SCHOOL SHOOTING PREVENTION AND RESPONSE AT THE BUILDING LEVEL

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Abstract

School violence has increased dramatically over the last decade. There have been many school shootings since the devastating mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012. Following each of these, there has been much national debate about gun control laws and mental health funding. While political stakeholders have been in a stalemate over these important issues, schools must develop better solutions for stopping school shootings. This dissertation discussed whether there is a clear profile for a school shooter, which emergency plans are practiced at a school in Massachusetts, and where the responsibility of resolving a school shooting falls. This dissertation addressed the problem of practice through a case study using the emergency management cycle (EMC), focusing on prevention, preparedness, and response from a school staff level. This case study focused on the following research questions: (a) Is it possible to profile and anticipate school shooters in order to prevent shootings? (b) What are the emergency protocols in place at the middle school in Massachusetts that is the focus of this study, and how can they be strengthened? and (c) What is the role of faculty and staff in the resolution of an active shooter situation? The researcher answered these questions through research as well as interviewing a multi-disciplinary selection of faculty and staff at a school in Massachusetts. Participants’ responses helped inform violence prevention, preparedness, and response training.

Keywords: school violence, school shootings, prevention, preparedness, response, and emergency protocols.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

The level of school violence in the United States has increased dramatically over the last ten years (Dogutus, 2013). School violence is a global issue, but occurs more frequently in the United States (Fritz, 2015). Violence occurs from both individuals trespassing and entering a building, as well as from school personnel committing acts of violence against fellow classmates, teachers, or administrators (Rocque, 2012). Since the devastating mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School December 14, 2012, there have been over 100 gun incidences in schools, including numerous school shootings (Gunter, 2015).

This issue of violence can be examined from various angles. Increasingly, the issue of school violence has occupied a national stage and has brought about ongoing debates about gun control and mental health reform, which cannot be ignored. From a national standpoint, the Second Amendment of the United States Constitution gives each American citizen the right to bear arms; however, further legislation and policies have attempted to keep firearms out of the hands of wrongdoers. In the United States, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) enforces gun laws. Some of the major policies adopted by the ATF include: (a) The National Firearms Act (1934), which taxed the manufacture and transfer of, and mandates the registration of Title II weapons such as machine guns, shot guns and short barreled rifles; (b) the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968, which prohibited interstate trade in handguns and increased the minimum age to 21 for buying handguns; and (c) a modification of the Omnibus Act, the Firearm Owners Protection Act which, in 1985, prohibited the sale to civilians of automatic firearms without ATF approval. In 1990, the Gun-Free School Zones Act was passed, prohibiting unauthorized individuals from knowingly possessing a firearm at a place that the individuals knows, or has a reasonable cause to believe, is a school
zone. The most recent law of note is The Federal Assault Weapons Ban (1994-2004) that banned semiautomatic assault weapons and large capacity ammunition feeding devices. This law expired in 2004; however, it was during this ban, in 1999, the tragic shooting of Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado was carried out by two students using double-barreled shotguns (BATF, 2016).

The second important related issue is the ongoing debate linking mental illness to mass school shootings. Peter Langman, world-renowned researcher of school shootings and author of *School Shooters* and *Why Kids Kill*, has suggested a direct connection between mental illness and school shooters (Langman, 2009). Langman categorized shooters into three psychological types: psychopathic, psychotic, and traumatized (Langman, 2009). Langman (2009) suggested that a direct connection exists between mental illness and school shootings. This perspective is widespread in media accounts as well, with strong advocacy around the acknowledgement of this direct connection to school shootings and an increase in funding for mental health services in the United States. Yet, from 2009-2011, substantial cuts were made by an Act of Congress to non-Medicaid state mental health spending; there was a cumulative cut of $1.8 billion nationwide, accompanied by a proposed $1.2 trillion reduction in spending in this category by 2021 (NAMI: Medicaid, 2011; Honberg, Diehl, Kimball, Usher, & Fitzpatrick, 2011).

Only twenty-three states increased mental health spending in 2015, compared to thirty-six states in 2013 and two in 2014 (Sun, 2015). The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI: Medicaid, 2011) Executive Director Mary Giliberti stated that Sandy Hook and tragedies like it “undeniably have helped fuel public demand for mental health care reform” (Sun, 2015).

When looking at staggering statistics such as 18% of children and adolescents having a mental health disorder, with 5% of those individuals diagnosed as severely emotionally
disturbed, the chances of each classroom having a child with a mental health disorder that will go undiagnosed and untreated will likely increase (Dikel, 2012). While in 2016 it became evident that the debates among political stakeholders regarding gun control needed to eventually reach a resolution from their political and philosophical stalemate and that the issues of mental health funding also needed to be resolved, it has also become increasingly clear that a more effective and efficient plan must be put in place to keep America safe -- particularly in the case of our next generation of school students.

This problem at the level of the school must be examined through three lenses simultaneously -- prevention, preparedness, and response. Many schools are aware that they cannot wait for legislative and policy changes to address this problem from a national level. Massachusetts in particular has adopted further legislation to ensure school safety and an improved climate of security for children. Specifically, the Massachusetts legislature passed two school safety laws: The Multi- Hazard Evacuation Plan for Schools in 2000, and the Medical Emergency Response Plans for schools in 2012. The first law focused on requiring superintendents to formulate a “specific multi-hazard plan” for each public school in their districts. They were mandated to focus these plans on: (a) forming a crisis response team; (b) designating a manager of the incident and substitutes; and (c) creating and implementing a communication plan. The superintendents were directed to aim the Medical Emergency Response Plan at (a) reducing the incidence of life threatening emergencies; and (b) promoting efficient response to such emergencies. Under the legislation, these plans should involve the school nurse, school athletic team physicians, coaches, trainers, and the emergency medical services agencies. Schools are required to practice these plans at the beginning of the year and throughout the school year (Cabral, Malone, & Polanowicz, 2014). Notably, while these plans
are robust in nature and are used to cover a vast majority of emergencies, there is no law yet focused on putting shelters in place, lockdown, or family reunification, all which are crucial during the time in which a shooter is active and during the aftermath (Cabral et al., 2014).

This researcher explored three sub categories of plans related to school shootings: (a) prevention, or the extent to which schools are able to profile and anticipate school shooters to prevent further shootings; (b) preparedness, or the emergency protocols in place and how schools can strengthen them; and (c) response, or the role of faculty and staff in resolving an active shooter to decrease harm during the time of a school shooting (Cabral et al., 2014).

This dissertation addressed this problem of practice through a case study that focused on prevention, preparedness, and response from a school staff level. This case study addressed knowledge at the school level about Massachusetts State policies in relation to school violence prevention and emergency plans. In obtaining an understanding of the prevention of school shootings, the researcher focused the review on the current literature examining the profiling of school shooters. To better understand preparedness, the researcher looked at emergency protocols and how they are practiced during the school year. Lastly, to understand the response component, this researcher looked at the prior training the faculty and staff at the school that is the focus of this study have had in regards to confronting an active shooter. Both archival research of laws, policies, and other documents and interviews with faculty and staff from a school in Massachusetts provided data for this study.

The researcher summarized the findings from the interviews to determine from a school staff perspective the level of awareness, understanding, and preparedness that exists. This information was compiled so it could be presented to the superintendent of the Massachusetts school that was the focus of this study. Ideally, providing thorough documentation of the
dynamic of a school and the challenges the school faced through a case study that probes these three areas of school safety will allow school leaders to obtain a better understanding of how to prepare and respond to active shooters.

**Significance**

School violence is a growing phenomenon in suburban and urban areas in the United States (Dogutas, 2013). Understanding the trends in school violence in an attempt to prevent these tragedies from happening may result in fewer serious injuries and possibly save lives; it can lead to creating a more positive daily school climate, thus allowing for the most optimal learning environment; ultimately, it can lead to prevention of future violence in schools by providing information that will help to establish effective deterrents (Everett & Price, 1995). Research is mixed regarding the patterns of and rationale behind occurrences of violence in schools. On one hand, research suggests that school violence such as shootings is characterized by a certain element of uniqueness; other studies assert that this form of violence is not distinguished from traditional violence that occurs outside of school (Rocque, 2012).

The strength of emergency plans is significant to prevention and responses; however, a great deal of the literature on school violence focuses on mental health factors rather than on examinations of approaches documenting prevention and responses to violence. Research also suggests that most school violence intervention is situational crime prevention; thus, the literature is not largely focused on theoretical methodologies and approaches that investigate the causes of violence and how to anticipate it or react to it (Rocque, 2012).

Few scholarly studies examine what to do to prepare for school shooting attacks and how to determine what staff would need to do during an active shooter situation. Only minimal research has been directed toward strengthening emergency protocol by properly training school
staff in order to limit the destruction of school violence incidents (Lunenberg, 2011).

Policymakers are creating laws from within this limited perspective. Some studies have focused on the role of students and teachers, probing how to promote a positive school climate with the hope that this alone will prevent violence from occurring. Other studies accounts use interviews with teachers to gauge opinions on their feelings towards violence in schools (Grayson & Alvarez, 2008).

Broadening the scope of research could assist school staff and students equipped to deal with a violent situation in acting as deterrents to future acts of aggression by students or intruders. It might also assist schools and their communities in the essential task of working together to combat violence in schools (Everett & Price, 1995). Physical and legal deterrents have proven useful in terms of school violence prevention (Time & Payne, 2008) – for example, schools that have a police presence and physical security in their building seem to be the most prepared for emergency situations. Resource officers, who help establish safety throughout the building by participating in class instruction and as presence in large assemblies in schools, also help prevent violence by deterring intruders or members of the community from attempting to carry out violent activities. Deterrence has been found to be a key factor in preventing violent activity (Time & Payne, 2008).

Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, and Pickeral (2009) asserted, “a sustainable, positive school climate fosters youth development and learning necessary for a productive, contributive, and satisfying life” (p. 181). Stichter (2008) cited four key factors that contribute to a positive school climate: the academic learning experience, overall school satisfaction, communication, and environmental experiences. He asserted that school climate goes beyond the classroom and involves everyday school life, attitudes, and the experiences of individuals within the school.
community. He linked school climate to prevention and vice versa claiming that preparedness and training focusing on school violence situation reactions can help foster a community feeling that is safe; feelings of communal school safety facilitate optimal learning (Stichter, 2008).

School leaders must continue to be vigilant and proactive in creating the safest possible learning environment for all students. The significance of school violence is shown on many levels and preventing it is part of the general goal of building safer communities for all. Stakeholders across all levels are impacted by the threat of violence in schools. Administrators must make sure that schools are as safe as possible to ensure the existence of an effective and impactful learning environment. Families want to feel confident that a safe learning environment every day at school surrounds their children. Communities must work collaboratively with schools to help create a broader safe learning community. Many community members have a vested interest in establishing safe learning environments for students and in ensuring that safety in schools is a top priority for all stakeholders and in all areas (Stichter, 2008).

