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Assignment 1.3: Case Study

2018 Parkland Shooting: A Case Study

Introduction

On February 14, 2018, in Parkland, FL, 19-year-old Nikolas Cruz took an Uber to Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, carrying bags containing a semiautomatic AR-15 rifle and ammunition.¹ Cruz shot 34 people who were inside five freshman classrooms.¹ 17 people died from the shooting, making the Parkland Shooting one of the top three deadliest mass shootings in American history.¹ The mass shooting ignited national discussions around gun reform, the role of phones and communication during a crisis, and boosted young people's participation in politics and the legislative process.²

Facts of the Case

Cruz, who had previously been expelled from Marjory Stoneman, entered campus Building 12 via a stairwell at 2:21pm and opened fire within 15 seconds of arriving.³ One minute later, the school's fire alarm went off after being pulled by Cruz, commencing student evacuations quickly followed up by the first 911 call to go out.³ At 2:23pm the school's resource office issued a radio alert about possible shots fired within the school and then remained at the southeast corner of Building 12 for the duration of the shooting, not once entering the building or discharging his weapon.³ At 2:28pm, Cruz left the school heading south, blending in with evacuating students.³ At 2:32pm, police and sheriff's deputies enter the school for the first time.³

After fleeing the scene, Cruz made his way to a nearby Walmart buying himself a Subway sandwich and drink around 2:50pm.³ At 3:01pm, Cruz headed over to McDonald's and continued to walk on foot for roughly two miles before being apprehended by police from a neighboring department at 3:41pm.³ Of the 17 people murdered, 14 were students and 3 were faculty and staff, with ages ranging from 14 to 49.¹ 17 others were injured.¹

Cruz had exhibited radical and mentally ill behavior before the Parkland shooting.⁴ School officials had previously attempted to have Cruz forcibly committed for psychiatric evaluation in 2016 after making serious threats to harm himself and others.⁴ Cruz had been investigated by both social services and a local behavioral health clinic called in by the high school officials, but both agencies concluded that Cruz was of low risk to himself and others and did not meet the criteria for further assessment.⁴ Five months after being expelled, and a year before the Parkland shooting, Cruz legally bought the AR-15 that would eventually be used in the shooting at Marjory Stoneman.⁴

In October 2021, those affected by the Parkland shooting reached a \$25 million settlement with the Broward County school district.⁵ Those involved in the settlement include the families of the 17 murdered individuals, 16 out of the 17 injured persons, and 19 people who were left severely traumatized by the shooting.⁵ The one injured individual not involved in the proceedings is seeking a larger payment to cover the lifelong care needed for the multiple gunshot wounds he received to his legs, lungs, and abdomen.⁵

The Broward school district provided five locations where students could receive free mental health support, cited 25 mental health clinicians available to students, and spent \$8 million on hiring more mental health specialists and support for the victims.⁶

Epidemiological Aspects

Victims were taken to Broward Health North Hospital.⁷ The hospital system to which the hospital belonged had previously participated in the county's first full active shooter drill with the help of SWAT teams several years before.⁷ Broward Health North had run an active shooter simulation within a year of the Parkland shooting.⁷ And Broward Health Medical Center had previously treated patients involved in the mass shooting at Ft. Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport a year before.⁷ Mass shootings in Florida have been on the rise, with 15 mass shootings occurring in 2019 and 34 occurring in 2020.⁸

Management

Management of the shooting was heavily criticized by the media and families of the victims, especially regarding the police response.⁹ Police protocols were not followed, allowing the gunman time to exit the building before police even entered.⁹ There was also confusion among authorities with many medical first responders forced to tend to victims under armed guard for fear of where the gunman was.⁹ Several news outlets later reported that communication failures led to a 20-minute delay in security footage.⁹ Police posted at other educational facilities, as well as an off-duty officer, entered the school before Marjory Stoneman's own armed school resource officer did.⁹ Although this was praised by the public, individuals not expressly called to the scene may have contributed to the confusion.⁹

All victims, including the shooter, were treated at Broward Health North Hospital.⁷ The medical professionals in the Broward Health system were highly trained, well-prepared, and kept the identities of patients concealed from the public.⁷

The students at Marjory Stoneman had undergone several active-shooter drills and were quick to act.¹⁰ However, Cruz's previous attendance at the high school made these drills ineffective as he was familiar with the emergency plans in place.¹⁰ Parkland was one of several school shootings where the shooter used a fire alarm to get students and faculty out into the open hallways.¹⁰ The Parkland shooting highlighted these gaps in active-shooter training and preparation, with greater emphasis put on police officers responding to any alarm and teachers making sure they are prepared to evacuate as soon as humanely possible, rather than locking down and waiting for emergency responders.¹⁰

Communications

The shooting at Marjory Stoneman incited mass protests across the country around gun violence and calls for gun reform.⁷ Parkland students started the March for Our Lives Movement, with rallies and walkouts occurring at schools all over the country.⁷ March for Our Lives also called for the political mobilization of the country's youth and urged young people to vote and participate in the democratic process.⁷ Today, Marjory Stoneman students are still calling for gun reform, the institution of universal background checks, and increasing the minimum age to buy assault rifles.⁷ Some of the parents and families of those killed have also founded their own organizations and nonprofits around reducing school and gun violence.⁷

Summary

The Parkland Shooting is one of the most devastating mass shootings. It highlighted the gaps in active-shooter plans, as well as put a spotlight on the role of law enforcement in shootings. Unfortunately, the victims of the shooting are still fighting for gun reform despite the continued use of semiautomatic rifles in mass shooting events.

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