

*United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural
Organization (UNESCO)*

*Discussing the
implementation of
measures for the
prevention, handling,
and aftermath of
school shootings*

PASMI IN 2023
Strength in diversity

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I. INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization is a specialized agency of the United Nations. It was established on November 16, 1945, with the objective to promote world peace and security through education, science, culture, and communication (UNESCO, 2021). The constitution signed on that day came into effect in 1946, and was approved by 20 countries. Since 1958, its headquarters have been located in the 7th arrondissement of Paris. The Director-General is Audrey Azoulay. Ever since 2017, UNESCO counts with 195 member states and 10 associate members (UNESCO, 2014).

UNESCO's initiatives contribute to meeting the Sustainable Development Goals established in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. UNESCO's objective is to use education, science, culture, and communication to the creation of a culture of peace, poverty eradication, environmental sustainability, and intercultural communication (UNESCO, 2014). This organ develops educational resources to assist people in living as global citizens free of hatred and violence, aims to ensure that every citizen has the opportunity to receive a high-quality education, and strengthens national relationships by supporting cultural identity and the equal dignity of all cultures.

Ever since UNESCO was created, it has made education a core branch of the organization. UNESCO is now more important than ever since the world is facing increasing complexity and uncertainty; knowledge, education, and learning need to be reimagined. Naturally, the rise of school shootings has gotten attention and this organization is determined to find solutions to this ever-growing issue (UNESCO, 2014). UNESCO's determination to deliver high-quality education and eradicate hatred and violence go hand-in-hand, thus making this issue a priority.

Because school violence has an impact on education, health, and well-being, UNESCO aims for a "comprehensive school health approach" that includes rules and regulations, skills-based education, safe learning environments, and links to health services. Education sectors must implement measures to prevent and address violence and discrimination (UNESCO, 2014).

This organization has created an emphasis on four main areas: providing comprehensive, up-to-date global data on school violence and bullying. Supporting

policies to prevent school violence and bullying. Improving the measurement of school violence and bullying within the frameworks established in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UNESCO, 2021). Strengthening the responses of national education sectors towards school violence and bullying.

Incidents of school shootings are a constant fear that children and adolescents currently suffer, the main cause being the easy access to weapons, mainly firearms, by minors (American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 2004). Firearm-related safety is very critical for individuals who have gone through (or are going through) depression.

School shootings have different causes, yet one of the main causes to address is the mental health of the violent parties. This is something very alarming given that combining student abuse plus easy access to weapons causes misfortunes with a minimum of 10 victims per attack for school shootings around the world (Tucker, 2022). Since 2014, more than 220 attacks have been recorded in the United States alone. These statistics are very alarming given that there were unfortunately more than 200 lives claimed by these attacks. In addition, on more than 30 occasions the attacker also died because he committed suicide (Hierro, 2018).

School shootings affect both the children and parents' safety perception of going to school, affecting the performance of students in academic and social performance. In the more devastating cases, children who have experienced these events suffer commonly from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, something that hunts them for the rest of their lives (NPR, 2022).

II. HISTORY OF THE PROBLEM

Albeit an ever-growing issue, school shootings have been reported since the 18th century. The earliest known school shooting happened in 1764 in today's Pennsylvania; ten children lost their lives in this incident (K12academics, 2022). Since then, school shootings have augmented in frequency and severity, but the causes remain constant. Evidence of mental health issues and bullying at home and school remain the major causes of school shooters performing these acts. However, hatred towards educators and fellow students also prevails as the cause.

During the 1800s, school violence was mainly student against another student; and the use of rocks and knives was predominant. Because of firearm availability, particularly in the United States, it wasn't long until violence escalated and simple physical attacks evolved into shootings. It followed with the student against teacher violence, where student abuse caused revenge and teachers were attacked by the damnified students, generally followed up by suicide (K12academics, 2022).

Thanks to the information retrieved in the following decades, a more detailed grasp is obtained of the causes of school shootings. The most common constant is problems at home; whether it is violence, a divorce, or lack of attention (K12academics, 2022). During the first decades of the 20th century, most fatal school incidents were inflicted either with arson or explosives.

