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Behind the Trigger: The Urgency for Education on the Heated Debate Between the Roles of  
Mental Health and Restrictive Firearm Policies

Abstract:

Over the past six decades, the roots of the gun violence epidemic have been fiercely debated between members of U.S. society. The primary controversy is whether poor mental health or the lack of gun restrictions is to blame for continued violence. As gun violence continues to increase in America, the debate halts the progression of creating positive change. “Behind the Trigger: The Urgency for Education on the Heated Debate Between the Roles of Mental Health and Restrictive Firearm Policies” answers the questions: how does mental health intervention and the implementation of gun restrictions differ in effectiveness in reducing the amount of gun violence in U.S. schools? Additionally, what can community members do to encourage needed policy change at a faster rate? Initial research proved the accuracy of previous assumptions that both the implementation of restrictive gun policy and the availability of mental health care need to be prominent in order to prevent gun violence in America. Interviews with the Volunteer Coordinator of the Boys and Girls Club, the Campus Operations Manager at Flintridge Sacred Heart Academy (FSHA), and a wounded survivor of a mass shooting provided differing perspectives on gun violence through personal experiences. A teach-in on mental health allowed the community to have a space for discussion and education on the importance of reaching out for help. Research was conducted alongside the completion of fieldwork with a

nonprofit organization and a teach-in on the importance of staying educated and getting involved in un-discussed causes. Through the compilation of each aspect of the project and additional research, it is evident that action is necessary to promote change and reduce gun violence.

## I. Introduction

As school shootings have become increasingly prevalent over the past decade, the fear of losing a loved one to gun violence has become a sad reality for millions of Americans. In the article, “Key Facts About Americans and Guns” by Katherine Schaeffer, the Pew Research Center surveys gathered information on Americans’ opinions on gun ownership and gun policy. As mentioned, about one-third of U.S. adults (86,100,000 people) personally own a gun and “about four-in-ten U.S. adults say they live in a household with a gun” (Schaeffer). Additionally, to highlight the numbers in 2024, the article “How Many People Die From Gun-related Injuries in the US Each Month?” from USAFacts brings awareness to “an estimated 3.8K ‘people died from gun-related injuries’ in August 2024” according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Although there is a decline in firearm injuries and deaths from previous months, gun violence remains a prominent challenge. It is a tragic and urgent issue, however, there is still no single solution to preventing gun violence. Hoping to gain a better understanding of the causes and possible solutions to ending firearm violence, our project asked the following questions: How does mental health intervention and the implementation of gun restrictions differ in effectiveness in reducing the amount of gun violence in U.S. schools? Additionally, what can community members do to encourage needed policy change at a faster rate? After conducting research, holding interviews with experts in the fields of gun violence, school safety, and mental health in adolescents, as well as participation in volunteering with a non-profit organization, and hosting a teach-in to educate the community, this project finds that ending gun violence is

complex and does not have a single solution. The research conducted shows that this polarized topic lacks media coverage and action. The debate over possible solutions needs to evolve into measurable movement, effecting positive change through advocacy. Effective advocacy uses strong research, strategically communicates to educate lawmakers, and builds community support to urge both policymakers and communities to lead efforts for meaningful change.

## II. Literature Review

Through the research and data collection surrounding firearm violence in recent years, researchers have gained an understanding of the complexity of the issue. There are many aspects that affect the severity of each violent occurrence. The following articles explore the mental health toll gun violence has on survivors and perpetrators, historical data on school violence statistics, challenging methods to halt shootings, the relationship between having access to firearms and violence in the school system, law and policy implementation, the dueling belief systems of differing political parties, and effective advocacy for policy change.

Human connection and feelings of inclusion can shape an individual's viewpoint of the world, therefore targeting healthy relationships within adolescence may have an impactful solution to psychological disturbance that can lead to gun violence. In relation to mental health, the article "Mental Health Matters: Mental Illness and Violence" by Donna Sabella suggests a direct correlation between mental illness and violence, which is a huge stigma about mental illness. In the U.S., "our firearm homicide rates are almost 20 times higher than those in Italy, Japan, Portugal, Austria, France, and Germany" (49). The article points out the psychological challenges that many of the recent youth who were responsible for opening fire have in common, such as having violent histories before their events. Although these youth were identified as having mental challenges, not all people who are mentally ill are violent. Within the public there

are stereotypes that individuals who have mental illness have “the potential to become violent...[and pose] a significant risk of violence” (50). This belief causes isolation and puts this group of individuals out of society, potentially causing increased mental challenges. Efforts to understand these individuals, especially by including these marginalized individuals in society, can allow them to flourish and potentially decrease the number of suicides and/or gun violence attacks. Sabella referenced that “severe mental illness alone was not a valid predictor of future violence, proposing that it’s necessary to take additional factors into account” (51). An individual's past and life experiences play an active role in their behavioral actions. For example, it is critical to note that substance use, family conditions, and past violence are correlated with gun violence. Similarly, in the podcast, "The Daily Toll Gun Violence Takes On America's Youth," hosted by Mr. Derek McGinty, his conversation with Gary Younge, a British journalist, brings attention to the importance of a deeper understanding of the data related to youth deaths as a result of gun violence. After a deeper exploration into the stories of individual youth, he concludes that guns are not the only problem. With the preexisting “inequality, racism, segregation, poverty, mental health crises...then you put the easy availability of firearms” the death rates, including suicide, murder, and unintentional deaths, keep rising (Younge).

While the previous sources have identified the multiple psychological contributors to gun violence, research has identified that accessibility to firearms is a key contributor to gun violence. In 2017, a study entitled, “Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance - United States, 2017,” gathered a nationally representative sample of students in grades 9–12 who attend public and private schools across the 50 states (Kann, et al., 2017). Kann and colleagues found that “4.8% of students had carried a gun on at least 1 day (not counting the days when they carried a gun only for hunting or for a sport, such as target shooting) during the 12 months before the survey”

(14). Sigel and colleagues (2019), in the study “Increased Violence Involvement and Other Behavioral and Mental Health Factors Among Youth With Firearm Access,” found that tragic scenarios, like suicides or youth homicides, are directly correlated with the ability of youth to get hold of firearms. These investigators identified multiple contributing factors that increase access to firearms. Using survey-based methodology, participants included 1,100 youth (78% of eligible youth completed the survey) and 730 parents (52% of eligible parents completed the survey). Psychological disturbance, such as aggressive behavior, internalizing emotional symptoms, symptoms of depression, substance use, and peer influence increase the risk for firearm access.

