information is vital in eliminating the threat as quickly as possible (Nichols, 2010). It is vitally

important to have a scene commander and to minimize radio communication to what is necessary and beneficial. Once the decision is made to make entry, it's essential for parties of the action team to work together and in unison. While it is important to make sure the threat is found and eliminated as quickly as possible, action teams need to make sure they are working as a unit to be most effective (Nichols, 2010).

Equally important as eliminating the threat itself, once the threat is eliminated, communication must continue to make sure help is getting to victims in need as quickly as possible (Nichols, 2010). Nichols (2010) continues to state that a tight balance needs to be made between rushing to help victims and making sure all threats are eliminated. The use of secondary devices, IED's or other explosives has been a growing concern in both training and practicality.

LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES – POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Prior to practicing and training for an active shooter situation, a response plan needs to be developed by the law enforcement agency. The agency must decide what type of response they expect from their patrol officers. Additionally, law enforcement agencies must work collectively with Fire/Rescue personnel and school administrations to develop a comprehensive response plan (Darst, 2013). The law enforcement portion is only one piece in the larger plan which has an overall goal of the safety of the students. While working together, each department has their own unique set of priorities and responsibilities. Law enforcement is required to find and eliminate the threat as quickly as possible. Rescue units are responsible for the treatment of injured victims. Fire personnel are concerned with and responsible for any secondary threats

such as explosive devices and to assist with victims. Finally, school administrators have a responsibility to communicate with parents, police and other departments (Darst, 2013).

Once a plan is in place, it will not be effective if not appropriately practiced and communicated. As mentioned earlier, schools to this day routinely practice fire drills, even though few, if any, students are killed by fire in schools annually (Grossman & Christensen, 2008). This is such a rare event, yet schools still practice them because they are mandated, either federally or by the state. This same concept needs to apply to active shooter drills. If mandates were established, certain areas could be focused on and minimum standards for response plans could be established (Stone & Spencer, 2008). Many schools today are practicing active shooter drills on their own, in absence of any mandated obligations.

The issue becomes, from a policy standpoint, is what should those minimum standards be? Minimum standards for school more than likely would differ based on a number of factors, including school size, age of students, location of school, and if a school resource officer is present, among others. While the specific standards may differ, the overall goal of student safety is the top priority. What most researchers agree on in regards to minimum standards is that there must be some sort of location lock down and school wide communication in place (Stone & Spencer, 2008).

Just as developing as continuous training of a plan is important, what's equally important, and often overlooked is communication from law enforcement agencies as to what is expected from responding patrol officers. Communication is often discussed in policing in terms of patrol officers with citizens or administration with being transparent to the community. Often what is assumed, sometimes incorrectly, is the effective communication between law enforcement

agencies and their patrol officers (Mawby, 2009). Through the use of realistic trainings and discussions, a clear and concise expectation of patrol officers response to an active shooter should be developed (Nichols, 2010). However, that understanding cannot be assumed. The understanding should be demonstrated through communication and training (Mawby, 2009).

Findings from current research have shown that a lack of partnership between law enforcement and educational institutions does exist (Stone & Spencer, 2008). This is possibly due to the fundamental difference in ideology or cultural differences in place. Either way, these differences must be put aside for the benefit of both entities and to better ensure the safety of the students. One of the best ways to open lines of communication between the schools and law enforcement is through the use of a school resource officer. As mentioned earlier, a school resource officer has many responsibilities, not more important than serving as a liaison between law enforcement and school administration. By having an understanding of both entities, the school resource officer can help mediate differences, and communicate effectively the concerns and opinions back and forth. Additionally, a school resource officer has numerous benefits which include an on-site first responder, an on-site trainer, and another authority figure students can express concerns with (Robles-Pina & Denham, 2013; Stone & Spencer, 2010).

Smaller schools, without the luxury of a school resource officer, should work with the police department to have a school liaison officer in place. The officer, while not stationed in the school, would have regular contact with the school and make random visits as frequently as possible. Additionally, training with school staff becomes increasingly important as those first few minutes, until police arrive; school staff will have the obligation and responsibility for eliminating the threat and student safety.

A final recommendation from a policy standpoint would be to ensure realistic training with all agencies who would be responding if such an event takes place. Policy should be created with the help of all agencies as each would be able to provide their own unique expertise to the situation. An unaffiliated mediator would best serve everyone to develop the best possible response plan. Once the relationship is developed, it should be reviewed and revised frequently to ensure the goal of student safety is always being met (Stone & Spencer, 2010). Cooperation amongst agencies in the policy development is also beneficial in creating solutions to conflicting goals of the agencies (Garrity, 2008).

SCHOOL CONSIDERATIONS

A top priority, for any school administrator is creating a safe learning environment. It's very important for educators to have a clear understanding in terms of scholastic activities. Equally important in today's world is for these same educators to have a clear vision and safety plans in place to deal with the potential of an active shooter in their school (Grossman & Christensen, 2008).

Training Active Shooter Drills

The development of a school safety plan, utilizing input from various stakeholders, is essential in creating a safe learning environment. Once a plan is developed, a few additional things need to happen. First, a plan is essentially useless unless it is trained and practiced. Much like how patrol officers train for responding to an active shooter situation, schools need to train on their end the same way. Training must be done frequently, to the point where actions become natural and done without thought so if the situation were to arise, staff could rely on their training as opposed to trying to develop a plan on the spot (Stone & Spencer, 2010).