The Federal Firearms Act of 1938 made it illegal to sell firearms to certain individuals and required FFLs (Federal Firearm Licensees) to sell firearms. This aims to keep a record of customers of firearms in the United States (Britannica, 2022). Moreover, in 1966, the University of Texas-Austin Massacre happened when Charles Whitman climbed atop the observation deck assassinating sixteen people and injuring thirty-one for a timelapse of over ninety minutes (K12academics, 2022).

The *Gun Control Act* and *Firearms Owners Protection Act* of 1968 came into effect, mainly regulating interstate (U.S) firearm commerce and prohibiting certain types of firearms, requiring a more in-depth background check on customers (Britannica, 2022). School shootings, however, augmented. In 1986 David and Doris Young took 150 students and teachers hostage in Cokeville Elementary School. They demanded \$300 million dollars for the rescue, however, Doris accidentally set up an explosive, injuring 78 students and teachers and her own death. In the Cleveland School Massacre of Stockton (1989), five children were murdered and 29 wounded by a single gunman using an AK-47 (K12academics, 2022).

During the decade of the 1990s, student safety perception saw a sharp decrease following (and followed) by years of great violence in schools. According to the U.S Department of Education, in the school years of 1998-99 alone, 3,523 students were expelled for bringing a firearm to school (K12academics, 2022). A similar survey by The Harvard School of Public Health highlighted that 15% of the students surveyed

claimed to have carried an arm in the past 30 days. In this decade alone, 466 students in the United States died from school shootings.

In addition, in 1996, sixteen children and one teacher were murdered in a Primary School in Scotland. Moreover, in 1999, fourteen students and one teacher were murdered at Columbine High School (Sandbox Networks, 2022). Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold had plotted to murder at least five hundred and destroy their school. They both committed suicide.

International examples have been getting more common and deadlier. In 2002, thirteen teachers, two students, and one policeman were murdered in a Secondary School in Germany. In 2007, 23-year-old Virginia Tech Student Cho Seung-Hui assassinated thirty-three in a classroom building (including himself). This event marked the deadliest school shooting in U.S history (Sandbox Networks, 2022). Then, in 2011, a former student from a public school in Rio de Janeiro returned to massacre twelve children before committing suicide. This was unprecedented in Brazil. In 2012, Adam Lanza murdered twenty children and six others at Sandy Hook Elementary in Connecticut. This is known as the second deadliest shooting in U.S history.

In 2017, a school shooting occurred in Monterrey, Mexico, in which a teacher and three other students died. Moreover, in 2018, Vladislav Roslyakov murdered 20 students with an arm in the Crimean Peninsula. He was publicly an avowed fan of the Columbine High School Massacre (Sandbox Networks, 2022). Most recently, in 2022, nineteen children and two teachers were assassinated at Robb Elementary School in Texas. The attacker had already severely wounded his grandmother at home. This incident was notorious due to the severely disappointing police report, being slow and to the eyes of most, immoral (Sandbox Networks, 2022).

III. CURRENT SITUATION

Although during the last two decades several more security and preparation modifications have been implemented in schools, school shootings have increased greatly throughout the world. School shootings are now a worldwide problem that has caused much consternation (NPR, 2022). The recent event at Robb Elementary School in Texas shocked the whole world because the community was faced with the question:

why didn't the police intervene at that moment? Events like this are very much expected not to occur at this stage of the problem (Sandbox Networks, 2022).

Firearm control is naturally the most controversial area of school shootings. It bears the question of how it is possible that children, as young as in elementary school, can carry firearms frequently without any implications. Only three countries in the world consider the ownership of a firearm a constitutional right: the United States, Mexico, and Guatemala (Amnesty International, 2022). There are over 175 countries that allow their citizens to own firearms (most with certain policies and regulations, including the three nations mentioned above). UNESCO believes in strong guidelines, policies, and regulations for firearm control in their member states; however, some have been notably unsuccessful.

Most countries have completely banned certain types of firearms (generally extremely high calibers) and require basic background checks: requiring no criminal records, psychological approval, firearm safety courses, and being regularly tested to ensure mental wellness to carry a firearm. Nevertheless, these measures are easily violated by faulty bureaucratic processes, illegal commerce of firearms, and countries suffering from violent causes (Amnesty International, 2022).