Increased access to firearms has a strong relationship with injuries requiring medical attention, as highlighted in the article “Prevalence and Correlates of Handgun Access Among Adolescents Seeking Care in an Urban Emergency Department” (Loh, et al., 2010). Loh and colleagues examine the prevalence of how youth with handguns are more likely to engage in risky behaviors and experience injuries requiring medical attention in an emergency department (ED). This study used a cross-sectional research design, data from a group of people at a single point in time, between September 2006-June 2008. The research was conducted within an emergency department at a level one trauma center that sees approximately 75,000 patients per year, 25,000 of those being children and adolescents (Loh, et al.). The study focused on patients between fourteen to eighteen years of age who came to the ED for medical illness or injury. Data was pulled from electronic tracking logs. Medical complaints at the ED were related to gun violence and independent/unrelated to gun violence. A total of 3,947 individuals were eligible to participate in the survey, and 88% (n=3,050) completed the survey. Approximately thirty-three percent of the participants reported having access to handguns. The reasons for going to the ED included a medical complaint (e.g. abdominal pain, asthma), an unintentional injury due to

firearms, and an intentional injury due to firearms for sixty-two percent, thirty-two percent, and six percent, respectively (Loh, et al.). When compared to schools across the nation's inner cities, adolescents had higher rates of gun access. Youths with medical complaints and youth with injuries had high rates of gun access. It is plausible that youth with current medical complaints may have a history of injuries due to violence and gun-related injuries. Thus, there are many high-risk individuals with medical complaints in the ED who may be overlooked as being at-risk youth for gun violence, because many healthcare providers may focus on individuals with injuries as being at high risk of gun violence. The authors conclude that healthcare providers in the ED need to consider demographic factors along with a broader lens of behavioral difficulties within the last year (ie substance use, gun injury, and fighting) as high-risk predictors for gun violence in adolescence in an inner city. Policies and prevention strategies targeting this high-risk population in the ED are needed, such as increasing prevention efforts through educating parents of high school youth on gun violence and the protected benefit of restricting access to firearms.

There has been a call to action to address gun violence in society. The article “Mitigating the Effects of Gun Violence on Children and Youth” highlights the psychological effects of gun violence pertaining to adolescents (Garbarino, et al., 2002). Being a direct victim of gun violence and witnessing gun violence can be a traumatic experience. This type of emotional stress causes harmful effects both physically and mentally and can result in symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). With about “43% of American households contain[ing] some type of gun,” accessibility to a firearm increases the possibility of depression in youth (74). Individuals who experience gun violence tend to lean away from their support system like parents and friends. Being in a violent area can cause loneliness, depression, and sleep problems, which results in diminished social interactions. Given increased access to guns inside the home, Garbarino and

colleagues indicated that intervention to address gun violence needs to include parent and community involvement through reducing exposure to social media violence and increasing access to mental health services (82). In the article, “Children, Youth, and Gun Violence: Analysis and Recommendations,” Kathleen Reich and colleagues (2002) highlight resolutions to improve psychological and economic issues in the United States and the relevance of public policy. Their research emphasized the need to prioritize education to the younger generation. Even though youth safety should be our primary concern, public debates are focusing on the Second Amendment and “the appropriate use of guns by adults” (5). Providing individuals the right to bear arms increases the volume of guns in family households. Such an increase in firearms, however, results in an increased risk for children to access guns. Despite the fact that the number of adolescents that have been affected by gun violence has decreased, “easy access [to guns] accounts at least in part for the fact that firearm-related injuries remain the second leading cause of death among children and youth ages 10 to 19” (6). Part of the decrease of gun violence after the 1990s was a result of increased education on safe storage and violence prevention. This article presents the reality that a high percentage of high school students possess guns. As the United States rates for unintentional shots are higher “than in other industrialized nations,” a study discovered that “children ages 5 to 14 were more likely to die from gunshot wounds if they lived in states where firearm ownership was more common” (8). Additionally, there is a direct correlation between firearms being present in the home and suicides. For example, a study presented how “guns were twice as likely to be present in the homes of teen suicide victims as in the homes of suicide attempters or a comparison group of teen psychiatric patients who were not suicidal” (8). In conclusion, increased gun violence has resulted in higher death rates and psychological, economic, and social consequences in our society.

Though increasingly common across the board in today's America, gun violence tends to target certain communities. In the article, "US Racial and Sex-based Disparities in Firearm-related Death Trends From 1981-2020.", authors, Lindsay J. Young, and Henry Xiang explore the firearm-death-related trends "...and years of potential life lost before age 75" (Young, Xiang) in the United States between the years 1981 and 2020. This "cross-sectional study" (Young, Xiang) collected data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)'s Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS) source relating information from fatal injury and violence situations from between the years 1981 and 2020. The study looked into information on specific racial and sex-based groups expressing how gun violence destroys the lives of millions and how firearm violence breaks apart specific communities. The study resulted in data that expressed an increased amount of gun-related homicides affecting black people at a rate almost seven times higher than that of white people. There was also an increase in firearm homicides between the years 2019 and 2020. Within this dataset, it is discovered that firearm homicide deaths increased in black communities by 39%. In addition to this information, it is shown that white individuals have the highest rate of gun-related suicides. In terms of sex-related information, it is expressed that men's firearm suicides are 7% higher than women's. The data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)'s Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS) database was slightly limited as it did not include legally intervened deaths by firearm. The article also states that they did not include "...US Hispanic versus non-Hispanic populations" (Young, Xiang) which was due to a lack of information on that population before the year 1990.

Tainting the mental health of gun violence victims, shootings have affected millions of people. Often overlooked are the common negative trends among shooters. The following



articles explore violence experienced in adolescence in both the home and school settings.

Additionally, the articles question the cause of the “killer instinct” found in many offenders. In

the article, “Do Video Games Kill?” Karen Sternheimer asks, “When white, middle-class teens

kill, the media and politicians are quick to blame video games. Are they right?” (Sternheimer

13.) Through this article, the author dives into the gaming world and addresses whether or not

games are teaching kids to kill. The original study stems from data related to the video game

“doom” from the 1990s. Later, the article plucks information from FBI case studies from the

early 2000’s. According to a 2000 FBI information, because of the rarity of school shootings at

the time, the FBI struggled compiling a “profile of a “typical” shooter” (Sternheimer 13.)

Because of this, shooter’s were typically linked to having a passion for playing violent video

games by the public. It was stated that “...games have come to represent a variety of social

anxieties: about youth violence, new computer technology, and the apparent decline in the ability

of adults to control what young people do and know” (Sternheimer 13.) The article concluded

that blaming video games for school shootings was an overstatement and certain news sources

reporting on shootings and video games “ ignore other research on the meanings that audiences

make from media culture.” (Sternheimer 13.) Though the article is thorough, the article was

written in the early 2000’s, it is limited without the addition of data from the past seventeen

years. The contribution of FBI interviews would have added first-hand experience to the article.

