

Sandy Hook Elementary School Massacre
Written by Professor Arthur Cohen B.A., M.A
Center for School and Personal Safety Research
(561) 509-6345 Email: Artmcohen@gmail.com

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Sadly it is not a perfect world and there are dangers everywhere. We would love to be able to control the risks and avoid the tragedies but as some know, these are things beyond our control. It is heart wrenching to think that there might be little that can be done to prevent another tragedy like the Saddle Hook or Columbine Massacre.

The purpose of this piece is to examine a number of key questions that arise after every shooting.

1. Could this event have been predicted?
2. Could this event have been prevented and if so by what means?
3. Would gun control legislation be the answer?
4. Why are these events likely to happen again and again regardless of the steps taken?
5. At what point would information be helpful to those under attack?

While this school massacre was catastrophic, it wasn't the first and it won't be the last. We have had Columbine, Virginia Tech and dozens of other shootings over the years. These attacks are by no means limited to the United States. It is difficult to impossible to stop a determined "evil" doer.

Schools and children are being attacked around the world. Afghanistan, Pakistan, China, Russia, Israel and the list goes on and on. Radical Islamic terrorists see schools as easy targets. Plus there are other racist, crazy or evil individuals who would commit outrageous attacks on young and old alike. Does anyone remember the terrorist siege of the Beslan School in Russia? How quick we forget. September 1, 2004 saw the most egregious attack, bar none, on a school and children in the Russian Caucasus. Several dozen heavily armed Islamic-nationalist guerillas, some wearing explosive belts, took 1100 children and parents hostage for several days. Some unspeakable acts were committed during that siege. In the

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end, 380 people died including 186 children, not to mention the devastating psychological effects it had on many others. Terrorists rely on frightening people. Many "experts" believe a U.S. school might be a future target. The reason is U.S. schools are easy targets and the terror benefits are enormous.

Would gun control legislation be the answer?

Gun control is the simple solution to a complex problem. Unfortunately, simple solutions often don't work. There are many complex issues at work here. In my book, *Surviving a Massacre, Rampage or Spree Killing*, I purposely avoided using the title rampage shooting and substituted rampage killing instead. This is because there have been many instances where a knife or explosives were used in the attacks. In China for example, many rampage assaults on students were committed with a knife. Likely this was because guns weren't available. Many people aren't aware that the Columbine duo set up two propane tanks to explode in the crowded school cafeteria. Luckily they malfunctioned or hundreds might have died. They also brought more than 30 pipe bombs along which luckily were never used. As to the gun question, two countries Switzerland and Israel have as many or more guns per person as does the U.S. yet they have a fraction of these shootings. So is it the gun or is it the unstable people in our society?

Could this event have been predicted?

Next, how can we predict who will become a shooter? According to a Secret Service Report in 2000, it is impossible to predict who will become a shooter. No clear picture was established after reviewing the 50 or so previous school shooters. Past events serve as motivational starting points for future attackers. Columbine set the bar for others to follow in both intensity and brutality. While I am not a psychologist, there is an enormous issue many are overlooking. The world is producing "monsters" at an enormous rate and here are just some reasons for it. Many kids today are growing up under stress in war zones around the world. As a result, many young people are suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The use of child warriors is a modern phenomenon. Estimates suggest as

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many as 300,000 children in at least 40 countries are combatants with the closest to us being our neighbor Mexico. Drug cartels entice young teens with money and excitement to become contract killers. Untold millions of Muslim children are being brainwashed by Islamic radicals in Madrassas around the world to hate. These are fertile grounds for recruiting suicide bombers and others capable of incredible evil. The reason children are recruited is that kids are easily indoctrinated, trained and controlled and so become great soldiers and killers. Young people are exposed to an incredible amount of violence in the media and killer video games which normalizes violent acts and behavior. For less stable individuals, they could easily cross over from reality to a world where violence appears to be the norm. Also kids exposed to and inducted into gangs where violence is a normal part of life could be changed forever. Gang mentality is quick to respond to any disrespect or challenge with violence. Additionally, there is the internet which provides easy access to propaganda and the promotion of evil ideas. From this, years ago we saw the creation of the "lone wolf" killer. Working alone and without any affiliation, these evolving killing machines are harder to locate. Studies have shown children growing up in the inner city suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in greater numbers than other areas. And let's not leave out those growing up in dysfunctional families where physical, sexual and emotional abuse is rampant. Have I frightened you yet? With this fertile ground for potential killers, clearly some will stand out and become our next major menace. If we believe the experts, it is virtually impossible to predict who and when. The psychological make-up of each of us is so different we never know what additional stress factor might push an individual over the edge to do these horrendous acts.

We must recognize that there is a mental health crisis in this country. This has largely been ignored. According to one study, about 15% of the student population suffers from some form of mental illness that largely goes untreated. Ignoring psychological problems of the young can only get worse as they get older and the hormones kick in. Our jails are full of people with mental health problems. However,

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Keep in mind what the Secret Service study revealed, you cannot predict who will do what. Many potential problem people often go unnoticed or ignored.