**Positionality Statement**

I was only eleven years old in 1999 when the tragedy of the Columbine High School shooting took place. As a sixth grader and an eleven-year old, I was naturally very scared when I heard the news of the attack. I could not fathom why or how anyone could commit such an awful act. I looked to my mother for answers and kept asking the question of why. The shootings at Columbine were the first of many violent acts that I remembered taking place during that period of time. Every few years, until I graduated from high school, acts of violence occurred in schools throughout the United States (Dogutas, 2013). It was very scary as a student growing up in this era of school shootings and violence. Experts claimed that the school
shooters were generally “outsiders” and people who may have been bullied while in school (Rocque, 2012).

Throughout my college and graduate school experience, it seemed common to hear of a school shooting or some form of school violence occurring at least once a year. These mass tragedies seemed to multiply in number and intensity as the years went on. After receiving my master’s degree, I became a high school special education teacher in Boston, Massachusetts. In December of my second year on the job, one of the worst school tragedies in American history occurred in Newtown, Connecticut, when a gunman entered a school building, killing kindergarten students, teachers, and the school principal. My first response was horror and sadness about this terrible tragedy, feelings shared by so many others. My next thought as an educational professional was, what if this were to happen in the school in which I work? I asked myself, is our school even somewhat prepared for an emergency situation? As teachers, we are there not only to teach our students, but also to protect them. I thought to myself that there must be a way to not only prevent these acts, but to be able to do something if an emergency situation were to occur.

**Personal Response**

As a man of the Jewish faith, I have grown up with a strong background in standing up for what you believe is right. The great Rabbi Hillel said, “If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am not for others, what am I? And if not now, when?” (Telushkin, 2010). Hillel is saying one must always speak up for oneself because, if you do not, then no one will. But Hillel also suggests that we must help others for the greater good of society and that we must not wait to take action! Using Hillel’s teachings, I believe I must speak up to help society. Many news and media outlets will discuss the aftermath of school shootings, and in my experience, schools
are underprepared for active shooter situations. In my research I intended to uncover how to better prepare and respond to an active shooter situation. I will continue to be an advocate for school shooting prevention and response training, as I believe one victim is too many. I feel that we need to make our schools safer, because it is inevitable that these violent acts will continue if we do not change the way we look at school violence. As Albert Einstein said: “The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results” (Dhurandhar, 2012). Schools must look at how to prepare for emergency situations in new and alternative ways. The way schools have been looking at emergency situations has led to the unfortunate reality of continuous violence and to the absence of change.

School violence is a prevalent issue in the United States and around the world. Littky (2004) wrote in his book, The Big Picture, that schools are run the way they are because “this is the way they have always been done.” Littky (2004) primarily suggested that schools have not evolved with the world of technology in terms of their operational structure. He critiqued how schools operate on block scheduling, where students are told where to go with the sound of a bell; he also noted that students must take the same core classes they did back when schools were founded, in the industrial age. “Back in the industrial age, which is when our ‘modern’ model of schooling was set up, the idea was that schools could churn out educated people much like factories churned out clothes and cars” (Littky, 2004, p. 30). Schools were made to run essentially like factories. Littky (2004) argued that schools are still run this way in a world where our graduates are going into a wide variety of fields, not simply industrial jobs. Taking Littky’s (2004) position a step further, it can be argued that schools are run the same way in terms of school security. Yes, metal detectors exist in some high crime urban area schools; however, typically, mass school violence incidents are more prevalent in suburban areas (Finley,
School resource officers are present in certain schools, but schools are still mainly operating under the same security protocols they have used for years. In the next section, I will further explain my positionality to the reader to provide a sense of my background and perspective on school security; I will also explain my theoretical position, which is based on my experiences as a student and a professional.

**My Educational and Professional Experiences with School Safety**

I will begin by discussing my experience regarding emergency plans in place at the schools where I was a K-12 student. I attended a public elementary school where I can remember having one or two fire drills per year. A fire drill consisted of lining up as a class and filing through the hallways, and eventually out the door. When the class was outside during the fire drill, each teacher would wait for the principal to give everyone the “okay” so all the students could go back to class. As I went through middle school, we had a similar safety drill procedure. I then attended a private high school, and the safety plan there for drills also consisted of lining up outside and waiting for the principal to let us know when it was all right to go back inside. I then went on to college where there were no in-class safety drills that I can remember. Professionally, I began my educational work in a suburb near Boston, Massachusetts in a public K-8 elementary/middle school. At this school, we had fire drills during which we would all line up and wait for the “okay” from the principal to go inside. I then began working at my first job as a high school teacher at a charter school in Boston, Massachusetts where, during the first year we did one safety drill, and that was a fire drill. During the fire drill, everyone at the school lined up outside and we waited for the “okay” from the principal to go inside. The same goes for the school at which I am currently an administrator. I realize this paragraph is repetitive, but I emphasize this point to illustrate the fact that little if anything has
changed regarding school safety since I was in elementary school. I have attended or worked in private, public, and charter schools, and the security drills at all of these institutions follow a very similar protocol. In my second year teaching, which was in 2012-2013, we instituted our “safe mode” drill only after the tragedy in Newtown, Connecticut. This drill consists of the teachers turning off the lights and locking the doors while students huddle in the corner of the room. During the 2013-2014 school year, we implemented the “safe mode” drill again but only practiced it for the first time in January. Such procedures need to be practiced at the beginning of the school year, instead of during the middle of the year. I believe establishing drills like this is a step in the right direction, but I truly believe there is more that can be done than simply turning off a light and locking a door.

**Research Questions**

This dissertation focused on three research questions:

- **Prevention:** Is it possible to profile and anticipate school shooters in order to prevent shootings?
- **Preparedness:** What are the emergency protocols in place at the middle school in Massachusetts that is the focus of this study, and how can they be strengthened?
- **Response:** What is the role of faculty and staff in the resolution of an active shooter?

**Organization of the Document**

This doctoral thesis is organized into four additional chapters. The following section of this chapter contains the theoretical framework that lays the foundation for the thesis. Chapter 2 analyzes in detail the literature focused on understanding the profiling of a school shooter as well as the research examining school preparedness, emergency protocols, and the capacity of faculty and staff to respond in the event that an active shooting occurs. Chapter 3 outlines the
methodology, research design approach, site and participant collection as well as the sampling, limitations and sample size. Chapter 3 also reviews the data collection and analysis and reviews the validity, reliability, and limitations. After data was collected and analyzed, Chapter 4 presents an analysis of the findings in a clear and concise manner. Chapter 5 contains a discussion of the research findings.

**Theoretical Framework**

The purpose of this dissertation was to investigate the profile of school shooters as a means of preventing violent incidents of this kind; it simultaneously investigated the current emergency protocol(s) used in a school in Massachusetts. To investigate the profile of a school shooter and emergency protocols, it was important to employ a theoretical lens to frame and understand the literature related to these phenomena. The framework chosen for this purpose, which also guided the research questions, is the Emergency Management Cycle (EMC).

The EMC framework was used in 2014 when Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick created a task force centered on school safety decisions that were being made at the local level; the framework focused on district resources. The EMC outlined four phases for emergency management: prevention, preparation, response, and recovery. In section one, the EMC addressed prevention with the goal of providing directives to set up a system to avoid the occurrence of incidents or to lessen the harm performed by an unavoidable violent act(s). This phase also involved mitigation. This phase from the framework -- prevention -- is related to the section of this research study focused on the profiling of school shooters; both consider factors such as age, gender, race, mental health diagnosis, whether students are victims of bullying, and prior school incidents. This focus on prevention aimed to determine whether shootings occur more in a suburban or urban setting, the time of day they commonly happen, and some
parameters related to location. A premise of this study, based on previous research and the tenets of the EMC, is that profiling for the school shooter may contribute to the prevention of further shootings by ensuring that students at high risk of committing acts of violence are given appropriate interventions and support systems (Cabral et al., 2014).

The second phase of the EMC is focused on preparedness. The purpose of this phase was to prepare staff for the worst-case scenario through emergency planning. The goal of this phase was to minimize the psychological and physical harm that takes place as incidents occur. Both the preparation and prevention phases can occur simultaneously, and they are usually ongoing. This researcher focused on the preparedness phase to determine the level and content of knowledge school staff members possess regarding the emergency plan set in place to respond to an active shooting as well as practiced throughout the school year (Cabral et al., 2014).

The third phase was response. This phase focused on the steps taken to minimize harm to people and property during a particular incident. The time frame is short-term and requires tight coordination and rapid action among all participants. In regards to the response phase, this study aimed to understand how the school could minimize the psychological stress of staff members if they are faced with an active shooter. It is important to note that, in this framework, the act of practicing the emergency protocols can fall under preparedness or response (Cabral et al., 2014).

The last phase is focused on recovery. The recovery phase is concerned with restoring the learning and teaching environment after an incident. It involved a process of mending the physical and psychological health of the school’s community members. This portion of the EMC is out of the scope of this case study and requires deeper examination, and development and implementation of mental health services (Cabral et al., 2014).
Limitations

This case study is limited to one school in the state of Massachusetts. It was therefore difficult to generalize findings because all districts do not have the same restrictions, budgetary concerns, and infrastructure. The solution that may work for this particular school may not be transferable to all districts. Some of the research in regards to the school shootings was media-based which presents an innate bias. Lastly, this case study did not cover the recovery phase of the EMC model.

Conclusion

There has been an increase in school violence over the past decade (Dogutas, 2013). School violence is a global issue, but occurs more frequently in the United States (Rocque, 2012). This is a multi angle issue including gun control laws and mental health funding; however, we must act in real time as school staff members to make our school environments safer while widespread debates are being conducted. While Massachusetts has two laws, the Multi-Hazard Evacuation Plan for Schools, developed in 2000, and the Medical Emergency Response Plans, passed for schools in 2012, they are not fully robust and do not include management of shelter in place and school lock down, both appropriate methods for response during an active shooting incident. This researcher has discussed how this issue was addressed through a case study performed on a specific school in Massachusetts. The case study focused on the understanding and knowledge at the school staff level in order to better educate leading stakeholders on best practices in regards to preventing and responding to an active shooting incident. This chapter discussed the significance of the issue at hand. School staff members across the United States lack an understanding of profiling of school shooters; furthermore, they do not have full knowledge of preventative strategies (Rocque, 2012; Cornell, 2006). Many
schools lack adequate training for possible emergencies (O’Toole, 2000). Research has found that schools are not properly giving staff intensive training that would allow them to be well equipped if an emergency situation arises (Rocque, 2012). The snapshot of my personal background and educational experiences outline my positionality as a former student, teacher, and current school administrator committed to responding to the need to provide a better understanding of prevention strategies and more training of school personnel in terms of emergency response preparation during an active shooter situation.

This chapter also discussed how the subsequent chapters of this dissertation are organized.

The theoretical framework chosen for this study focused on EMC -- the comprehensive set of measures put forth by Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick in 2014 when a task force was created to evaluate and structure safety decisions made at the local level with a focus on school resources. This is the framework that this researcher focused on – particularly its three phases of school shooting prevention, preparation, and response.