Expanding on violence in the school system, scholars explore the impact of childhood

bullying on the mental health of individuals. In the article, “Association Between Bullying,

Childhood Adversities, and Social Capital Among Adolescents”, authors Andressa Reisen,

Daiene Rosa Gomes, Maria Carmen Viana, Luciane Bresciani Salaroli and Edson Theodoro dos

Santos Neto study the factors that affect bullying in both the victims and aggressors. The

epidemiological research conducted involved 2,281 students in Brazil between the ages of 15-19. These students participated in answering the “Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire, Childhood Adversity History Questionnaire and Integrated Questionnaire to Measure Social Capital, in adapted versions” (Reisen, Gomes, Viana, Bresciani Salaroli, Theodore dos Santos). The students were chosen specifically based on the municipality of their school’s location. The research finds that several factors can influence bullying including “gender, age, parental divorce, childhood adversities and cognitive social capital” (Reisen, Gomes, Viana, Bresciani Salaroli, Theodore dos Santos). It was also discovered that male adolescents are more likely to be involved in bullying incidents while female adolescents tend to try to avoid it. The article infers this statistic is true because of “a greater inability to deal with conflict by male adolescents” (Reisen, Gomes, Viana, Bresciani Salaroli, Theodore dos Santos). It was also observed that bullying significantly decreases with age. Along with this data, the article concludes that there is a need to end this violence to reduce negative mental and physical health effects. The article states that the teens interviewed were from both public and private schools yet, none of the students had “no cognitive, auditory or visual impairment to impede their active participation” (Reisen, Gomes, Viana, Bresciani Salaroli, Theodore dos Santos). Including such students would provide a more inclusive data set, and a better representation of entire school communities.

Similar to Reisen’s article, the following data focuses on adolescent mental health.

In the article “What are the Parent-Reported Reasons for Unmet Mental Health Needs in Children?”, author LeaAnne DeRigne addresses the parental explanations for why adolescent mental health care needs are not addressed. The goal of the study is to discover the root of the issue of unmet child health care needs and to find solutions and ensure every child is taken care

of and given equal opportunity to receive care. The study had two primary research questions: “What are the parent-reported reasons for having unmet mental health needs?” and “What is the relationship between insurance status and type and reason for unmet need?” The article uses information from the National Survey of Children with Special Health Care Needs. The study focused on children with reported long-term mental health and or behavioral issues over the past twelve months. The study used both qualitative and quantitative data, asking parents opinion-based questions as well as asking about their personal experiences. The study then collected numerical data on participant’s insurance details. The study resulted in the realization that parents without insurance reported high prices to be the reason for unmet mental health care services for their children. Those with public insurance help were less likely to claim high prices were the issue. The study also shows that society would greatly benefit from an expansion of health insurance coverage for all children to receive the care they need. Interestingly, the article states “When a child has extensive treatment needs, even parents with high incomes can be confronted with treatment costs that are unaffordable. They are often advised to relinquish custody of their child to the state so that the child becomes eligible for Medicaid benefits and can access a more comprehensive array of mental health services, including long-term residential treatment. (DeRigne.)

Continuing with the theme of violence in school, the following article provides historical data on school shootings spanning 250 years, revealing the exponential increase in recent decades. Within Rosalind Duplechain and Robert Morris’ article, “School Violence: Reported School Shootings and Making Schools Safer”, they address the past, present, and future of school shootings by analyzing data. The authors write “The major intent of this paper is not to dwell on the extent and/or depth of what is the makeup of school shooters, but it is more to give

insight into how to create a safe school and a safe school environment.” (Duplechain, Morris)

This article addresses the questions “what are the risk factors associated with school shooters?” and “how do we create safer schools?” Part one of the article is a data analysis of school shootings between the years of 1760 and 2014. The data includes the number of school shootings in a given amount of years and their mortality rate. This information was pulled from various newspaper articles. When identifying the risk factors of shooters, information was pulled from CDC lists. Though school violence in the eighteenth century stemmed from different causes than today (primarily caused by school fights and disagreements in young children) the rapid increase in school shootings over the past 250 years has proven there is a major gun violence issue. In another study, data was pulled from the work of Lisa Snell and Alexander Volockh, education professionals wanting to put an end to school violence. From the research conducted and the data analyzed, it is shown that the number of school shootings annually has increased dramatically. The risk factors of shooters range from personal challenges like attention deficits, to familial issues like “Diminished economic opportunities” (Duplechain, Morris), to societal issues like bullying and discrimination. In the end, it was noted that to help make positive change in the school environment to decrease the amount of violence, schools need secured entrances and increased amounts of “strategically placed telephones” (Duplechain, Morris) and alarm systems to maintain the safety of students, faculty, and staff. In addition to this, school communities must become aware of their surroundings and report any strange behavior in order to prevent violence. Finally, administrators need to take students' mention of death seriously. The authors write that besides in student speech, “The theme of killing may even appear in student work assignments and artwork.” (Duplechain, Morris) It is critical to take all students seriously. Though this article is in-depth and has vast information, it was written in the early twenty-first century and cannot

account for the several school mass shootings since then.

After discovering the severity of school shootings, scholars aim to devise a plan to halt the increasing violence rates. The article “One Way to Foil School Shootings” similarly provides a method of reducing gun violence in schools, arguing that teaching empathy to kids in schools makes kids less inclined to deal with their emotions through violence. Law enforcement can only identify threats, while the teaching kids empathy approach could reduce the amount of kids who are threats. Christian Science Monitor’s article illustrates this, stating, “A growing body of evidence shows that teaching empathy toward people who are troubled is more effective in curbing gun violence than trying to profile would-be assailants (Christian Science Monitor 2024).” Focusing on empathy can help kids build connections with one another and with others in the community. Also, more kids would be able to recognize the struggles of others, so they would feel less isolated. For example, many states have funded community based violence intervention programs where local members advocate against the violence. The author is showing that if similar advocacy is utilized in classrooms, this could be beneficial in stopping kids from being threats. These kids need to be educated on the topic. Lastly, the author discusses how students that learn empathy are more likely to create a trusting and inclusive environment. Violence intervention programs are implemented in 41 U.S. States, and schools are successfully adopting empathy focused curricula like the Harvard Graduate School of Education. The article concludes stating that we already have the resources we need to create less violence: the ability to teach empathy early on to students.