The United States, which is by far the country most affected by school shootings, has one of the most controversial firearm regulation acts in the world. Federal weapon laws mainly ensure proper distribution of firearms, prohibit certain weapons, and require an instant criminal background check (Britannica, 2022). In addition to these, each state has independence on its weapon control laws, some being very restrictive and making firearms completely illegal, while others are much more lenient, not even requiring a permit beyond the federal basic requirements.

The 2018 Small Arms Survey found that there are 393 million registered firearms in the United States. The country has, for comparison, only 326 million citizens (Hierro, 2018). There isn't a clear formula to ensure firearm control policies prevent school shootings and other firearm-related events. There are certain countries such as Chile that have relatively simple policies to have access to a firearm, yet murder rates are very low. In Mexico however, laws are very restrictive, and nearly thirteen million unregistered firearms are calculated to circulate in the territory. The country has a homicide rate of nearly 20 per 100,000 people, more than three times the world

average, and it is the second most affected by school shootings (The War on Drugs plays an important role in these statistics). Countries like Honduras and El Salvador have very poor firearm control policies and are faced with the highest murder rates (both nearing 90 per 100,000 people) (InSight Crime, 2013). However, in-depth background checks (including criminal, psychological, and theoretical exams) help reduce firearm access to the wrong hands significantly.

Another critical aspect to look at in school shootings is the psychological causalities both for the attacker and the victims. A survey by Alfred University shows that students believe revenge is the main reason for school shooters to attack (Britannica, 2022). Wanting to get back at those who hurt them, bullying, “not valuing their life”, and home violence are the main causes of shootings detected by students. The vast majority of attackers did not have a close friend circle, enjoyed violent movies and TV shows, and never had psychological support.

Most psychologists agree that attackers suffer from very deep depression combined with paranoia. These individuals are struggling, have had multiple failures in their lives, and are desperate before the event (Meloy, 2022). Psychologists believe that if these individuals received some type of treatment, shootings could have (and could be) prevented. Mental health, however, is not in itself the cause of school shootings; it is a risk factor. Mental health combined with a troubled childhood (commonly combined with trauma), bullying, social impediments, and feeling like an outcast generates highly stressful situations, sometimes ending in school shootings.

A 2004 study by the U.S Secret Service and the U.S Department of Education found that nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of shooters had been bullied or harassed at school (NPR, 2022). Researchers say that when one has been struggling alone for a while, failing, their despair can turn into anger. This anger leads to homicidal (and suicidal) thoughts. Disturbed students start fantasizing about revenge and identify with other individuals who have become school shooters. Easy access to firearms feeds this fantasy.

Psychologists state that these attacks can be prevented since they are often prepared weeks or months in advance, and early behavioral signs can be detected. Isolation, loss of affection, and violent tendencies are signs of a child in danger (NPR, 2022). It is important not to underestimate these changes. Psychologists and educators have found that surrounding a struggling child with the right kind of support and

supervision early on, connecting and listening to them, can help prevent future shootings and completely turn an individual away from violence.

In a study conducted in 2020, students who have experienced school shootings were analyzed. Results showed that the youth near a school that has experienced a shooting consumed 20% more antidepressants than the constants. Mental health impacts however are not the end of the story (The Conversation, 2022). These students also are much less likely to graduate high school, go to, or graduate from college. Additionally, the study revealed that each student exposed to a shooting could expect to earn USD \$115,500 less over the course of their lifetime. The aggregate costs of school violence represent \$5.8 billion dollars. These students will be forced to live with the consequences of what happened for decades to come.

IV. UN ACTIONS

The United Nations is highly concerned about implementing measures to prevent more school shootings. Eradicating violence and improving the quality of education is at the core of this organization. The UN Human Rights Office has commented that nations should live up to their obligations to protect their citizens from the “horrifyingly commonplace but preventable violent acts that are a direct result of insufficient gun control” (Colville, 2019).