Active shooter drills should be practiced both with and without students. It is important to train with students so as they know what is expected of them if a school shooter situation was to arise. Practicing things such as school lockdown drills, teachers working with students in securing classrooms, hiding in rooms, escape routes, and simply being quite are skills that can be worked on. Since no active shooter situation is predictable, it's important to practice a variety of "skills" so if the situation were to present itself, the best trained technique can be used effectively (Grossman & Christensen, 2008). Utilizing students in drills adds an element of realism plus an added level of stress for teachers and administrators. However, there is a fine line to instill proficiency versus instilling fear, but the happy medium has to be found, as to not create an atmosphere of complacency (Grossman & Christensen, 2008).

Active shooter drills must also be trained on a larger scale, involving police, fire/rescue, and any other potentially responding resources. This type of training is extremely important as it creates an understanding of everyone's roles and responsibilities. It also allows for expectations to be set and any issues that arise can be resolved. An effective response plan requires school-specific planning and coordination with additional responding resources (Buerger & Buerger, 2010).

Additional School Considerations

To go along with training, another important element of importance is having school personnel understand their roles. For the response plan to be effective, each entity has a very specific role. The role of school personnel is following the response plan in place and student safety. When done correctly, the response plan has a greater potential to limit casualties and be successful. It's important for school staff to understand and expect that police response to an

active shooter is going to be fast and potentially violent. Staff must understand that law enforcement's initial priority is not to stop and rescue aid, and in some situations, might step past victims in need of assistance. What's important is faculty and staff has an understanding of this reality, as they will be given the task of taking care of themselves and other potentially wounded individuals, until medical assistance is able to respond (Department of Homeland Security, 2008).

What can't be understated is the continued evaluation and practice of active shooter drills. Plans need to be fluid and revisited frequently to ensure they are appropriate to changes in threats and school dynamics. It would be beneficial for all parties involved if school administrators worked with other school districts in regards to comparing response plans. This would allow best practices to be shared and create a better, more effective response plan which in turn, creates a safer learning environment for the students (Department of Homeland Security, 2008).

An additional factor schools must account for when creating their active shooter response plans is to consider the reality of an individual, outside of police or the suspect, who might be armed and attempt to end the threat. Currently most schools ban firearms, not only on the premises, but also in the surrounding areas (including parking lots and adjacent properties). However there is a current movement among individuals who want to be able to bring firearms on school property. The movement claims that safety will increase with the addition of responsible firearm users having their guns with them to engage in a threat if necessary. While not offering overwhelming support, research has shown that at a minimum, schools should reconsider their policies on guns (Thompson et al., 2010). Thompson et al. (2010) goes on to

state, that a greater awareness of the importance of a highly visible campus firearm policy and its potential for reducing firearm trauma on campuses is needed.

A real opportunity lies in student-teacher relationships. Most shootings are not spur of the moment reactions, rather they are often planned and other peers are aware of the ideas. The problem is that information others know is not getting to the teachers, or individuals who would have the ability to prevent the shooting from happening. Therein is where the problem lies. By increasing student-teacher relationships, students will feel more comfortable using a teacher as a trusted individual, potentially eliminating a school shooting.

The issue of improving student-teacher relationships is extremely complex and beyond the scope of this research. By combining the intervention strategies of being aware of a student's psychological profile in addition or creating open lines of communication between students and teachers, the potential risk of a school shooting diminishes. However because of the complexity of problem of school shootings, the ability to eliminate all school shootings is almost impossible. While not perfect, psychological profiles in addition to improving student-teacher relationships creates an opportunity to eliminate the frequency of school shootings.

SECTION V: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

After examining the theoretical framework, literature review and suggested recommendations, some trends become apparent. It is very clear that schools, at all levels from elementary to colleges and universities, are all susceptible to an active shooter situation. The sheer makeup of the school, providing numerous targets in a confined area, will always be an issue with prevention. As a result, schools need to prepare the environment as best as they can to make the overall situation less appealing to a potential shooter.

Because schools will always be a target rich environment, it's essential that schools need to have an action plan in place. The plan needs to be a coordinated effort amongst all resourced that would respond to an active shooter situation. Additionally, and almost as important as the development of, the plan needs to be trained and practiced. The trainings need to be done regularly and reevaluated frequently to keep up with the threats and trends in school shootings.

The specific tactics of responding officers has changed dramatically over the past 15 years. Events such as Columbine High School, Virginia Tech and Sandy Hook Elementary have force police to reconsider and expectations of responding patrol officers. Because of the ability to create mass casualties in an extremely short period of time, police can no longer hold outside the building and wait for specialized unites to arrive. Quick action teams or entry teams need to be formed as quickly as possible and once entry is made, officers need to march towards the threat, bypassing victims in need, placing a greater emphasis on additional loss of live versus officers own personal safety.

Because of the randomness of which a school shooting can occur, it's nearly impossible to completely prevent a situation from happening. One of the major deterrents in school violence has

been the presence of a school resource officer. School resource officers have a multitude of benefits both from a police standpoint and a school standpoint. While it's unrealistic to suggest a school resource officer in every school, law enforcement agencies and schools alike should make it a priority to at a minimum provide a liaison officer who represents the needs of both entities on a scaled down level.

The findings of this paper show that a goal of completely preventing an active shooter situation from happening is unrealistic. However, by law enforcement, school administrations and other resources working together to establish, train, and execute a response plan, the potential for unnecessary loss of student's life will be kept to a minimum.

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