While teaching empathy focuses on prevention by addressing emotional and social issues, Joshua P. Starr’s article takes a different approach, looking at the challenges and implications of having armed officers in schools. Within the article “Armed Officers in Schools: The Good, Bad,

and Ugly”, author Joshua P. Starr addresses the popular ideology that there should be armed adults on school campuses to maintain the safety of students and other community members. Through this article, the question “Does having police officers on hand actually make schools more safe?” (Starr 62) is addressed. Starr, being a former district superintendent, discusses his experiences in the school system and involvement with local police. Along with personal anecdotes, Starr pulls information from recent polls including the PDK- the “Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools”, analyzing school-community opinions annually. Results from this study reveal that “80% of parents would favor posting armed police officers at their child’s school” (Starr 62.) It is unclear how many participants there were in these polls. The article reveals that as many parents saw police officers as heroes and safe people, many students and other community members were treated poorly by officers, and struggled to come forward and speak on their negative experiences. Starr writes about several issues with having armed officers in schools. Starr writes, “Privately, though, many district leaders will tell you that if they had a choice, they’d rather not have armed officers in the schools at all” (Starr 62). It is concluded that many officers working at school are also upset without having the support of school leaders, and the respect of students, parents, and teachers. In addition, the schedule of local police does not line up with that of the school, causing room for “error”, and periods of time without protection. The article concludes that there can be several issues in having armed officers in schools, with people upset on both sides of the issue. With his personal connection to the school system, Starr offers reliable data and stories from his time as a superintendent. Addressing several perspectives strengthens the research done. In addition to this, the article could have been stronger including the voices and opinions of others through quotes. The inclusion of quantitative data would significantly strengthen the article as well.

Starr's article highlights the difficulties of having armed officers present in schools, while Jeffrey Fagan's "Policing Guns and Youth Violence" depicts the direct relationship and effectiveness of connectivity between law enforcement and the community. The article highlights different strategies the United States has implemented in urban areas, including, for example, the Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS), the Gang Congregation Ordinance, the San Diego reform, and New York City's order-maintenance policing (OPM) strategy. These reforms are tools that police departments use to aid them on the topic of youth gun violence reduction. San Diego, Boston, and Chicago used the Reciprocal Control approach to formulate a united front against gun violence. The Reciprocal Control approach is a method where the citizens and the police cooperate together. Involving the citizens builds trust in law enforcement, community engagement, and knowledge about what is occurring in society. Residents in the Boston area "reported that fair and respectful treatment was important to their ratings of their security" (Fagan). Having trust in the police promoted their conformity with the law. In addition to Boston, Chicago participated in a "Community Policing Experiment." The Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS) designated the police to their own "beats" or their district. With the police staying in their particular "beat", it permitted them to get to know the residents and vice-versa. The CAPS experiment resulted positively with "nearly three in four Chicago residents were familiar with the term "community policing," two in three stated that the police were actually doing "community policing," and two in five had heard about the monthly beat meetings" (Fagan). To diminish gang activity in Chicago, the Gang Congregation Ordinance was put into action. However, the Supreme Court found it to be unconstitutional due to the fact that it did not "appear to have the desired effect of reducing crime" and "murders rose by 2.9% in the three districts with the highest arrest rates, but declined by 54.5% in the three districts with the lowest

arrest rates” (Fagan). The Neighborhood Policing Philosophy in San Diego focused on the “creation of a systematic process of police--citizen interactions to maximize social control” (Fegan). It benefited the community involvement and trained/educated community members on services involving crime-prevention and victim-assistance. Another method used is the Punitive Legal Control which New York City and Richmond implemented. Although effective at the moment in reducing gun violence, in the long term its benefits do not continue. The police focused on "order-maintenance policing" (OMP), but it increased the mistrust in the community and the feelings that the police were racially profiling people. In conclusion, the most beneficial strategies include the people. Alliances between community members and police and having proactive practices to reduce gun violence, will not only be effective in the present but also carry through to the future.

Fagan’s article explains the effectiveness of the connection between law enforcement and the community, whereas Buttar and colleagues' study investigates what ways are effective when protecting schools from gun violence. The study “Protocol for a Nationwide Case-control Study of Firearm Violence Prevention Tactics and Policies in K-12 Schools” by Navjot Buttar, Sonali Rajan, Louis Klarevas, Seth J Prins, Justin Heinze, and Ken Cheung assesses how specific safety tactics and policies in K-12 public schools influence shootings and student disciplinary outcomes, and how urbanicity, socioeconomic, and racial factors influence these effects. The study uses public data collection from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and U.S. Census Bureau. The researchers gathered data on different schools’ (with and without shooting incidents) political views, economic status, racial demographics, urbanity, school staffing, budgets, academic performance, and facilities. They measured the presence/absence of 27 different safety methods by reaching out to schools to obtain school safety plans and looking



at public data. The authors state, “Driven by preliminary study planning and statistical power calculations, the study protocol intends to collect data on an estimated 658 K-12 public schools (329 cases and 329 controls) across the US, (Navjot)” meaning they collect data on cases, schools that have experienced a shooting, as well as data on controls which have not been the site of a shooting. However, the study is not yet completed, and the data is still being collected since it is such a thorough study looking at over 650 schools. This article was published in May of 2024, so the results have not yet been released. The article concludes by discussing how schools have implemented many safety methods to combat gun violence, but these tactics are often based on common practices rather than scientific data. The effectiveness of different numbers and types of safety tactics is unstudied and it is unclear how race, urbanism, and economics influence this. The findings of this study thus aim to provide data to schools to choose the most effective gun violence prevention tactics rather than commonplace tactics. This will create safer environments in schools where parents and kids do not have to wonder if they will make it through the school day safely. The authors identify limitations such as the quality of the data. They explain how it may be difficult to determine all safety tactics since schools may have undocumented safety methods used that are not accounted for in the study, especially when considering publicly available data.

While Buttar's study focuses on determining the effectiveness of safety tactics in schools to prevent gun violence, Anthony Braga's article shifts the focus to the broader issue of enforcing existing gun laws. In the article “More Gun Laws or More Gun Law Enforcement?,” Braga asks whether or not enforcing certain gun laws are actually attainable? Braga states, “The irony is that some of the laws these advocates claimed should be enforced more vigorously were designed to be unenforceable.” (Braga 2.) In addition, the National Rifle Association (NRA) argues there are

already laws set in place. This article focuses on the application of gun restrictions and the many challenges that leaders face while trying to enforce these laws. The article pulls numerical data from the NRA, uses information from polls, and quotes famous politicians to reinforce the information provided in the article, supporting the idea that views on gun violence are wide-ranging and complex. This article resulted in the discovery that there are many issues with existing gun laws. The article states, “The implicit claim-that the number of laws tells us something about their quality or potential effectiveness is wrong-headed.” (Braga 3.) It is stated that there are still several loopholes to get access to firearms despite gun restrictions. Braga writes that there is still also “the continued existence of an unregulated secondary firearms market” (Braga 3). Along with this, the article writes that current governments on all levels lack the ability to provide law enforcement agencies with the tools to keep firearms out of the hands of the wrong people. Concluding the article, it is stated that these laws are extremely hard to hold against gun traffickers. The article effectively addresses the issues in creating firearm restrictions and takes into account differing perspectives.