Lastly, this chapter discussed the various limitations this author encountered when performing the research for and when presenting the findings of this case study.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review is focused on two bodies of literature. The first body of literature addressed the ability of school officials and staff to profile for school shooters based on previous school shootings in order to prevent further shootings. The second body of literature is focused on the current emergency plans across the nation and how one school in Massachusetts is trained to respond to an active shooter.

History of Youth Violence in America

Violence among America’s youth has been present since the beginning of the nineteenth century (Blumstein, 2002). Men between the ages of 15-29 are overrepresented as the perpetrators and victims of violence; actually 75% of all homicide victims in the world are men (Legge, 2008). Modern technology has brought many benefits to today’s world; however, it has also made it easier for young people to access uncensored mass media materials (violence, sexual, etc). The media and technology combined have contributed to an increase in violence on television, and in movies and video games. Media violence increases the likelihood of aggressive and violent behavior in the short term as it triggers an automatic reflex to imitate behaviors (Anderson, 2003). Though media outlets have contributed to an increase in the violent tendencies of America’s youth, this variable pales in comparison to the leading risk factor of youth violence in the United States: the widespread availability of guns (O’Donnell, 2001). Easy accessibility to guns in America has played a role in augmented violence related to drug trafficking, socioeconomic crime, and school shootings (O’Donnell, 2001).

The accessibility of guns has increased youth violence, prompting policy makers to respond. The rate of violence among young people trended upward significantly in the period from 1985-2000 (Blumstein, 2002). The combination of the rise of illegal drug markets and the
accessibility to firearms was a lethal combination (Blumstein, 2002). Drug market violence trended upward with violence manifesting itself in the form of robbery and homicides. Policy makers did not start to make concerted efforts in regards to stopping youth violence until many school shootings took place in the 1990s (Blumstein, 2002). After that rash of school shooting incidents, policy makers tried to impose harsher penalties on youth found guilty of violent crimes (e.g., trying youths as adults) to deter them from committing criminal acts. For example, California passed Proposition 21 in year 2000, which increased prison sentences and allowed juveniles as young as 14 years old to be tried as adults (Blumstein, 2002).

Many young members of society have little income or ability to earn money; others have access to money through their parents. A youth who is a member of a family of low socioeconomic status is at a greater risk of committing violence (Blumstein, 2002). Legge (2008) noted that the “social ecology of poverty, and prevalence of youth employment is the foundation for...criminality…More generally, the extent of inequality in access to community resources, especially income opportunities, is essential to youthful offending” (p. 19). People who become desperate for money will rob and steal from others. Easy accessibility of handguns has made committing robberies much more common for the 17% of children who live in poverty (Blumstein, 2002; Legge, 2008).

The ease of obtaining guns has led to an increase in the frequency and scope of school violence in the United States (Dogutas, 2013; O’Donnell, 2001). Most school deaths are the result of gun violence (O’Donnell, 2001). Males carry guns with a higher frequency than females; with youth and adults alike commonly claiming they possess weapons for “their own protection” (Blumstein, 2002; O’Donnell, 2001). A paradox exists: teenagers are unable to purchase guns, yet they have easy access to guns. Students may take guns from their homes that
are owned by another household member (usually their parents). An estimated 40% of gun owners in the United States do not store their weapons in locked cabinets or safes in their homes (O’Donnell, 2001). Easy accessibility to guns in the United States is a significant factor in violence. Presence of a firearm increases the likelihood of turning an argument into a violent crime. Violence in American society exists in many different forms, but it overwhelmingly has one thing in common: the presence of a firearm. O’Donnell (2001) asserted that if fewer guns were readily available in our society, there would be a decrease in violence amongst teens. He also noted that the presence of guns is the common factor in any type of serious violence (O’Donnell, 2001).

**Chronological Overview of School Shootings in America**

Understanding the chronology of school shootings in the United States (U.S.) is integral to recognizing the growing concern about the increase in school shooting violence. Only 11% of all of the school shootings from 1927 to 2016 occurred before 1980. In the 1980s, there was a tremendous increase in school shootings; that decade alone accounts for 16% of all school shootings since 1927. The 1980s is when the United States saw a dramatic change in family dynamics, as there were exponentially fewer families in which the father was the breadwinner and the mother was a homemaker (Mooney, 2013). Additionally, the 1980s is when the United States saw a rise in semi-automatic weapons on school campuses (Mooney, 2013). School shootings increased even more in the 1990s, when 23% of all school shootings since 1927 occurred. These include the 1999 Columbine shooting, which was one of the first school incidents with widespread media coverage (Mooney, 2013). School shooting frequency continued to increase in the 2000s, during which 27% of all school shootings since 1927 occurred. Each decade from 1980 to 2009, school shooting incidents increased by an average of
5.5%. The last 10 years alone included 37% of the school shooting incidents since 1927 (Langman, 2016c).

With an average of over 20 homicides per year in schools from 1996 to 2007 (Mooney, 2013), and school shootings happening more frequently, school violence prevention and response are of critical importance. If history is any indicator, the next few years may unfortunately bring more school shooting casualties than the United States had previously seen within a comparable time period (Mooney, 2013; Langman, 2016c).

**Profile of School Shooters**

Understanding certain demographic characteristics common among school shooters could potentially assist in implementing measures to prevent catastrophic school shootings. This section of the literature review examines research regarding the profiling of school shooters including studies that address demographic categories such as gender, race, age, and socioeconomic status.

Males between 15-29 years old in the United States die more frequently from homicide than any other age group (Legge, 2008). A child in the United States is 13 times as likely to be killed by homicide committed with a gun than a child in Finland, France, or New Zealand. The majority of school shooters are males (JeeHae, 2013; Roque, 2012). Research has suggested that, in the history of school shooting (kindergarten-12th grade), there have been four reported incidents where a female has carried out an attack in a school (Langman, 2016c). Overwhelmingly, research has indicated that males have carried out nearly every school shooting (Langman, 2016c; Rocque, 2012, JeeHae, 2013).

The majority of school shooters are white (Fritz, 2015). In a sample of 32 secondary school shooters in the United States, 66% were white; the other 34% consisted of the following
minority groups: African American, Asian, Latino, Middle Eastern, and Native American (Langman, 2016c, p.1; Rocque, 2012, p. 306). JeeHae (2013) sampled 593 school shootings since the 1700s, and 75% of those shooters were white males (p. 5). The majority of school shooters come from families in the lower to middle class (Rocque, 2012). Additionally, most school shooters grow up in suburban or rural areas, and these attackers generally range from ages 10-19 (JeeHae, 2013).

Understanding certain demography about school shooters is essential to school shooting prevention strategies. In this section of the literature review, the researcher uncovered research to discuss the possibility of profiling through demographic categories. To summarize, the literature suggests that school shootings are typically carried out by white lower to middle class males between the ages of 10-19 living in suburban or rural areas (Rocque, 2012; Legge, 2008; JeeHae, 2013; Langman, 2016c).

There are common psychological trends that should be considered in regards to school shooters. Psychological trends may include mental health diagnoses, psychiatric medications, and student peer experiences that may contribute to students becoming violent. The researcher will focus on the role of bullying /effects of being picked on among school shooters, as well as categories of mental health behavioral typology (Terry, 2010; Langman, 2009).

South Carolina adopted the South Carolina Safe School Climate Act in 2006 to address public concern about bullying within public schools (Terry, 2010). The act encouraged schools to:

…Limit and punish “harassment, intimidation, or bullying” defined as a gesture, an electronic communication, or a written, verbal, physical, or sexual, act that is reasonably perceived to have the effect of: Harming a student physically or emotionally, or
damaging a student’s property, or placing a student in reasonable fear of personal harm or property damage; or insulting or demeaning a student or group of students causing substantial disruption in, or substantial interference with, the orderly operation of the schools (Safe School Climate Act 2006).

It is a common theme in the media that bullying plays a significant role in school shootings (Anderson, 2003). Some researchers have claimed that bullying plays a role in many school-shooting incidents, but that it is not a direct indicator of a school shooter (Langman, 2016b; Knoll, 2013). In fact, the majority of students who are bullied do not ever commit crimes (Langman, 2016b); indeed, school shooters who have experience with bullying are typically the victims and not the aggressors. Many school shooters, however, do report feeling persecuted; their aggressions have often stemmed from issues they have had with one of the targets of the shootings (United States Secret Service and United States Department of Education, 2004; Fein, Vossekuil, Pollack, Borum, Modzeleski, & Reddy, 2002; Langman, 2016b).

The psychology of a shooter is an important aspect to look at when trying to figure out if a specific profile for a school shooter exists; however, scholars have stressed that most students who suffer from mental illness do not commit school shootings and that categorizing all students with mental illness into one group will create too many false positives (Knoll, 2013). However, many school shooters have exhibited certain psychological tendencies such as issues with self-esteem, depression, and social rejection (Knoll, 2013; United States Secret Service and United States Department of Education, 2004; Fein et al., 2002).

Langman categorized school shooters into three different psychological categories: traumatized, psychotic, and psychopathic. Traumatized, he asserted, refers to children who have seen substance abuse or criminal behavior in the home; psychotic refers to children with
schizophrenia-type disorders; and psychopathic refers to students who demonstrate narcissism and a lack of empathy for others (Langman, 2009). It is interesting to note that 75% of Langman’s subjects who fell under the category of traumatized were reportedly bullied (Langman 2009; 2016b).

This section discussed possible common psychological trends exhibited by school shooters. While many school shooters did experience bullying in their school system, research revealed that bullying is not a direct indicator for becoming a school shooter. However, many school shooters do experience depression and social rejection. Additionally, school shooters typically fall into one of three categories: traumatized, psychotic, or psychopathic (Langman, 2009).

**School Violence-Threat Assessment**

Mass media outlets suggest that every school shooter fits a certain profile (Cornell, 2006). Due to the relatively minimal existing scholarly research on school shooters, which is a result of school shootings being a relatively rare occurrence with a small sample size, profiles of the perpetrators are not yet clearly defined (Cornell, 2004; JeeHae, 2013). School personnel and educational professionals have shown minimal interest, however, in school shooting research. As JeeHae (2013) stated:

Scholars from the areas of health policy or criminal justice have shown their interest in school shootings. However, scholars in the field of education have not shown active studies regarding school shootings in spite of the fact that teachers and students are most affected by the school shootings (p. 89).
This section of the literature will focus on various threat assessment tools that can help identify possible school shooting perpetrator characteristics and threat attributes. Cornell (2006) discussed threat assessment as follows:

What is threat assessment? Threat assessment was developed by the Secret Service to deal with persons who threaten to attack public officials and has evolved into a standard approach to analyze a variety of dangerous situations, such as threats of workplace violence. A threat assessment is conducted when a person (or persons) threatens to commit a violent act or engages in behavior that appears to threaten what is termed “targeted violence.” Threat assessment is a process of evaluating the threat, and the circumstances surrounding the threat, to uncover any facts or evidence that indicate the threat is likely to be carried out. Student threat assessment can be distinguished from profiling in part because the investigation is triggered by some form of student threat behavior rather than some combination of demographic and personal characteristics of the student (p. 4).