This office also commented on how albeit mental illness may be a factor in firearm violence, there are much more reasons why one would resort to violence, including blind hatred, racism, and xenophobia (Schlein, 2019). All of these factors beg a much broader issue. It is not enough to only look at the direct measures to be implemented in order to prevent school shootings. It is critical to look at the entire cultural system: from hatred, discrimination, and racism, to firearm control, mental illness, and school safety.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization is naturally one of the most involved organs of the UN in this topic. UNESCO thus has taken into effect the following actions (UNESCO, 2021):

UNESCO member states declare the first Thursday of November the “International Day Against Violence at School Including Cyberbullying”. This calls for the strengthening of partnerships and initiatives aiming to prevent and eliminate violence in the school environment (UNESCO, 2021). Additionally, UNESCO has released a publication in the World Education Forum of 2019 that offers the most up-to-date, comprehensive evidence on school violence, an analysis of global prevalence and trends, the nature and the impact, and successful national responses.

Thirdly, in collaboration with the Institute for School Violence Prevention at Ewha Womans University, this organization organized the “International Symposium on School Violence and Bullying” (Seoul). This organization released a forum that looks at the scale, nature, drivers, and consequences of school violence. Finally, UNESCO works with partners to support international efforts to respond to school violence. Examples include the “Safe to Learn Campaign” and the “Power of Zero Campaign” (UNESCO, 2021).

V. POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization is steadfast on the importance of taking actions in order to resolve this issue. According to different studies, research and analysis, this organization has hereunto compiled a list of comprehensive solutions towards the prevention, confrontation, and correspondence of school shootings. These are the following solutions proposed in order to solve the issue:

01. In order to prevent the chance of a firearm entering a school, and hence preventing a shooting, access to firearms should be limited dramatically since places where it is more difficult to acquire a firearm generally show lower homicide rates (The Conversation, 2022).
 - a. Studies show that permissive firearm laws and higher firearm ownership were linked with higher rates of school shootings.
 - b. Countries should review their firearm control policies with the purpose of determining potential risk factors, improvements, address a more

current context, and ultimately implement actions such as scrutinizing firearm trade and acquisition.

- c. Some actions that can be made are to raise the age for legal purchase, imposing longer waiting periods before access to weapons, requiring more in-depth background checks, and eliminating access to individuals at high risk of committing violence.

02. In order to address a potential threat, conducting more risk assessments at schools is critical since research shows that by assessing a threatening individual, paired with preventive and protective measures taken as a response, showed to reduce rates of student aggression (The Conversation, 2022).

- a. Assessments conducted by professionals (including police officers, school officials, teachers, and mental health professionals) should consult and cooperate with each other to determine a student's risk for violence.
- b. These assessments should follow a set of guidelines, such as the “Journal of Threat Assessment and Management” of the American Psychological Association, that ensure assessments are conducted in the most up-to-date, effective manner with the purpose of addressing the threat in the best possible way.
- c. Risk assessments show to improve teacher-student felt safety and trustworthiness; improving academic performance and lowering suspension rates.

03. Making school buildings safer is key in order to reduce the likelihood of weapons being brought into schools and the possibility of a shooter accessing the premises undetected (Paolini, 2015).

- a. Upgraded camera surveillance and increased law enforcement at schools appear to deliver increased felt safety. Metal detectors when entering

school buildings show the best results at avoiding the entry of firearms at schools; concomitantly to improving students' and teachers' felt safety.

- b. Legal minimum security requirements should be imposed in national education sectors in order to achieve the accomplishment of these measures. New private and public institutions should implement these measures to their budget in order to get certified for educational purposes.
- c. The amount of equipment should be determined through vulnerability exposure; meaning zones of high firearm ownership should be more carefully surveyed in regards of safety.

04. Reduce exposure to violence on social media by promoting exposure consciousness campaigns through social media, schools and government institutions (The Conversation, 2022).

- a. Researchers say that watching violent programs and playing violent video games can lead to hostility, aggressiveness, desensitization to violence, and aggressive behavior. It is suggested to reduce screen violence on which children and young adolescents are exposed.
- b. It is also important to promote alternative activities such as sports, literature, and arts.

05. Improve mental health services accessibility by using task shifting, integration with primary care and technology based tools (Breitinger, 2018).

- a. Children with emotional and behavioral problems should have a way to be easily provided with mental health care services. This organization suggests exceptions to privacy protection policies to allow for better communication with the endangered children and report risk situations to schools.