Braga's article emphasizes the challenges and inefficiencies of enforcing existing gun laws on a national scale, whereas the article “My City Has a New Strategy to Reduce Gun Deaths” by Sam Liccardo, the mayor of San Jose, aims to advocate for local solutions to reduce gun violence through explaining San Jose’s plan to have local annual fees and mandatory insurance for gun owners. He explains how many of the shootings in San Jose are from unintentional shootings or unknown shootings. So many of these shootings could have been prevented by the implementation of local policies. An annual fee for gun ownership will not only make fewer people want to own guns, but the money will go directly to gun violence organizations that will use it for the cause. The mandatory liability insurance on guns will

incentivize people to safely store and use their guns. He states, “Insurance companies can use premiums to encourage safer behavior by providing gun-owning policyholders with financial incentives to take gun-safety classes, store their firearms in a gun safe and install a chamber-load indicator or trigger lock (Liccardo).” This conveys how this policy will be beneficial in reducing gun deaths. Also, he explains that a federal court ruling showed that San Jose’s policies do not go against the Second Amendment, showing that the policies are not infringing on people’s rights. The article concludes that these policies can thus promote safer gun ownership and fund gun violence prevention organizations while also not violating Second Amendment rights. A limitation is that fees could disproportionately affect low-income people; however, especially if gun violence worsens, it may become necessary to add these policies. Similarly, in Joseph Blocher’s article “Firearm localism,” he promotes local policies, discussing balancing the Second Amendment protections with localized public safety when determining gun regulation policies. He states, “the costs of gun violence and the government interest in preventing it are generally higher in urban areas than in rural areas (Blocher)”, depicting how all areas must conform to the Second Amendment when gun violence varies so widely in different areas. In urban areas, there are more people and different crime types, so gun regulation is needed more there than in rural areas where gun ownership is more common for hunting or self-defense. The purpose of the article is to inform readers about firearm localism, meaning that the Second Amendment should be tailored to reflect the different levels of regulation needed depending on how urban or rural the area is. The research question is would a localized Second Amendment effectively promote public safety without infringing on rights? Bloncher provides the example of Chicago, a city with a population bigger than many rural states. Chicago cannot implement tailored regulations to reduce gun violence even though the population and stakes there are much higher. This creates

a disproportionate effect because Chicago residents are then more vulnerable to gun violence due to regulations not designed for that area. Preemptive laws, state laws that block local governments from making their own firearm regulations, are an obstacle for firearm localism, but they are outdated due to the Heller and McDonald decisions, court cases that made it more difficult to place regulations on firearms (Blotcher). Thus, he concludes that preemption laws are preventing urban cities from being able to implement the necessary regulations to prevent gun violence, such as bans on urban assault weapons or high-capacity ammunition magazines. Localized firearms will thus allow urban areas to protect their residents without infringing on rural rights.

Similar to Blocher's writing, the article, "Fact Sheet: California's Strong Gun Safety Laws Continue to Save Lives", conveys the success of firearm restrictions in today's modern communities. In the article, Governor Gavin Newsom of California proudly restates statistical data on California's progress with gun restrictions and addresses the positive changes being made in California to maintain the safety of its citizens. Data collectors worked alongside the California Department of Justice to gather information for this article. Data in this article is both quantitative and qualitative information. Comparing the state to gun-ownership-heavy states like Texas and Florida, the article claims California is ranked #1 for gun safety in the nation. Along with this, the article shares data such as the amount of gun restrictions we currently have, the predicted lives saved by these restrictions, and more comparisons to other US states to show great contrast. The data shows that California is making great progress in reducing state-wide firearm violence. In the article it is stated that, "We've made significant progress to implement nation-leading gun safety laws to keep Californians safe. California won't stop until we rid ourselves of the heavy toll inflicted by the gun violence epidemic" (Newsom). The data explains

that over 19,000 lives are predicted to have been saved in recent years in California because of gun laws. The article concludes by naming and outlining the nine current gun restriction laws in California. Although the article thoroughly identifies the strengths of California's gun restrictions, it fails to mention the struggles faced when putting those restrictions into place. The article aims to speak on the triumphs of the state, but fails to honestly discuss the trials legislators ran into when trying to implement new ideas. The article can also discuss the future plans of California to continue building on our safety programs.

Congruent to the article where Governor Gavin Newsom highlights California's gun restrictions progressions, the article "Mental Illness and Reduction of Gun Violence and Suicide: Bringing Epidemiologic Research to Policy," by Jeffrey W Swanson and colleagues, highlights the correlation between suicides and psychiatric disorders regarding gun violence. The purpose of the article is to investigate the "effectiveness of policies and laws designed to prevent firearm injury and mortality associated with serious mental illnesses and substance use disorders" (366). One example that motivated talk about gun restrictions and mental illness was the massacre of students in Newton, Connecticut in 2012. With such high numbers of injuries due to firearms, like "32,000 people are killed with guns," public health experts suggested prevention policies like "including universal background checks for gun purchasers, a ban on military-style assault weapons and high-capacity ammunition magazines, and a crackdown on gun trafficking" (366). Whereas, the National Rifle Association accused the mass shootings of being caused by mental illness, recommending "the creation of a national database of persons with mental illness" (366). Although this is one potential solution, it comes with the issue of violating individuals' privacy. Epidemiologic evidence is one way that these stakeholders are trying to remove false stereotypes of people facing mental challenges, educate society, and raise financial support to enhance

intervention for this population. One major impact on public perception is that the news skews people's beliefs. For example, research comparing the beliefs of people who were exposed to watching the news of violent people with mental illness and those who were not exposed to news stories involving violence found that those who were exposed to the news had generalized that the people with mental illness were more likely to be dangerous. Public policies that fall in line with the views of society, whether or not they are fair or successful, tend to reinforce stigma and restrict the rights of people with mental illness. One notable study, the MacArthur Violence Risk Assessment Study (MVRAS), found that psychiatric patients who experienced substance abuse did have violent behaviors, but importantly, patients who experienced only mental challenges, with no substance abuse, had the equal ability of violence to their community members. One limitation is the limited geographical location where the data was collected. The article concluded that a beneficial policy approach to diminish gun violence is “an emphasis on time-sensitive risk for violence and suicide” (375). There is a need for a more proactive approach, including “prohibiting firearms access [which is] a more productive policy approach to prevent gun violence than focusing broadly on mental illness diagnoses” (375). To move forward, support for people who are experiencing depression and other mental illnesses is imperative.