It is important to note that school shooting incidents are rare (Cornell, 2004; United States Secret Service and United States Department of Education, 2004; Fein et al., 2002; O’Toole, 2000), which makes it challenging to come up with a specific quantifiable or qualitative formula for a threat assessment tool.

This section will focus on threat assessments as a way to help prevent school shootings. Due to the rareness of frequency of school shootings, certain characteristics listed do not in isolation indicate that a student with these characteristics will commit a violent school act. However, research suggests that these are possible indicators to look at when assessing a student
as a possible threat to the school. This section will discuss the reason threat assessments are effective and specific related themes, using numerous threat assessment examples.

Threat assessments are a practical approach to identifying potential school shooters (Cornell, 2004; United States Secret Service and United States Department of Education, 2004; Fein et al., 2002; O’Toole, 2000). Although school shootings are rare, violence can potentially occur at any school. When a student shows signs of possible violent behavior, schools are responsible for doing the best they can to minimize potential risk factors of violence towards other students (JeeHae, 2013). Determining the level of threat is a key factor in assessing potential violence. As O’Toole, (2000) observed:

Assessing the level of threat is currently a great challenge for school personnel. This is simple statistical logic: when the incidence of any form of violence is very low and a very large number of people have identifiable risk factors, there is no reliable way to pick out from that large group the very few who will actually commit the violent act (p. 3).

Scholarly and policy literature has suggested that schools should create a multi-disciplinary team of professionals within the school to assess levels of threat among students (Cornell, 2004; O’Toole, 2000; United States Secret Service and United States Department of Education, 2004; Fein et al., 2002; Brock, Nickerson, Reeves, Jimerson, Lieberman, & Feinberg, 2009). This team should consist of an administrator, school mental health personnel, and law enforcement officials. The PREpare Model of School Crisis Prevention and Intervention model, a school curriculum designed by the National Association for School Psychologists, specifically suggests that the potential for a violent incident can be reduced and consequences mitigated by creating a network of steps that includes prevention, intervention, response, and posttraumatic treatment (Brock et al., 2009Cornell, 2004). PREpare is an acronym that represents a specific
hierarchy and a sequential set of activities. It uses threat assessment models such as The Virginia Threat Assessment Model and The National Center for the FBI’s Analysis of Violent Crime (NCAVC) Threat Assessment Model to look at many categories for threat analysis, including students’ family background, school culture, and the personality and disciplinary history of the student (Cornell, 2004; O’Toole, 2000).

Once a threat is identified or made, schools need to determine its legitimacy. Langman (2016b) asserted that most threats made would not be acted on or fully implemented. Due to the seriousness of threats and past school shootings, however, all threats must be taken earnestly; but assessing the risk of each individual threat is a challenging task. Scholarly literature and threat analysis documents have suggested that school threat assessment teams must determine whether the threats pose an imminent risk to the school community or whether they are more transient in nature and pose less of a threat. Students that are typically considered a high risk for shootings are students who direct threats at specific targets and mention specific details related to the action they are planning (such as weapon choice, or saying, for example, “I am going to shoot student X with a gun tomorrow”) (O’Toole, 2000). Indeed, many school shooters told at least one other person about their violent plan prior to carrying out the attack (JeeHae, 2013; Langman, 2016a; United States Secret Service and United States Department of Education, 2004; Fein et al., 2002). Threats that are typically determined to represent a medium risk commonly involve comments from students that are illogical (i.e. I am going to use nuclear materials to bomb the school). A student who would be considered a low level risk is one whose threat is vague and not directed at any particular student (O’Toole, 2000).

Certain characteristics are common among individuals who have committed school shootings. However, it is important to again note that individuals not prone at all to committing
school shootings may share these characteristics; thus, while these characteristics may indicate the possibility of a threat, they should not be relied upon exclusively to make a determination (O’Toole, 2000; JeeHae, 2013; Langman, 2016b). These characteristics include: poor coping skills, depression, narcissism, lack of empathy, anger management issues, a challenging relationship with parents, access to weapons, and lack of intimacy (O’Toole, 2000).

Scholars studying this phenomenon have suggested that school staff ought to view schools as potential crime scenes. Administrators in particular need to closely examine their school culture and climate and determine what factors might possibly influence a person to commit a school shooting in their specific setting. Researchers have recommended that school staff try to determine why students might feel detached from school, as the majority of school shooters have an interpersonal dispute with at least one of the victims (JeeHae, 2013). Additionally, the staff can assist in prevention by establishing whether or not their school community provides the climate and procedures to allow students to report other students who make threatening insinuations, as mentioned previously, most school shooters will tell at least one person about the attack prior to the shooting (Langman, 2009; O’Toole, 2000; JeeHae, 2013).

This section of the literature review focused on various threat assessment tools that can help determine possible school shooting perpetrator characteristics and threat attributes. Although school shootings are rare, the potential exists that violence can erupt at any school. The overview of the research specifically looked at threat assessment models such as: The PREpare Model of School Crisis Prevention and Intervention, the Safe School Initiative, the Virginia Threat Assessment Model, and the FBI’s National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime (NCAVC) Threat Assessment Model. These resources allow one to make certain
conclusions regarding threat assessment. Threat assessment is most effective when schools create a multi-disciplinary team to assess levels of seriousness of student threats. Students that carry out shootings may have family issues and may exhibit certain personal characteristics that can classify them as possible school shooters. It is important to again note, many of these characteristics are exhibited by students who will never commit an act of violence, thus making it challenging to make one profile for a school shooter (Burns, 2002; O’Toole, 2000; Cornell, 2004; Brock et al., 2009).

Response

An effective emergency response in the midst of an active shooting incident is critical to mitigating the carnage of an attack. The researcher gleaned key information from the existing literature on response tactics; however, scholarly resources on this specific topic are limited. This section of the review examines emergency preparation within a building; it also discusses best practices to adopt to respond to an active shooter.

To prepare individuals to respond promptly and effectively during an attack requires specific training, repetition of procedures, and clear organization. Not all crises are preventable, but schools must plan for all possible scenarios to lessen the impact in the case of an attack. This requires schools to cultivate a culture of preparedness. This section discusses preparation from the standpoint of the physical building makeup and emergency preparation systems that need to be put in place in an organization (United States Department of Homeland Security, 2008).

The physical makeup of a building is a critical factor in emergency preparation. Research suggests that schools or any organization should have cameras outside of buildings to identify any people going into or out of the building. Additionally, organizations should incorporate supplementary security measures such as registering visitors each time they enter a
building and physical barriers such as bulletproof glass. In schools, barriers that are accessible to move in front of doors in an emergency should be identified. Organizations should also have policies around visitation and weapons clearly stated and posted for the entire school population and the community to view. Buildings should also have multiple evacuation routes mapped, with blueprints and exit plans easily accessible to law enforcement personnel during emergencies (O’Toole, 2000; Brock et al., 2009; United States Department of Homeland Security, 2008).

Emergency preparation systems should be in place within the school community. School staff should be adequately trained as to what to do in an active shooter situation. Research was scarce on this, so the researcher drew parallels from the more abundant and more clearly focused research on preparation for fire safety (National Fire Protection Association, 2012). Consistent practice of procedures and drills throughout the school year is also essential so that all school staff and students understand what exactly to do during a crisis situation. Additionally, along with proper security training, school staff members should be trained in first aid and CPR (National Fire Protection Association, 2012). When practicing emergency plans, the FBI has suggested that schools should always reevaluate, rethink, and revise (O’Toole, 2000; Brock et al., 2009).

Although limited research was available that outlines specific procedures to adopt to respond to an active school shooter situation, some studies did describe best practices more generally. The next section compiles trends from the existing literature on school shootings and fire preventions and discusses recommendations regarding how to respond during an active shooter situation.

When looking at how to create the most effective response in the moment that a school shooting occurs, trends and facts related to certain characteristics of school shootings should be
examined. Most school shootings last less than 15 minutes. Most school shooters use a pistol, and some shooters use rifles. Most of the victims of school shootings are ages 10-19. The majority of school shooters act alone. Most attacks happen during the academic school day. Most attackers are neutralized on-site by law enforcement or school staff, thus making it extremely important for school staff to be properly trained on what to do during a school shooting. Law enforcement response time is approximately three minutes from the time of notification to the time of arrival (Jeehee, 2013; Langman, 2009; United States Department of Homeland Security, 2008; O’Toole, 2000).

During an active shooter situation, research suggests three main strategies individuals under attack or witnessing the incident can follow -- run, hide, or fight. The most optimal scenario is for members of the school community to identify an exit that is accessible and safe, and to use it. As stated previously, it is essential for students and staff to be extremely knowledgeable of the layout of the building, particularly the exits. If an evacuation of some kind is not possible, then hiding is the second best option. Locking doors and barricading entrances to the hiding place with furniture or other obstacles is advised. The third option is to fight and take action against the shooter; this should be employed only as a last resort. If an individual chooses this response, tactics like disorienting the shooter by throwing things at them, yelling, and making improvised weapons are advised (United States Department of Homeland Security, 2008).

When law enforcement arrives at the scene of an active shooter, it is important for staff members to remain calm, raise their hands, and drop everything in their hands so that law enforcement does not make the mistake of believing they are aggressors wielding weapons. Staff members should be prepared to assist law enforcement by giving them the shooter’s
physical description and possible location. It is important to note that the immediate responsibility of law enforcement officials who arrive first is to find the shooter, not to tend to the injured (United States Department of Homeland Security, 2008).

An effective emergency response in the midst of an active shooting incident is critical to mitigating the carnage of an attack. This section of the literature review focused on emergency preparation within a building and best practices to adopt during the initial stages of responding to an active shooter. It was evident from the research studies and policy documents consulted that the physical makeup of a building is a critical factor in determining an organization’s preparedness during an emergency situation such as an active shooting. Emergency plans must consist of a clear structure that puts effective systems in place; it is essential that the building manager be part of the creation of these plans. Practicing emergency response drills is also critical to carrying out an effective response to an active shooter. Characteristics of school shootings such as duration and police response time are critical aspects to take into account when preparing security and prevention measures for active shooting situations. The literature that was consulted revealed three ways individuals could respond to an active shooter: run, hide, or fight. It is evident that the most optimal option is to safely buy time before law enforcement arrives; however there are specific measures a school can take to equip the building and to train school personnel so that the safest response is possible (United States Department of Homeland Security, 2008).

**Conclusion**

This literature review focused on many aspects of prevention and response to school shootings. Most violent deaths in schools are the results of gun violence (O’Donnell, 2001). School shootings have had a consistent upward trend since the early 1900s, specifically a steady
incline each decade for the last 30 years (Langman, 2016c). The literature suggested that school shootings are typically carried out by white lower to middle class males between the ages of 10-19 living in suburban or rural areas (Rocque, 2012; Legge, 2008; JeeHae, 2013; Langman, 2016c). The literature also suggested that many school shooters do experience feelings of depression and social rejection. Research revealed that school shooters typically fall into one of three categories: traumatized, psychotic, or psychopathic (Langman, 2009).