- b. The number of physician assistants (PAs) with specialized training in mental health could increase. In situations when there are few psychiatrists and their geographic distribution doesn't meet the need for them, transferring the care of simple patients who need easy clinical decision-making to such PAs working under the supervision of psychiatrists could be of great assistance.
- c. Adding front-line clinicians and screening procedures into primary care clinics, the locations where patients contact with the healthcare system most frequently, is another option to enhance access to mental health care. By having primary care physicians flag patients for additional evaluation by psychiatric PAs and other physician extenders with a focus on mental health, we can increase capacity. These professionals can do more patient screenings, provide simple first-line therapies, and keep consultation and referral options to psychiatrists built into general care practices. The collaborative care model routinely shows improved mental health outcomes compared to standard management in primary care settings.
- d. New technology can increase the effectiveness of care and broaden practitioners' reach. Some of the issues brought on by the unequal distribution of mental health professionals can be resolved, for instance, by using video conferencing to conduct mental health "visits." It has been demonstrated that Software-based solutions are equally as effective as in-person therapy for delivering traditional cognitive behavioral therapy.

VI. COUNTRIES INVOLVED

1. United States of America

Over 3,500 children and teenagers are massacred by gunfire, and 15,000 more are wounded. Every year, an estimated 3 million children in the United States are susceptible to shootings. For children and teenagers, firearms are the primary cause of death. Since 1970, there have been 2,032 school shootings in the United

States, and the number is rising. Since the atrocity at Sandy Hook Elementary School in December 2012, there have been 948 school shootings. School shootings have reverted to pre-COVID levels, if not escalated, according to some reports (Sandy Hook Promise, 2020).

2. United Mexican States

Massacres in schools in the United States are not phenomena that can be ruled out in Mexico, because bullying among classmates, availability of weapons, and a lack of attention to mental health are all common in the country, which might lead to additional incidents. Mexico had the second-highest number of reported cases, with 8 school shootings (Universidad de Guadalajara, 2022).

3. Republic of South Africa

According to a countrywide survey of 5,939 young people conducted in 2012, 22.2 percent of South African youth experienced violence at school between August 2011 and August 2012 (Global Campaign for Peace Education, 2015). This equates to one in every five high school students. The South African backdrop of violence, as well as the context of violence in schools, along with inadequate pastoral oversight, continues to provide a favorable environment for increased school violence. Low-level violence has become prevalent in South African society, and schools must provide an alternate means of dealing with conflict. Many of the practices that create violence in schools must be eliminated immediately. Corporal punishment, which instills in youngsters the values of degradation, force, and humiliation, must be abolished entirely. In school, intimidation by leaders and instructors must also be avoided. Discipline is best done privately, and schools should avoid publicly shaming students.

4. Republic of India

Firearm violence is extremely rare in India, however, firearm culture has proliferated in a rapidly developing area. According to Indian police, the number of monthly applications for weapons licenses has increased fivefold in recent years. The average in 2002 was two to five licenses per month; currently, it is 15 to 20 (ABC News, n.d.).

5. Federal Republic of Nigeria

Armed individuals, known locally as bandits, have created a business out of kidnapping students hostage in northwest Nigeria, with Kaduna state bearing the brunt of the blame. Since December of last year, they have abducted roughly 1,000 students from schools, with more than 150 still missing (Aljazeera, n.d). School kidnappings were first carried out in Nigeria by the armed groups Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province, but the practice has since been replicated by other shooters. The most high-profile school kidnapping occurred in 2014 when Boko Haram seized over 270 schoolgirls from the town of Chibok. Around 100 of them are still missing.

6. Argentine Republic

7. Azerbaijani Republic

8. Commonwealth of Australia

9. Dominion of Canada

10. Federative Republic of Brazil

11. Federal Republic of Germany

12. French Republic

13. Japan

14. Kingdom of Spain

15. People's Republic of China

16. Republic of Estonia
17. Republic of Hungary
18. Republic of Italy
19. Republic of Kenya
20. Russian Federation
21. Republic of Turkey
22. The Hellenic Republic
23. The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
24. The Islamic Republic of Pakistan
25. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

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