While Swanson highlights both gun regulations and mental health, Nyla Samee’s article examines how the red vs. blue divide is hindering progress on gun violence prevention. In the article “Stricter Manufacturing Controls Can Help Reduce Gun Violence,” Samee aims to emphasize the need to focus on mass gun manufacturing and gun trafficking rather than only focusing on gun access and ownership in order to more effectively reduce gun deaths. The ongoing debate on the causes of gun violence between democrats and republicans is not

contributing to stopping gun violence. Democrats argue that stricter policies on gun violence are needed, while conservatives argue that this encroaches on their right to bear arms and the problem is the mental health of the shooters. If something is to be done about gun violence, people should discuss how guns are manufactured instead of the red vs blue fight. Despite how Massachusetts and Connecticut, blue states, are home to some of the most strict policies on owning guns, these states are responsible for much of the guns manufactured in the U.S. and have had major shootings, such as the 2018 shooting in Parkland (Samee). The guns used in this shooting were manufactured in Massachusetts, showing how the manufacturing is the issue. The US is the biggest manufacturer of weapons. Samee also shows the need for tight gun regulation in all states, stating, “Blue states with strict gun laws often suffer gun violence when weapons are trafficked in from red states with looser gun laws. (Samee)” Other countries such as Mexico suffer from gun trafficking of guns manufactured in the US. Lastly, Samee discusses how the NRA represents gun manufacturers over gun owners, suggesting that it is more focused on producing guns and making money. Corporations such as the NRA providing guns for everyone is worsening gun violence, and the production of these guns needs to be regulated. While so many guns are being made, democrats and republicans arguing about who has access to these guns will do nothing to stop the problem. The article concludes that in order to address gun violence, stricter regulations on gun production and trafficking are needed to reduce shootings.

Mark W. Susmann’s article similarly highlights how the red vs blue argument is preventing gun violence prevention progress, with non-gun owners representing the blue side and gun owners representing the red side. The academic journal article “Correcting Misperceptions of Gun Policy Support can Foster Intergroup Cooperation Between Gun Owners and Non-gun Owners” by authors Susmann, Graham N. Dixon, Brad J. Bushman, and R. Kelly

Garrett explores the misperceptions of gun owners regarding support for gun policies such as background checks and waiting periods. While most gun owners support these policies, many gun owners believe the majority of other gun owners do not, which reduces their willingness to advocate for these policies and cooperate with non-gun owners. This misperception is creating a division between gun owners and non-gun owners. The purpose of this study is to determine if correcting misperceptions could help people overcome this division and increase gun owner support for these policies. The research question, although not explicitly stated, is—how does correcting misperceptions about gun owners' support for gun safety policies affect gun owners' willingness to cooperate with non-gun owners? The researchers collected data through a survey, where they recorded data from participants for two experiments. In Experiment 1, 241 gun owners participated, and in Experiment 2, 752 gun owners participated. Excluding responses flagged as bots or duplicates, the final amounts were 195 and 696 in the 2 experiments. In experiment 1, participants were either shown corrective information about gun owners' support for gun regulation policies or no corrective information. The corrective information explained that the majority of both gun owners and non-gun owners supported these policies, while non-corrective information only involved non-gun owner support with no mention of gun owners. In experiment 2, participants were randomly assigned to receive no corrective information, corrective information, or corrective information with rationale. Then, all participants answered questions so the researchers could determine how effective the corrective information is in changing gun owners' perspectives on gun safety policies and changing negative feelings towards non-gun owners. For example, participants were asked to estimate the percentage of gun owners in support of the policies. Overall, the results in both experiments showed that the corrective information significantly increased participants' estimates of gun



owners' support for policies (Susmann). The participants who were given this information saw more similarity within the beliefs of themselves and non-gun owners. The participants reported more willingness to collaborate with non-gun owners and less negative feelings towards non-gun owners. Thus, the researchers concluded that correcting gun owners' misperceptions about other gun owners' support for gun safety policies increases their openness to working with non-gun owners and reduces negative feelings towards them. This may help bring more support for gun safety measures, helping to reduce gun violence in the U.S. The study's limitations include focusing on gun owners without looking at non-gun owners, a small sample size, and uncertainty about whether the increased willingness to collaborate translates into actual action.

Addressing misperceptions and making an impact requires advocacy. The article "How to Advocate for Policy Change" by Prosperity Now describes the steps anyone can take to initiate policy change. The first step is using strong data and research to demonstrate solid evidence on why the policy change is needed. Data can illustrate the severity of a problem and the effectiveness of a proposed solution. Prosperity Now states, "Educating your lawmaker is the most direct opportunity you have to influence policy." The next step is to effectively communicate by tailoring messages to different audiences, providing personal stories to connect with the audience emotionally, and framing a proposed policy so that it aligns with a policymaker's priorities. Resources like Tips for Writing Op-eds and Neighborhood Partnership's Messaging Toolkit can help craft persuasive messages. Next, engaging policymakers is an important step because building relationships with lawmakers can make them more inclined to advocate on behalf of a proposed policy. Lastly, advocacy efforts have more impact when community groups and coalitions work together.

Building on this approach, the U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory highlights how these advocacy strategies can be applied to address gun violence as a public health crisis. "The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on Firearm Violence," published by the government agency the Office of the U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy, lists ways to increase funding and improve community and legislative initiatives to reduce gun violence. First, Murthy emphasizes the need for increased research funding to improve data collection and determine the most effective firearm violence prevention methods. Other causes of death with similar mortality rates have significantly higher funding. According to D.E Stark, "In relation to mortality rates over a 10-year period, firearm violence killed about as many people as sepsis but funding for firearm violence research was less than 1% of that for sepsis." There is also no national system to track all firearm injuries which makes it hard to see the full scope of gun violence. Research investments to address this include improving data sources and collection, expanding research to determine short and long term effects of gun violence and assess different prevention methods, and investing in implementation to effectively apply evidence-based gun violence prevention methods. Next, Murthy outlines a strategy for communities to reduce gun-related injuries and deaths. This includes implementing Community Violence Interventions (CVI) which connect at-risk individuals with services like healthcare, housing and employment. Hospital-based violence intervention programs (HVIPs) can provide support to victims of violence. Organizational violence prevention involves measures like Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management (BTAM) teams, emergency action plans, and workplace safety programs to identify potential threats. Health systems can encourage secure firearm storage and temporary transfers during high-risk times. Finally, improving education, healthcare access, housing, and economic opportunities can help to reduce gun violence. Murthy then lists steps policymakers and public

health leaders can take to reduce gun violence. This includes requiring secure firearm storage and implementing child access prevention laws, universal background checks and expanding purchaser licensing laws, and firearm removal policies. These removal policies, Extreme Risk Protection Orders and Domestic Violence Protection Orders, should be implemented to protect victims of domestic violence and prevent individuals who are a threat to themselves or others from purchasing or having a gun. Finally, banning assault weapons for civilian use and implementing policies that regulate who can possess a loaded gun in public are necessary actions. A limitation of this advisory is that it does not create or enforce laws. Rather, it relies on communities and policymakers to implement policies and other initiatives.