School shootings are infrequent; however, the potential for violence exists in any school, thus making it of utmost importance for stakeholders to take precautionary measures. Threat assessment is most effective when schools create a multi-disciplinary team to assess the various levels of seriousness of threats made by students. Students that carry out shootings may have family issues and may exhibit certain personal characteristics that can help classify them as possible school shooters (Burns, 2001; O’Toole, 2000; Cornell, 2006; Brock et al., 2009).

An effective emergency response to an active shooter is a critical aspect of mitigating damage in an attack. Research suggested that the physical makeup of a building is a critical factor in determining an organization’s preparedness during an emergency situation such as an active shooting incident. Practicing emergency response drills is an important preventive measure to take to prepare personnel to respond to an active shooter. Characteristics of school shootings such as duration and police response time are critical aspects in considering responses to a school shooter. The research identified three ways individuals are advised to respond to an active shooter: run, hide, or fight. In general, this literature review has attempted to identify the parameters for profiling a school shooter and for determining the most effective response to an active shooter; it has also summarized the training and precautionary measures required to assure
a response has a chance of being effective (United States Department of Homeland Security, 2008).
Chapter 3: Research Design

This study explored the following categories and research questions:

• Prevention: Is it possible to profile and anticipate school shooters in order to prevent shootings?

• Preparedness: What are the emergency protocols in place at the middle school in Massachusetts that is the focus of this study, and how can they be strengthened?

• Response: What is the role of faculty and staff in the resolution of an active shooter situation?

Methodology

Determining the research paradigm is an essential part of framing a research proposal (Creswell, 2012). The paradigm must closely relate to the problem being investigated. Choosing a qualitative design allowed the researcher to understand trends and relationships rather than just analyze statistics. The investigator aimed to explore a research problem that the literature did not adequately address; the researcher acquired new information and made a contribution by exploring the experiences of the participants interviewed (Creswell, 2012).

Research Design Approach: Case Study

The investigator chose the case study method to answer the research questions. A case study approach was particularly useful to employ because there was a need to obtain an in-depth appreciation of an issue, event, or phenomenon of interest in its natural real-life context (Creswell, 2012). A case study focuses on a how or why question, which is what the investigator was seeking to understand and answer. This method required no control over the behavioral event, and it focused on a contemporary phenomenon (Creswell, 2012).
Case studies are a type of ethnography; however, they differ from ethnography in several ways. The case study researcher focuses on an activity, event, or program involving individual participants; it describes the activities of the group. Additionally, case study research focuses on an in-depth exploration of the actual “case” at hand based on extensive data collection. In comparison, an ethnographer examines shared patterns of behavior exhibited by a group over time (Creswell, 2012). The case study approach was implemented for this study to allow the researcher to focus on a group of individuals at a school in Massachusetts; it included extensive data collection to determine participants’ understandings of prevention and preparation for and response to a possible active shooting incident.

Various forms of case studies exist: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. This section outlines all three. An intrinsic case study is chosen when the case itself is of interest; intrinsic cases are typically unusual cases. Hughes (2009) described an intrinsic case as one where “the study is undertaken because one wants to better understand the particular case. The case reveals the story. The case does not represent other cases, the case itself is of interest” (p. 237). Intrinsic cases stand alone and are defined as being of interest unto themselves, without generalizations or comparisons. Instrumental cases are those that illuminate a particular issue; the instrumental case is used to shed light, in depth, on one issue (Hughes, 2009). Instrumental cases are used to expand the reader’s interest in the topic. Hughes (2009) asserted, “with less interest in a particular case, researchers may study a number of cases jointly in order to inquire into the phenomenon, population, or general condition” (p. 237). Collective cases, meanwhile, are chosen when a researcher determines that understanding them together will lead to a better understanding of a phenomenon and will perhaps enhance theorizing about a larger collection of
cases. The investigator used the instrumental case study approach to illuminate, in depth, the broader issue of school violence.

The case study research method has been widely used to conduct qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methodology research (Creswell, 2012). Three seminal authors have provided the foundations that shape case study research -- Robert Stake, Robert Yin, and Sharon Merriam. This section of this chapter focuses on the philosophical approaches of Stake, Yin, and Merriam.

Stake (1995) postulated that concentrating on the “one” – for example, a single child or a single system – in a case study provides the structure from which to understand in detail a particular issue or system with its many features and boundaries that might be encountered. Stake asserted that boundaries must be overcome in a case study; behavioral patterns are also critical factors in understanding the case. These boundaries and behavioral patterns are still considered critical factors even if the end result remains unclear. Stake argued that researchers gather information with their own particular bias, which requires them to report their rendition or construction of the constructed reality, and to reflect on knowledge that they gathered through their investigation (Stake, 1995). Stake focused on understanding the phenomenon behind the cases, but he emphasized that this cannot be accomplished without acquiring a comprehensive understanding of the case itself. Acquiring a comprehensive understanding of the case involves not only learning the case, but also studying in detail the process of how one learns about a case. Stake’s method thus involves “progressive focusing,” which is a flexible design that allows researchers to make major changes after they have moved from the design phase to the research phase (Stake, 1995). Additionally, Stake’s method advocates triangulating observations and interpretations. After triangulation takes place, in Stake’s method, a researcher must then seek
out what is common and what is particular about the case, learning from the details of the case to move the process forward towards generalization (Stake, 1995).

Yin (2003) asserted that a case study should be used to investigate important topics not easily covered by other methods. In his presentation of the design and methods of the case study approach, he argued that the case study is a legitimate methodology for conducting inquiries that lead to a theoretical proposition (Yin, 2003). Yin advocated a tight and structured system that breaks a case study into three parts. First, a researcher must define the case that is being studied. Yin suggested that a researcher might redefine the scope and focus of the case while navigating through the research process (Yin, 2003). Second, a researcher must decide to study either a single instrumental case or a collection of multiple cases (Yin, 2003). Yin advocated the use of multiple cases in order to develop theory. Third, Yin claimed that researchers must decide if they would like to embark upon theory development (Yin, 2003). In agreement with Stake, Yin supported the idea of triangulation (Yin, 2003).

Merriam (1998) defined a case as a “single thing, a single entity, a unit in which there are boundaries” (p. 27). Merriam asserted that qualitative researchers make sense of the world through their own experiences. Merriam argued that researchers bring their own biases and life interpretation to a situation; these perspectives interact with other people’s interpretations of the phenomenon being studied (Merriam, 1998). Merriam believed the important philosophical assumption is that reality is constructed by individuals in their social worlds (Merriam, 1998; Yazan, 2015). Merriam stated:

The researcher brings a construction of reality to the research situation, which interacts with other people’s constructions or interpretations of the phenomenon being studied.
The final product of this type of study is yet another interpretation by the researcher of others’ views filtered through his or her own (Merriam, 1998, p.22). Merriam’s identification and construction of a case study was very detailed, as she provided a step-by-step process for designing the qualitative research. This included conducting the literature review, constructing the theoretical framework, identifying the research questions, and crafting the research question. Her design is far more flexible than that of Yin or Stake (Yazan, 2015).

This section discussed the philosophical approaches of three seminal authors who have shaped case study research. Stake, Yin, and Merriam provided relevant and valuable perspectives on case study research. Stake asserted that boundaries must be overcome in a case study and that behavior patterns are critical factors in understanding the case. Yin argued that a case study should be used to investigate important topics not easily covered by other methods. Merriam proposed that qualitative researchers make sense of the world through their own experiences. All three authors agreed that triangulation is an important part of case study methodology (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003; Merriam, 1998).

**Site and Participant Selection**

The case the investigator studied was a middle school in Massachusetts; participants included school personnel. Five participants were selected to participate and provide interview data for this case study. Each participant was employed by the same middle school. The positions the participants held were as follows: dean of students, teacher, social worker, guidance counselor, and school resource officer. According to the literature, these positions play a crucial role in regards to prevention, preparation, and response in the case of an active shooter situation (Cornell, 2004; O’Toole, 2000).
The inclusion criteria for participants were: (a) speaking English proficiently, (b) being part of the selected middle school district, (c) being over 18 years old, and (d) having a proficient level of literacy. The exclusion criteria for participants were: (a) being under 18 years old and (b) having a poor level of literacy. Prior to the start of the interview process, the researcher determined whether participants met the inclusion criteria.

**Sampling, Limitations, and Sample Size**

The investigator was the assistant principal at the middle school that was the focus of this study, and the sampling strategy was convenience sampling. Convenience sampling is utilized when a researcher selects participants because they are willing and available to take part in the study. Since this was a sample of convenience, the inclusion and exclusion criteria were minimal; the participants fit the criteria (Creswell, 2012).

In general, when selecting participants, it is important to choose from as large a sample of the population as possible: the larger the sample, the less potential there is for sampling error to occur (Creswell, 2012). A limitation of this type of sampling is that a researcher cannot say with confidence that the individuals are representative of the population; however, the researcher made a concerted effort to include one individual from each group in the middle school that the literature demonstrates plays an important role in prevention, preparation, and response in an active shooter situation. This study was also limited by the size of the sample. Because research for this case study took place during the summer months, the investigator was unable to attain a larger sample size since most staff are contracted for 10 months out of the year and can be unwilling to volunteer their time during the rest of the year.
Recruitment and Access

Participants in this case study were recruited through the school system where the investigator was employed. It was crucial to obtain permission from several individuals and groups before data was collected. The investigator contacted the superintendent of the school via personal e-mail. The superintendent granted permission to the investigator to perform the study. (Please see Appendix B for contact letter submitted via secure email server). The investigator also received permission from the principal to conduct research at the specific middle school site (please see Appendix C for contact letter submitted via secure email server). Finally, the investigator contacted each participant individually to request participation in the study (please see Appendix D for contact letter submitted via secure email server).

Participants

There were five participants in this study. When discussing the participants, pseudonyms were used to protect their confidentiality. The first participant, Noah, was employed by the middle school that was studied for 4 years. Noah had worked in the education system for 11 years. Noah was a social studies teacher at the middle school that was studied, and his highest degree achieved was a bachelor’s degree. The second participant, Vivian, was employed by the middle school that was studied for 12 years. Vivian had worked in the education field for 12 years. Vivian was a guidance counselor at the middle school that was studied, and her highest degree achieved was a master’s degree. The third participant, Nathan, was employed by the middle school that was studied for 2 years. Nathan had worked in the education system for 23 years. Nathan was the dean of students at the school that was studied, and his highest degree achieved was a master’s degree. The fourth participant, Jessica, was employed by the middle school that was studied for 11 years. Jessica had worked in the education system for 11 years.
Jessica was the social worker at the middle school that was studied, and her highest degree achieved was a master’s degree. The fifth participant, Charles, was employed by the middle school that was studied for 1 year. Charles had worked in the education system for 1 year. Charles was the school resource officer at the middle school that was studied, and his highest degree achieved was a bachelor’s degree.