Could this event have been prevented and if so by what means?

We have to accept the fact that a determined individual or group is difficult to stop. Plus, the law prevents us from stopping people from something they might do. There has been some success in preventing these events from happening through tips provided by the public or students. This type of prevention must be encouraged and expanded. While we can't prevent all of these events, we can provide training for teachers and the public how to survive once an attack occurs. Keep in mind that in most cases where school massacres have taken place, the event is over in about 5-7 minutes. That means, surviving the event would require taking action immediately to stay alive until law enforcement arrives or the attacker kills himself/ herself. Since training young students might be too frightening, training the teachers who would direct students would be beneficial.

At what point would information be helpful to those under attack?

Since how to prevent an attack is not yet on the horizon, the educational community should concern itself on what to do when it does happen. Once an attack is in progress, there is a great deal of crucial information that would be helpful in enabling people to survive. Knowing that most attacks last between 5-7 minutes is important and a good starting point. Currently, the common and almost universal technique used in schools when a dangerous situation arises is the lockdown. In the past, lockdowns were chosen, even by students, when an opportunity to escape existed. This is because they have been indoctrinated into this one shot solution. This "one size fits all" approach isn't always the best choice. However, if a lockdown is implemented, keep in mind you have an entire group of students concentrated in one place at the mercy of a shooter should he get in. It would be like "shooting fish in a barrel." Locking the door alone is not enough. Teachers should direct students into barricading the door with furniture making it very difficult or impossible for someone to enter. Keeping a door jamb handy and

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jamming it into the bottom of the door will also be helpful. If there is a window in the door, cover it. Once barricaded, students should hide away from the door, quiet and out of view. Remember, these shootings are over in 5-7 minutes so if the shooter runs into an obstacle, he is likely to move ahead to look for other easier targets. There are many tactics that might be used based on the number and position of the shooter(s). Keep in mind NOTHING is 100 percent. In an open space with nowhere to run, playing dead has worked in some cases. Running for the closest exit or for cover is another option. While running is genetically programmed, where to run isn't. One should seek to get out of view of the shooter as quickly as possible. In some cases, escape routes can either be booby trapped, a terrorist tactic, or shooters might be lying in wait. The latter tactic was a technique used by two young school shooters in the Jonesboro school shooting. The two snipers waited outside hidden in some trees ready to shoot the people escaping during a fake fire drill. It is important to know the difference between cover, i.e. a thick stone wall which might protect you against bullets shot and concealment, i.e. a door, which will only protect you if you are not seen. If closer than 10 feet, rushing the shooter might be an option. A good time to rush would be if the shooter is distracted or reloading. An additional distraction can be created by throwing something at the shooters head which could buy you a second or two to close the gap. Once close enough, control the weapon. If others are trained, they would know to assist you at this point. Because of stress, so many choices to pick from and so little time to decide, these tactics have to be carefully explained and quality training is needed. As anyone in law enforcement or the military know, this training cannot be offered once in a lifetime. It must be presented well and reinforced periodically.

Many of the Sandy Hook teachers were heroes in the truest sense of the word. Some died trying to protect the children. Could any deaths have been prevented? I believe some teachers and students could have been saved had they had the appropriate training. Unfortunately, the educational community has been very slow in providing teachers and school staff with any meaningful school violence

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prevention or safety training. Even after many horrendous events, the educational community continues to be a slow learner. There might be several reasons for this including the cost of training, concern for frightening anyone i.e. students, parents of teachers, or protecting the reputation of the school or community. As far as the cost is concerned, the cost of even one lawsuit would easily cover years of staff training with a good deal left over. I have heard numerous times from administrators, "The safety of our students is our primary concern." Really? It saddens me to say, in my 30+ years in public education, I have seen that other hidden agendas often compete with student safety and student safety doesn't appear to be the top priority. Let's make it one.

About the Author:

Professor **Arthur Cohen B.A., M.A.** is a retired educator, author, speaker and personal safety expert. Sometimes referred to as the "**Streetwise Professor**," he is a nationally and internationally known personal safety expert. He is a former adjunct professor with Alfred University, Norwich University and the College of St. Rose where he taught courses on school safety. Professor Cohen has written extensively, both books and articles, on school and personal safety issues. He is the author of ***Surviving a Massacre, Rampage or Spree Killing***, published by Paladin Press in the spring of 2010. His program, "**Become Streetwise!**" **A Women's Guide to Personal Safety** was motivated by the murder of a former student in 1980. In the past, he has worked with the **National Crime Prevention Council** and **Youth Crime Watch** and presented safety programs at many of their conferences. He was a speaker at almost 100 local, state and national conferences for educators, law enforcement and healthcare professionals. In 2011, the Massapequa Schools, where he taught for 33 years, inducted him into their **Hall of Fame** for the work he had done in introducing safety programs for students, teachers and the community.