Overall, the above research is invaluable as it goes into detail on differing opinions discussing what method is most effective in preventing gun violence as opposed to primarily focusing on a single point of view. The mixing of differing opinions highlights the importance of coming to a consensus or at least actively listening to those we disagree with. This literature review thus highlights the common mental health struggles in perpetrators as well as the mental health impacts of gun violence on survivors, quantitative data and historical records on school violence, the pros and cons to several proposed violence-reducing tactics, the connection between access to firearms and increased violence, addressing political differences in ideology, and the differing political beliefs on the root issues of gun violence. Though the majority of the resources are peer-reviewed academic journal articles, the research conducted has limitations. These include a lack of diversity in interviews conducted and data collected, a generalization of communities through research conducted on inner-city youth, and a reliance on qualitative and experiential data. As gun violence has become a large issue fairly recently, there is a lack of data collected in recent years testing the effectiveness of new legislation and policies on

gun-ownership as well as mental health care services.

### III. Fieldwork+Action Plan

To complete the Plan of Action, within the topic of gun regulation and mental health, contact was made with the organization Sandy Hook Promise. Sandy Hook Promise offers the opportunity to bring gun violence education curriculum to different schools. Their programs *Start With Hello* and *Say Something* implement education on social awareness, social inclusion, and the signs of an individual trying to reach out for assistance with mental health struggles. After diving deeper into this organization, the conclusion was reached that this program did not allow for volunteer opportunities but could be used to engage in advocacy. Due to this realization, a pivot was necessary to find a new fieldwork organization. Since mental health plays a substantial role in adolescent lives, we searched for communities that provide safe environments for all children. Following continued research, contact was made with the Boys and Girls Club. Over a phone call on December 9, 2024, Michael Fenn, the Boys and Girls Club volunteer coordinator, highlighted the mission and work of this organization. The Boys and Girls Club works with students from elementary through high school, from all economic levels, ethnicities, and religions. The volunteer opportunities offered were within the daily schedule between 3:30 and 4:30pm. The rest of the night had allotted time for individual studies, where volunteers could assist the students with their homework as tutors, followed by games and activities. Fieldwork with this organization was not possible due to multiple scheduling conflicts. This highlighted the difficulty organizations face such as coordinating with different groups of people and acquiring sufficient amount volunteers because without support, this causes reduced resources for their communitiy.

Although the original plan was to work with the Boys and Girls Club, its mission still aligned well with the project though we could not work directly with the youth. Instead, Mr. Fenn agreed to participate in an interview for the research project. His insights were very impactful, as he has a Ph.D. in Psychology and has done research on aggressive stimuli like firearms and their impact on violent behavior.

On Wednesday, March 11th, 2025, volunteering took place with the organization Days for Girls through the Feminists In Action co-curricular at Flintridge Sacred Heart Academy. Laura Paszkiewicz (Ms. P), a parent of a former FSHA student, led the Flintridge Sacred Heart Feminists In Action group on a sewing day. Not only were valuable sewing, pinning, and ironing skills learned, details about Days for Girls and their impactful project were shared and expressed by leaders Ms. P and Holly Hunnewell, the Feminists in Action Moderator. Days for Girls offers menstrual care by providing reusable menstrual kits that come in a backpack. They also provide education for women and girls in communities that do not have access to these supplies. In some communities, when girls get their menstrual cycle, they are forced to take a week off of school or work. As a result, they may fall behind and eventually stop attending altogether. One of Days for Girls' missions is adding days in school and work for these girls by providing the necessary resources to stay clean and safe. Increasing girls' education not only improves their success in the future but also impacts their future families. Providing education on women's bodies to greater communities will lead to a new awareness and acceptance of menstruation and human health. Being educated and remaining informed is a major theme shared by both Days for Girls and gun violence and mental health topics.

The original plan for the advocacy portion of the project was to present the Sandy Hook Promise's *Say Something* curriculum during a Pillars Assembly (a school-wide assembly). The

program was created for Middle and High School as a digital program that includes engaging storybooks, videos, activities, and projects. These interactive activities increase connections, communication, build empathy, and social consciousness and awareness. The program's curriculum involves thought-provoking questions, pre-organized lesson plans, and educational activities on mental health in adolescents and challenges students to reach out for help when they notice it is needed.

Despite the original plan of presenting the *Say Something* program during a Pillars Assembly, limited time and space transformed the advocacy portion of the project into a teach-in in the school library. After meeting with Boyoung Kim, the Assistant Principal of Student Life and Culture at Flintridge Sacred Heart Academy, and being in contact with Katherine Eisenstein, the Librarian at Flintridge Sacred Heart Academy, the teach-in took place on March 28th, 2025. Looking back on the teach-in, the library provided an opportunity for increased discussion in a comfortable environment. Though it was open to the entire school community, participation was voluntary instead of forced attention in a school-wide assembly. This promoted an environment of truly invested listeners and participants. The presentation expressed the correlation between mental health and gun violence and reviewed the common warning signs of someone in distress using the *Say Something* programming. It emphasized the importance of speaking up when someone is in distress to more effectively reduce harm to themselves and others. The teach-in occurred during a study hall block, and ten students and one staff member attended.

Following the initial discussion with Mr. Fenn and the teach-in, two interviews were conducted. In an effort to gain a wide-range of data, the individuals selected for the interviews came from varying backgrounds and experiences. The first additional interviewee was Steven Cronkhite (Safety Steve), the Campus Operations Manager at Flintridge Sacred Heart Academy,

with the goal to learn about the safety tactics of the school when met with a threat and to gain his perspective on the effectiveness of each measure. Finally, Alyssa Kilpatrick was interviewed.

Mrs. Kilpatrick is a wounded survivor of the Route 91 Harvest Festival Shooting, the largest mass shooting in the history of the United States. She has volunteered with Moms Demand Action, a gun violence prevention organization. Her insights provided a firsthand account of the impact gun violence has had on her life as well as what she has learned through her experiences.

#### IV. Findings/Results

Through the fieldwork completed with Days for Girls, the *Say Something* teach-in, and interviews with field experts, it is evident that advocacy for both mental health support and gun regulation is urgently needed. Through educating and engaging with the community, the work with Days for Girls and the teach-in was a success. One major theme learned in both settings was that having knowledge of a topic provides people with confidence and allows individuals to be conscious of what is occurring around them. In relation to gun violence through the teach-in, we learned and taught our community about the importance of informing society that easy accessibility of firearms is a huge contributor to gun violence. One impactful lesson that the teach-in provided was the importance of understanding warning signs of an individual trying to reach out for assistance. With limited education, both having experienced violence pertaining to firearms and the menstrual cycle can result in feelings of trauma. Working with Days for Girls with Ms. P gave insight to how to start and conduct an advocacy project. As we started the volunteer work, Ms. P held herself in a confident manner and was knowledgeable about the work she was doing. She provided information about the organization and the people whom we were supporting, which made the experience very meaningful. She provided insight on how a non-profit project is run through showing how the project acquires supplies and volunteers. The

supplies include recycled fabrics and sewing machines provided by FIA members. To get people involved, the sewing event is announced to the Flintridge Sacred Heart Academy Community, and the event is open to all students and faculty.