Each of the participants was employed by the school system in Massachusetts that was used for this case study.

Table 1 presents this data.

Table 1

<table>
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<th>Participant</th>
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<th>Years at school being studied</th>
<th>Years in the education system</th>
<th>Position at school being studied</th>
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<tr>
<td>Vivian</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Guidance counselor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nathan</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Dean of students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Social worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>School resource officer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Collection**

**Interviews**

The questions asked during the semi-structured interviews addressed the following questions:

- Prevention: Is it possible to profile and anticipate school shooters in order to prevent shootings?
• Preparedness: What are the emergency protocols in place at the middle school in Massachusetts that is the focus of this study, and how can they be strengthened?

• Response: What is the role of faculty and staff in the resolution of an active shooter situation?

All participants answered yes to being employed at the middle school in Massachusetts that was the focus of this case study. Other questions determined their highest degree achieved, the number of years they had been in the education system as well as at the school being studied, and their current position at the school. Qualitative data was collected through interviews. At the request of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), each participant was interviewed at an agreed upon public location. Each interview session lasted about 30-45 minutes. General memos and field notes were taken as the interview progressed, and the interviews were digitally recorded through Rev®. Because this sample of participants was determined based on convenience, the inclusion criteria were confirmed during the first section of the interview (Please see Appendix A for complete interview questions), following verbal consent to the informed consent form.

**Informed Consent**

In the contact email that was sent to participants, I provided a detailed explanation of the scope of the project and the role of the participant in the study. The investigator used an unsigned consent form (Appendix E). Participants received the unsigned consent form prior to the interview. At the start of the interview, the participant and I reviewed the form together. The investigator answered any questions the participant had regarding the form and/or the study. Verbal consent was given prior to the continuation of the interview. The consent form did not need to be signed.
The individuals participating in this case study did not receive remuneration of any kind. There was no risk to the individuals who participated. An IRB was submitted to ensure the investigator respected the rights of all participants involved and adhered to all required procedures.

**Data Storage and Confidentiality**

Any information obtained in connection with this study that could be identified with the individuals interviewed remained confidential; information was disclosed only with the participant’s express permission or as required by law. No names were associated with any interview information; any information that could be used to identify a participant was altered to protect confidentiality. The recordings of the interviews were not labeled with participants’ names, but rather with a pseudonym. Rev®, a professional transcriptionist, was used; a transcriber confidentiality statement (Appendix G) was signed. All data files were encrypted and password protected, and only the principal investigator (Professor Kristal Clemons) and the researcher on this project (Zachary Abrams) had access to the files.

The data was used for the researcher’s doctoral thesis project and potentially for future journal articles, books, presentations, or research. Even in those instances, confidentiality will be kept for all participants. Information regarding confidentiality was shared with all participants prior to the start of the interview process, both by reviewing the consent form and verbally consenting before the interview.

Each interview was audio-recorded using an electronic application called “Rev® recording application” on the researcher’s iPad. Rev® has no limit to audio length, and electronic recordings were transferred to a computer from the iPad. Electronic recordings of the interviews and all other electronic documents were downloaded and saved to the researcher’s
personal external hard drive. All files were encrypted and password-protected. Transcripts were saved in the same secure manner as the electronic recordings. Only the researcher and principal investigator had access to these files.

All written documents were kept in a locked desk drawer at the researcher’s home while the investigation took place. After the thesis project is complete, any hard-copy materials containing confidential interviewee information will be destroyed. All remaining electronic data stored on the researcher’s personal external hard drive will remain untouched and kept in a locked safe in the home of the researcher. These remaining data and documents will be destroyed 5 years after the completion of the study.

Data Analysis

Once approval was obtained from the IRB and it was confirmed that the participants met the inclusion criteria, the interviews were conducted. Data was collected through the interviews; the investigator used open-ended questions to try to decrease response bias (Creswell, 2012). Interviews were transcribed directly by the researcher, with the assistance of the computer software program Rev®.

Transcripts were saved in the same secure manner as the electronic recordings. Only the researcher and principal investigator had access to these files. Notes made by the interviewer were also reviewed and typed, and stored securely. There was no attempt to omit words or phrases, as the specific themes emerged organically (Creswell, 2012). The information emerged as it was transcribed, and the investigator was careful to not impose bias on the information analyzed from the interviews and field notes. During the initial process, the investigator transcribed verbatim what was stated in the interviews and perceived on the recordings; memos were also typed and reviewed (Creswell, 2012).
Data analysis was performed through a bottom-up approach as laid out by Creswell (2009). A bottom-up approach focuses on the researcher collecting data, preparing the data for analysis through transcription, reading through the data to obtain a general sense of the material, and then coding the data to determine the superordinate and emergent themes. This process allowed the researcher to determine the commonalities and divergence between the participants’ responses.

Once the interviews were completed, the researcher contacted Rev® Transcription Services. The transcription confidentiality agreement (See Appendix G) was completed and all collected data were submitted to the service. Rev® is a professional service that transcribes data using 128-bit SSL encryption, the highest level of web security available. The files sent to Rev® were never shared and were password protected. The files were only visible to the researcher and the principal investigator. Once the transcriptions were received, participants were given the option to review them. This was done to ensure accuracy of the information.

The data analysis process began with a preliminary exploratory analysis in order to obtain a general sense of the data. Field notes were made in the margins to better understand the trending themes. The interviews were explored separately and in conjunction with one another to identify superordinate and emerging themes.

The researcher employed MAXQDA to assist with the coding process. During this process, I took great care to illustrate each participant’s experiences.

Through looking at the summative experience of all participants, the researcher was able to identify superordinate themes. According to Saldana, superordinate themes are based on commonalities (Saldana, 2009). Lastly, emergent themes were identified through reviewing each
participant’s narrative. Through the understanding of emergent and superordinate themes, the researcher was able to answer the research presented at the beginning of this study.

**Analysis Process**

Analysis began after I finished collecting data and conducting all interviews. Data analysis was performed through a bottom-up approach as laid out by Creswell (2009). A bottom-up approach focuses on a researcher collecting data, preparing the data for analysis through transcription, reading through the data to obtain a general sense of the material, and then coding the data to determine the superordinate and emergent themes. This process of identifying themes allowed the researcher to determine commonality and divergence among the participants to answer the research questions. I will now discuss this exhaustive process at length.

**Preliminary Exploration of Data**

The data analysis process began with the researcher performing a preliminary exploratory analysis. The purpose of this was to obtain a general sense of the data. During this time, the researcher also used memos or field notes in the margins. These memos included short phrases, ideas, concepts, or hunches as to what the coding may demonstrate. Each interview was explored separately and in combination with one another to allow superordinate and emerging themes to be identified.

**Coding**

The process of coding is the ability to segment and label text to form descriptions and broad themes in the data (Saldana, 2013), which are then used to answer the major research question and form an in-depth understanding of the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2009). This researcher employed MAXQDA software to assist with the coding process. This program is rooted in grounded theory, based on “code and retrieve,” and enabled the researcher to combine
qualitative and quantitative procedures. During this process, I took great care to illustrate each participant’s experiences.

Through looking at the summative experience of all participants, I was able to identify superordinate themes. According to Saldana, superordinate themes are based on commonalities (Saldana, 2013). Next, emergent themes were identified through reviewing each participant’s narrative.

According to Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009), it is the researcher’s responsibility to demonstrate and identify what was learned from each participant. After that, it is important to identify the superordinate and emergent themes to determine the “power” behind each theme in identifying the answers to the research questions. To easily identify these themes, tables were provided that appropriately and sequentially linked the superordinate themes with the emergent themes and participant responses. This gives the reader a clear understanding of the connections between responses and themes and an in depth understanding of how the responses relate to the overall central phenomenon.

Validity, Reliability, and Limitations

Validity is the development of sound evidence to demonstrate that the test interpretation matches its proposed use (Creswell, 2012). The investigator looked closely at one-on-one interviews as a way of obtaining an in-depth appreciation of an issue, event, or phenomenon of interest in its natural real-life context. This instrument was appropriate for the purposes of this study. Three different types of validity are incorporated when conducting a qualitative study: construct validity, external validity, and internal validity. Construct validity pertains to inferences about the constructs or variables in the study; it determines whether the study is credible and accurate. Internal validity draws upon the cause and effect relationship among the
variables. External validity relates to whether the information from the case is generalizable.

There are various threats to internal validity, including the time that passes between the beginning and end of the experiment, maturation of the participants, the selection of the participants, the ability for the participants to drop out at any time, and interactions within the selection. While I was not able to address all threats to internal validity, the following steps were taken to address most of the threats: the researcher performed interviews within one week of each other; there was minimal risk to the individuals participating in this trial, increasing the chances that participants would remain in the study until it was concluded; and finally, participants agreed not to discuss the interview questions during the data collection process with the confidentiality agreement (Creswell, 2012).

The reliability of a study involves the ability for the data collection instruments and analysis to produce similar results over a certain period of time. The investigator used the same interview form for each participant. One pilot interview was conducted to work through any issues related to interview bias, discussion of the open-ended questions, and understanding of the interview flow. This resulted in strong internal consistency and enhanced reliability because procedures were fine-tuned, and one version of the instrument was completed to improve the subsequent interviews (Creswell, 2012).

The investigator went through several steps to develop the questions used in the interviews, including identifying the purpose of the instrument, reviewing the literature, and then writing the questions.

There are many limitations to this study. With regard to external validity, this study was not deductive in nature since it was small; therefore, it may not be generalizable. Interviews were conducted; bias can arise with interviews due to poorly constructed questions, poor recall,
and problems with reflexivity. For example, an interviewee may answer questions according to what he or she believes are the correct or desired answers the interviewer is seeking (Creswell, 2012). These factors, combined, may affect the reliability of the instrument used.

**Conclusion**

This chapter reviewed the case study methodology selected to investigate the research questions. Numerous types of case studies were discussed; this research employed an instrumental case study. The work of Yin, Stake, and Merriam, key theorists of the case study method, was discussed. The investigator discussed the collection of data and the simple inclusion and exclusion criteria that were used in this study. This chapter reviewed convenience sampling, the approach chosen for the study, and described limitations and how the investigator attempted to minimize them. This chapter reviewed the processes that guided the interviews and determined the channels of access to participants. This chapter also reviewed data storage and how confidentiality was maintained. Data analysis and intricate coding procedures were discussed. This chapter also reviewed validity and reliability, as well as limitations inherent to the study. This chapter described the five participants involved in this study and the process of analyzing their responses. This chapter also discussed the transcription process. Lastly, this chapter reviewed the preliminary exploration of data and the exhaustive process of coding all information to form an in-depth understanding of the central phenomenon.
Chapter 4: Findings of the Study

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize the responses from each participant interview. This chapter provides a brief biographical sketch of each participant and discusses his or her responses to each of the interview questions. This chapter also discusses how each participant’s responses were reflected in the super ordinate and emergent themes. Pseudonyms are used to protect the confidentiality of all subjects.

