


## Chapter 9

# School Shootings and Trauma-Sensitive School Environment

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### ABSTRACT

*School shootings are traumatic events that have detrimental impacts on children. Studies revealed that after the school shooting children can suffer from traumatic symptoms which cause difficulties in learning and relationships. Traumas negatively affect developing brain structures of the children which can lead to long-term problems. For that reason, the trauma sensitive schools (TSS) model, which aimed to provide safe and secure environments for children, can be helpful to support the children and to improve their well-being after the school shooting.*

### INTRODUCTION

Violence is a worldwide problem that needs to be addressed. Many researchers from different disciplines study on violent behavior to understand the causes of these behaviors to prevent them. Violent behavior can be seen in different forms like domestic violence, bullying, homicide. School shooting is another violent behavior that involves attacking someone by firearm on the school grounds. It is regarded as form of mass shooting yet it differs from the other mass shootings by the place the violent act is conducted (Gerard, Whitefield, Porter & Browne, 2016). As the frequency of school shooting events increase, concerns related to cause and effects of school shooting also increase. According to data of Center of Homeland Defense and Security, there were 68 school shooting between the 1999 and 2018 (Melgar, 2019). While high number of school shooting event is concerning for governments,

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the decrease of average days between school shooting lead to moral panic (Muschert, 2007). For that reason, prevention and intervention has great importance.

In order to prevent school shooting events, understanding the motives behind these acts is necessary. From the criminological perspective, it was documented that event characteristics, offender characteristics, victim characteristic and motives related to school shooting differ from each other (Gerard, et al., 2016). In that sense Muschert (2007) classified school shootings into several types which are rampage school shooting, mass murders, terrorist attacks, targeting shootings and government shootings. Rampage shootings and targeting shootings mainly aimed to take revenge. The perpetrator is a member or a former member of the school community. On the other hand, mass murders in schools are perpetrated by an adult to gain power by targeting symbolically meaningful group. Terrorist attacks are politically motivated shootings. Government shootings occur in response to student protest or riots, intent to control crisis. Statistics revealed that most of the school shootings happened in last years can be classified as rampage shootings that they were mostly conducted by students and targeted certain person or group (Government Accountability Office [GAO], 2020). According to the data of GAO (2020) the most common reason for school shooting in K-12 schools is the dispute between members of the school. After disputes and grievance caused shootings, accidental shootings and school-targeted shootings were respectively the most common causes of the school shooting between 2009 and 2019.

Offender related factors are considered as crucial to understand school shooting and to prevent its increasing trend. Studies revealed that characteristics of offenders under the age 18 and over 18 differ significantly from each other. According to results of the study which analyzed 28 offenders showed that more than half of the offenders under the age 18 have history of psychiatric history, rejected and bullied by the peers. These rates lower for the offenders age over 18 (Gerard et al., 2016). On the other hand, another study conducted with 41 offenders show that 41% of the offenders socialize with other students and 44% of them take part in organized social activities (Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum & Modzeleski, 2002). Offenders' link to school also differ from each other according to age that offenders who are over 18 has no link to the school whereas half of the offenders under 18 has connection with the school (Gerard et al, 2016).

Offender link to school is one of the factors that play role in the school shooting events. Some of the studies highlighted the school related factors as risk for the school shooting (GAO, 2020). Data from the national report revealed that poor schools where the most of the students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch targeted more than the wealthy schools. Nearly two-thirds of the school shooting between 2009 and 2019 was happened in poor schools. Together with the wealth of the school, motive for the shooting was also changed. School shootings in poorer schools was mostly

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