Through the interview process, three different individuals and perspectives provided a deeper exploration and understanding of gun violence in the world today. The first interview conducted was with Michael Fenn. Mr. Fenn shared his passion for his work at the Boys and Girls Club, as well as the effort he puts into the safety of their community. Mr. Fenn was asked to discuss the Club's specialized programs, safety guidelines, as well as his perspective on reducing gun violence. He revealed the club's efforts to shape the entire person through teaching the children life skills beyond the classroom. Mr. Fenn shared that the Boys and Girls Club emphasizes inclusivity and provides programs in finance and leadership for their teenage attendees, while games and tutoring is provided to their adolescent students. Additionally, he shared the Club's effort to provide a safe and welcoming community for all. Each Boys and Girls Club location is secured and requires authorization for entry. Mr. Fenn explains the "passive" yet "non-lethal" actions he takes to protect himself such as using cameras around his home and carrying mace, stating he cannot imagine what it is like to kill another person with a gun. Mr. Fenn concluded with an emotional statement... "People think that it is some kind of manifestation of manhood by having an AR15 type rifle. Because this is important to me, we do have to protect our kids." Bringing awareness to the idea that the possession of a gun is a status statement providing a sense of power.

In an interview with Stephen Cronkhite, Flintridge Sacred Heart Academy's Campus Operations Manager, he highlighted several methods of improving school safety nationwide. At Flintridge Sacred Heart Academy, he explained, "we employ 24/7 on-campus safety and security



officers to watch the campus around the clock,” and use checkpoint stations during the day to screen all visitors. This security system, including over 70 surveillance cameras and ID checks, demonstrates how safety measures can deter potential threats. He emphasized that effective school safety requires physical security, proactive planning, mental health support, and community involvement. He stated, “safety is everyone’s responsibility, including students,” and noted the role of FSHA’s two safety committees in updating protocols based on real incidents like the Eaton Fire. Staff and students are trained in the “RUN, HIDE, FIGHT” model and use lockdown latches and coded announcements to respond to threats. While these protocols can be alarming for students and can create anxiety about a shooting occurring, they are necessary since the community must be prepared for this in order to avoid poor training and reaction times in the case that one does happen. FSHA also presents a lockdown training video to staff and students and utilizes “SEE SOMETHING, SAY SOMETHING” to encourage alertness. Mental health is central to safety. The Student Crisis Team, led by a licensed professional, ensures “the student is seen to safety” in moments of crisis. In terms of mental health, this provides comfort leading to a decreased amount of fear and anxiety. On gun violence, he says, “Conducting safe and well-communicated school drills with students and employees is the best way to facilitate school safety.” Therefore, if more schools employ security measures like FSHA’s, this can help prevent school shootings.

The final interview conducted was with Mrs. Alyssa Kilpatrick, a mass shooting survivor, mother, and advocate for gun policy reform. Mrs. Kilpatrick was asked to describe her experience with gun violence, the resources survivors need to regain and maintain positive mental and physical health after a shooting, as well as her perspective on the necessary steps to reduce gun violence. She replied with a thoughtful response after each question, detailing her

personal experience in the line of fire. She explains the tragic and lasting results of gun violence in her life, harming both her mental and physical health. She states “It (gun violence) impacts nearly every aspect of my life. I have physical pain and scars from the blast injury from an AR-15. I suffer from mental health issues such as PTSD and anxiety. Whenever I am in a public place, I assess my surroundings and familiarize myself with the nearest exits...” As both a mother and a preschool teacher, Mrs. Kilpatrick states her fear of her children and students experiencing the same tragedy she did. She names the need for accessible mental and physical health care for all survivors including access to “...physicians and surgeons with special training for blast injuries and the resulting health issues (such as high lead levels due to bullet fragments)... elevated lead levels can cause cancer and neurological problems years after being shot.” Finally, Mrs. Kilpatrick addresses the way her experience shifted her political affiliation away from the Republican party, “which aligns itself with the gun lobby and the NRA (National Rifle Association).” She claims she used to be ignorant on gun control yet her experience has forced her into research and advocacy. She concludes with her views on the restrictiveness of guns. She attributes the lack of firearm restrictions to misinterpretations of the Second Amendment, the right to bear arms. She stated “The gun lobby and the NRA are powerful entities that donate heavily to politicians who will vote in line with their interests. Extremism on the far right has grown and resulted in fear mongering. One of their favorite sales tactics is “the only way to stop a bad guy is a good guy with a gun. But if more guns made us safer, we would be the safest country in the world and we are far from it. Gun violence is the leading cause of death for children in the US.” Mrs. Kilpatrick’s personal account offered the project a perspective and opinion of someone directly affected by gun violence.

#### V. Conclusion/Reflection/Recommendations

Through the accumulation of the research conducted and the action plan, the assumptions were correctly predicted that we would discover that both the implementation of restrictive firearm laws and the availability of mental health care play significant roles in reducing gun violence in today's society. The research brought attention to the many aspects of firearm violence and its prevalence in the modern United States. As a result, the school community was enlightened on the causes of violence and the effects of violence and suggested possible solutions to open up the discussion on firearm danger. We have gained the understanding that little progress happens when groups with opposing perspectives lack the ability to hearken to each other's opinions. With platforms for more open discussions on the topic of violence, more positive progress can be made on the road to putting an end to firearm violence.

The final product of the research was a success, however, as a collective process there are improvements that could have been made. For example, working with an organization more closely aligned with the goals of the project would have been beneficial. Additionally, time management is a skill that could be implemented more efficiently. The communication portion of the process was difficult; organizing emails and dates to meet and volunteer was a challenge. Starting the coordination of possible dates to volunteer and the initial process of signing forms was more time consuming than we anticipated. For researchers exploring this topic in the future, one recommendation is to be proactive and initiate the volunteer portion as early as possible. Also, to improve the teach-in, one possible adjustment would have been to start advertising earlier to allow for more community involvement. Additionally, including a method of checking the understanding and knowledge of our audience after the teach-in could be supplementary material. Lastly, we faced the obstacle of working in a group of three on this large project, each

of us researching several different aspects of gun violence; however, we surpassed this challenge and came together through communication and openness to one another's ideas.

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