Summary of Each Interview

Noah

Noah began by describing his role at the middle school. Noah had been at the middle school being studied for 4 years and had been in the education field for 11 years. He began as a teaching assistant and now was a seventh grade social studies teacher. When asked if he knew of any students in the school who experienced trauma he said, “Trauma as far as school shootings, that’s an area of no, but trauma within the family, death of parents, bullying, et cetera, yes.” He stated that he knew of students who were bullied and handled it through the institution’s protocol. He knew of students diagnosed with a mental illness and stated that he had witnessed violence in school in the form of fistfights and pushing. Noah believed the identifiers for a school shooter were students who were withdrawn and took themselves out of the school environment, who seemed to be “going through the motions.” He was unaware of the Multi Hazard Evacuation Plan of 2000 or the Medical Emergency Response Plan of 2012 in Massachusetts.

Noah also stated that he was aware of the school plan for his institution, in which his role would be to shelter in place, lock the door, and shut off the lights until the code was called off. He did not believe there was adequate training to prepare staff and students for an active shooter
situation. In discussing how the school’s training could be improved, he stated, “it’s obviously a sensitive subject, but I think that needs to be prepared for.” He went on to assert:

I think our overall response for situations needs a little bit more training for the teachers, especially with new teachers that come in every year. Not just given an orange backpack [emergency bag] and not really given much training, so I think that's something that needs to be done on a yearly basis. As far as an active shooter, I think that there are other methods that we could switch over to, primarily from what I've roughly heard on ALICE [alert, lockdown, inform, counter, evacuate] and being more proactive than reactive, is something that we can maybe also learn about. Maybe not the whole program, but bits and pieces of it, to be more productive and obviously the safety of the students and the staff.

He did not believe the staff was well trained by law enforcement, “at least not to my knowledge.”

Noah believed the police would be responsible for resolving an active shooter situation; however during the few moments it would take them to get there, the situation would be handled by security within the building. Table 2 outlines the superordinate and emergent themes that Noah discussed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Super-Ordinate Theme</th>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
<th>Participant Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experience Trauma</td>
<td>School shootings</td>
<td>“Trauma as far as school shootings, that’s an area of no but trauma within family, death of parents, bullying, et cetera, yes.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Death of parents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trauma within the family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I’ve had students come to me with issues of other students bullying, I guess and I’ve tried to deal with that through the proper protocol that we”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental illness</td>
<td>Present in the school system</td>
<td>“I think as far as a school shooter, maybe someone that's a little bit more withdrawn. Takes themselves out of the school environment.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At-risk students</td>
<td>Withdrawing from friends from their social group</td>
<td>“Maybe just going through the motions. Maybe withdrawing from friends that they have associated with before or perhaps even teachers that they were friendly with or cordial with before and just removing themselves from the group.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Withdrawn from teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Take themselves out of the school environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Going through the motions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent tendencies</td>
<td>Exert physical violence</td>
<td>“Yes. Students that I think would exert physical violence on other students as maybe a fist fight or pushing or shoving in the hallway, to that extent.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role during an active shooter situation</td>
<td>Shelter in place</td>
<td>“I would assume that would be a stay in place, so we would lock down the rooms and go through that procedure that we have here of putting the students in the designated location within the classroom.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lock down rooms and shut lights</td>
<td>“Locking the door, shutting the lights, and staying in place until the code is announced over the PA.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Await call over the loudspeaker</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparedness of staff/students in time of an active shooter situation</td>
<td>Lack of knowledge of the multi-hazard evacuation plan and medical emergency response plan</td>
<td>“I am not aware of the multi-hazard evacuation plan.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of student awareness during an active shooter</td>
<td>“I am not aware of the medical emergency response plan.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of formal training by school staff leaders</td>
<td>Do you feel like the school has done adequate training to prepare staff if there were an active shooter? The participant responded, “No.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of law</td>
<td>Do you feel that students are well aware of what to do during an active shooter? The participant responded, “No.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>enforcement assisting with formal training</strong></td>
<td>Do you feel as if students have practice in active shooter situation, enough to perform the tasks required under intense pressure? The participant responded, “No.” Has there been enough formal training by the school leaders on active shooter situations? The participant responded, “Not to my knowledge.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Enhance school security** | Better training for teachers and new teachers that come in that year  
Training done on a yearly basis  
Being proactive instead of reactive | “It's obviously a sensitive subject, but I think it's something that needs to be prepared for.”  
“I think our overall response for situations needs a little bit more training for the teachers, especially with new teachers that come in every year.”  
“As far as an active shooter, I think that there's other methods that we could switch over to, primarily from what I've roughly heard on ALICE and being more proactive than reactive, is something that we can maybe also learn about.” |
| **Resolve** | Police  
Security in the building | “I would assume to resolve and to get rid of the active shooter, I would assume would be the police. However, I know that they are usually a while to get there, so maybe security within the building to maybe hold it off. Hold on until the police get there. That's just a guess.” |

**Vivian**

Vivian began by describing her role at the middle school. She had been with the school district being studied for 12 years and had been in the field of education for 12 years. Vivian was a Spanish teacher for 8 years and was now a guidance counselor. Vivian had been at the school throughout numerous administrations and could comment on trends and patterns she had
seen throughout her tenure at the school. Vivian stated that she was aware of students who had trauma in their daily life, including students who had witnessed the death of a family member, were victims of sexual assault, and were victims of domestic violence in and out of the house. She also stated that she was aware of students who were actively bullied at the school. She discussed students diagnosed with mental illness: “We have some students who have been diagnosed with different mental illnesses who we are usually working with, based on that, working with an adjustment counselor to help them.” When asked if certain students posed a threat to another’s safety, Vivian stated, “Over the years I’ve had students who have been physically aggressive towards other students who I do believe have the potential to be… to cause physical harm to others.”

When Vivian discussed students who may be at risk of being a school shooter, she stated that it was usually students on the outside of social circles, who kept to themselves but were holding a lot of aggression on the inside. Vivian stated that one could sometimes see violence in their art and writing and they may participate in violent video games. Vivian also believed there was not a lot of parental involvement with these students, and they were also kids who had been bullied through the years.

Vivian was not aware of the Multi-Hazard Evacuation Plan or the Medical Emergency Plan put in place in 2000 and 2012 by the state of Massachusetts. Vivian stated that her role in the event of a school shooter situation would be to wait for direction from administration and then either shelter in place or evacuate depending on the location of the shooter. She did not believe staff and students were prepared for this type of violent event, and law enforcement had not assisted with the formal training of the staff and students. She believed more training should be conducted within the institution. She believed the active shooter situation would be resolved
by law enforcement. Table 3 outlines the superordinate and emergent themes that Vivian discussed.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Super-Ordinate Themes</th>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
<th>Participant Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experience trauma</td>
<td>Death of family members</td>
<td>“Yes, I am aware of students who have been involved in trauma in our school. In my role as a counselor I've met with students when they've reported trauma and also when they've dealt with past trauma.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sexual assault</td>
<td>“I've dealt with students who have witnessed death of family members, who have been victims of sexual assaults, who have been witnesses to numerous types of violence whether it be domestic and/or outside the home.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Witnesses to numerous types of violence</td>
<td>“Don’t have a lot of parent involvement or are bullied in school.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Domestic violence/outside the home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental illness</td>
<td>Present in the school</td>
<td>“We have some students who have been diagnosed with different mental illnesses who we are usually working with, based on that, working with an adjustment counselor to help them.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At-risk students</td>
<td>Outside of social circles</td>
<td>“Personally, I would say that we look for the students who are on the outside of social circles, who keep to themselves, the quiet kids who seem to be quiet but holding a lot of aggression on the inside. Maybe kids who we see sometimes in their writing can write about violent acts, kids who are interested in, or overly interested in, violent acts that have happened in the past, who may play a lot of violent video games at home, don't have a lot of parent involvement, kids who have been bullied throughout the years.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Violent writing pieces</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Playing violent video games</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent tendencies</td>
<td>Physical violence demonstrated in school</td>
<td>“Over the years I’ve had students who have been physically aggressive towards other students who I do believe I have the potential to be ... to”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


| Role during an active shooter situation | Await administration instruction  
Shelter in place or evacuate | “My specific role would be to wait for direction from administration as to what to do in the specific situation, either stay in place or evacuate.”  
“I think my role, depending on what the plan would be, would be to make sure that we get all the kids out of the building out of the building safely or to make sure all kids stay in place and then be there to support families and students in the aftermath.” |
|---|---|---|
| Preparedness of staff/students during an active shooter situation | Lack of knowledge of multi-hazard evacuation plan and medical emergency response plan  
Lack of adequate training for staff  
Lack of adequate training for students/perform under intensive pressure  
Lack of law enforcement involvement in training | Do you know what the multi-hazard evacuation plan for schools developed in 2000 is? If yes, please describe it. The participant responded, “I do not.”  
Do you know what the medical emergency response plan for schools 2012 is? If yes, please describe it. The participant responded, “I don’t believe so.”  
Do you feel like the school has done adequate training to prepare staff if there were to be an active shooter? The participant responded, “No.”  
Do you feel like students are well aware of what to do during an active shooter? The participant responded, “No.”  
Has there been enough formal training by the school leaders on active shooter situations? The participant responded, “No.”  
“Has law enforcement assisted with any form of active shooter school training? The participant responded “No.” |
| Enhance school security | Shooter training | “I believe we should start having some active shooter training.” |
| Resolve | Law enforcement | “For resolving an active shooter
Nathan

Nathan began by describing his role at the middle school. Nathan had been in the education system for 23 years and was in his second year at the middle school being studied. While Nathan had different job titles at other schools, he was the dean of students at the middle school being studied. Nathan had a comprehensive background in therapeutic environments as an administrator, and understood aspects of trauma and de-escalation within a school setting. As dean of students, Nathan was the lead when it came to discipline and school climate within the school, which made his perspective on violence within the school of extreme importance to the study. He was aware of students who had experienced trauma, but admitted that there may be many students the administration and staff were not aware of. He knew about students being bullied and of mental illnesses among students at the school. He believed there were violent acts that occurred at the school, including fighting, hitting, punching, and kicking. He believed that students who were a threat to the school system had “a personal background, stress, a trigger, something that sets them off, and obviously a target.”

Nathan was not aware of the Multi-Hazard Evacuation Plan or the Medical Emergency Response Plan developed by the state of Massachusetts. He stated that his specific role during an active shooter situation would be to make sure students got out of the building and to ensure other staff members were in a safe spot. He believed the school staff was prepared in the event of a school shooting: “Yes, we go through training and drills at the beginning of the year and throughout the school year to work on this.” He also believed students were prepared because of the drills, however he knew the stress of the situation might cause the students to not perform
according to the drills practiced. He stated that school leaders had enough formal training: “Yes, we’ve had the police department and the fire department come in and act like an active shooter and we’ve gone through the building and make sure the teachers and the students are following the protocol.” Nathan stated that while he felt the staff and students were prepared, the institution could improve active school shooter training by conducting the drills more often and at more random times. If an active shooting occurred, he believed the police would be responsible for resolving the situation. Table 4 outlines the super-ordinate and emergent themes that Nathan discussed.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Super-Ordinate Theme</th>
<th>Emergent Theme</th>
<th>Participant Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students Who Experience trauma</td>
<td>Trauma is present in students in this school</td>
<td>“Yes. I think there are many students at this school that have experienced trauma.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of awareness by faculty/staff of students who have experienced trauma</td>
<td>“There are also some students that we aren't aware of that have experienced trauma. Yes, I think there's a great deal of students at this school.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td>“Every year there are incidents where students have been bullied. We investigate them and some of them have been found to have happened.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental illness</td>
<td>Mental illness is present in the school</td>
<td>“Yes, there are many students that have mental issues, mental diagnosis, in the school.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent tendencies</td>
<td>Physical acts of violence during the school year</td>
<td>“Yes. Very often there are incidents that happen in school where violent, physical acts happen in school. Fighting, hitting, punching, kicking, that type of thing.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At-risk students</td>
<td>Concerns/issues in personal background</td>
<td>“Personal background, stress, if there's a trigger, something that sets them off, and obviously a target.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role during an active shooter situation</td>
<td>Evacuation</td>
<td>“My specific role would be make sure the students get out of the building and”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparedness of staff/students during an active shooter situation</td>
<td>Safe Space</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of knowledge of multi-hazard evacuation plan and medical emergency response plan</td>
<td>Do you know what the multi-hazard evacuation plan for schools developed in 2000 is? If yes, please describe it. Participant responded, “No, I do not.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate training of staff</td>
<td>“Yes, we go through training and drills at the beginning of the year and throughout the school year to work on this.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate training of students/under intensive stress</td>
<td>“Yes, we go over it. We talk about it and they practice it in the school during the drills.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law enforcement training of staff</td>
<td>“You never can tell when there's stress involved and there's an incident you can't be 100% for sure. In terms of what we could do in terms of training them, I think we would do everything that we can.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Yes, we've had the police department and the fire department come in and act like an active shooter and we've gone through the building and make sure the teachers and the students are following the protocol.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participant responded, “yes” to formal law enforcement training of staff.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enhance school security</th>
<th>Drills performed at random intervals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I would say, more often and at more random times. We do a lot of it at the beginning of the school year. I think we should continue to do it throughout the whole school year.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resolve</th>
<th>Police</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I believe the police are responsible for doing that.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Jessica began by describing her role at the middle school. She had been employed there for 11 years and had been in the education field for 11 years. She was the adjustment counselor (social worker) for the middle school. Jessica handled many crises throughout the school day, and worked with the school’s most challenging students, which was a critical perspective for this research. She stated that she was aware of students who had suffered all sorts of trauma, including violence, homelessness, and poverty. She was aware of students with a mental health diagnosis and was not aware of students who might be a threat to another’s safety within the institution at that time.

When asked what she believed were indicators for students who were at risk to become a school shooter, she stated, “I think mental health issues that are not being addressed, not being treated. Major life stressors that aren’t being managed, lack of support either at home or within the school.” She was not aware of the Multi Hazard Evacuation Plan or the Medical Emergency Response Plan for schools in Massachusetts.

When asked to describe her role if there were an active shooter she stated, “Turn lights off. Lock doors. Block doors, if possible. Then shelter students and yourself in a designated location away from windows or any exposed areas until the all clear is given.” Jessica did not believe that students and staff were prepared for a school shooter. “I do not believe there is enough drilling, so that it’s not automatic when a situation may or may not happen… There are a lot of confusion around the policies with that and the procedures.” When asked to discuss student preparedness she stated that she felt the younger students were better prepared, attributing this to possibly being trained better in the elementary schools. She did not believe the
older students knew what to do. Jessica did not believe there had been enough formal training for staff because there was only one discussion or talk per year about school-shooting situations. She believed the training was also at a bad time of the year, “typically at the beginning of the school year when there’s a lot of information being thrown at the staff. I think it’s lost in the shuffle and it’s not made to be as important as it needs to be.” She stated that she did not believe law enforcement had assisted with any formal active shooter training, with the exception of one talk given by the school resource officer.

Jessica believed training needed to be improved and various scenarios needed to be practiced throughout the building, not just in the classroom. She would have liked to see some focus on larger areas such as hallways and the cafeteria. She believed that law enforcement would resolve a school shooting in conjunction with school officials.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Super-Ordinate Theme</th>
<th>Emergent Theme</th>
<th>Participant Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experience trauma</td>
<td>Homelessness</td>
<td>“I'm aware of events that they've suffered through and that information comes to us either through the student, the family, the teachers. They've suffered all different kinds of trauma. Depending on violence, homelessness, poverty.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Violence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental illness</td>
<td>Present in the school</td>
<td>Do you know of any students who have mental illness diagnosis in the school? Participant responded, “Not at this time.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At-risk students</td>
<td>Mental health issues not addressed</td>
<td>“I think mental health issues that are not being addressed, not being treated. Major life stressors that aren't being managed. Lack of support either at home or within the school. I think that's it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Major life stressors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of support at</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent tendencies</td>
<td>No students are a threat to the school</td>
<td>Are there students in the school who you would deem a threat to another’s safety? Participant responded, “Not at this time.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Role during an active   | Shelter in Place                        | “To shelter in place with whatever students I may have in my office.”  
| active shooter situation|                                        | “Turn lights off. Lock doors. Block doors, if possible. Then shelter students and yourself in a designated location away from windows or any exposed areas until the all clear is given.” |
| Preparedness of staff   | Lack of knowledge of multi hazard       | Do you know what the multi hazard evacuation plan for the school developed in 2000 is? If yes, please describe it. Participant responded, “I’m not sure.”  
| /students during an      | evacuation plan and medical emergency   | Do you know what the medical emergency response plans for schools in 2013? If yes, please describe it. Participant responded, “No.”  
| active shooter situation| plan                                    | “I don't think there's been enough drilling, so that it's not automatic when a situation may or may not happen. Either for staff to know what to do in an emergency or if our students know what to do in an emergency. There's a lot of confusion around policies with that and procedures.”  
|                         | Lack of adequate training for staff     | “I think we get, maybe one discussion or talk per year on what to do in safety situations. Typically at the beginning of the school year when there's a lot of information thrown at staff. I think it's lost in the shuffle and it's not made to be as important as it needs to be.”  
|                         | Lack of student awareness               | “I think we've had a talk from our school safety person, but not the Police Department.”  
|                         | Law enforcement assistance with training|                                                                                                                                 |
| Enhance school security | Increased training                      | “I think we need to have more training. I think it needs to be taken seriously.”  
|                         | Various                                 |                                                                                                                                  |
Charles

Charles began by describing his role at the middle school. Charles was a detective in the town in which the middle school is located. He had been at the institution for one year and was part of the education system for one year. His job was school resource officer. Charles brought a unique perspective to the research, as he was a law enforcement detective in the town. Charles was specifically trained in active shooter situations, and played a major role in the safety of the school. Charles stated that he saw students experience trauma, including verbal, physical, and bullying. He had witnessed bullying in the school system, including a situation where older students were bullying younger students; he felt as if the younger students were unaware of whom to contact in that case. Charles was aware of students with mental illness and behavioral issues including attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and schizophrenia. He believed there were students who were a threat to the school, and he had worked with the school to separate those students from the student population at large.

He believed there were indicators a student may possess if at risk of becoming a school shooter. He stated they were “just violent tendencies, maybe the way they interact, their behavior, or certain outbursts…no ability to control their emotions…. Maybe when they don’t
get their way, they react differently, maybe they throw things, they assault other students, they
assault teachers.”

Charles was not aware of the Multi-Hazard Evacuation Plan or the Medical Emergency
Response Plan set by the state of Massachusetts. He stated that his role during the time of an
active shooter was:

I obviously call into dispatch. I let them know what we have. If I can get a description of
the shooter and where they are, I relay that information. My goal is to preserve life and
safety. If I can figure out how many, because usually if there's one, there’s two, if there’s
two, there’s three. That’s how we’re taught. Don’t just assume that, if you see one
person that's involved in a school shooting, don't think there's only one. I try to get as
much information as I can. Make sure the plans are in place for the school, lockdown
plans. Just try to get as much authorities and as much help as I can, medical, police, fire,
things of that nature.

Charles stated that he felt students were prepared for an active shooter, but to improve
there could always be more practice and drills. He believed the institution should practice to
improve on certain aspects of the drills, such as knowing whether students should stay or leave
the room. He also believed school security could be improved upon by ensuring all doors were
secure. He believed the staff was well trained in the school’s lock-down procedures. When it
comes to the resolution of the school shooter situation, he believed the police were responsible
for resolving an active shooter situation, but everyone including administrators must act as a
team to protect as many staff and students as possible until law enforcement arrived.

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Super-Ordinate Theme</th>
<th>Emergent Theme</th>
<th>Participant Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experience trauma</td>
<td>Verbal trauma</td>
<td>“Yes I’ve encountered students who’ve had certain types of trauma.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physical trauma</td>
<td>“I’ve had situations where I’ve witnessed younger classmen, let's say like 6th graders, being bullied by 7th and 8th graders. Of course, being new to the middle school, coming from elementary school, they don't really know how to handle that.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental illness</td>
<td>ADD/ADHD</td>
<td>“Yeah. There are some students who maybe have been diagnosed with certain behavioral disorders, maybe ADD or ADHD or schizophrenia, or just other mental disorders that I cannot really name off the bat, but just encountering and talking to the social workers of the school, I'm aware of certain mental disorders that some students may possess.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Schizophrenia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At-risk students</td>
<td>Violent behavior</td>
<td>“Maybe the way they interact, their behavior, maybe having certain outbursts, not controlling their emotions. These are signs that I think should raise a red flag to students as well as faculty, parents and authorities. Just stuff out the norm. Maybe when they don't get their way, they react differently, maybe they throw things, they assault other students, they assault teachers. Things of that nature.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uncontrollable emotions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Outbursts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent tendencies</td>
<td>Threat to school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role during an active shooter situation</td>
<td>Describe the shooter</td>
<td>“When they’re an active shooter and I'm aware of it, I obviously call into dispatch. I let them know what we have.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preserve life and safety</td>
<td>“If I can get a description of the shooter and where they are, I relay that information.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lockdown plans</td>
<td>“My goal is to preserve life and safety.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I try to get as much information as I can.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“Make sure the plans are in place for the school, lockdown plans. Just try to get as much authorities and as much help as I can, medical, police, fire, things of that nature.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preparedness of staff/students during an active shooter situation</th>
<th>Lack of knowledge of multi hazard evacuation plan and medical emergency plan</th>
<th>Do you know what the multi-hazard evacuation plan for schools developed in 2000 is? If yes, please describe it. Participant responded, “I do not.” Do you know what the medical emergency response plans for schools in 2012 is? Participant responded, “I do not.” “I feel like the school has done adequate training, especially in this day and age with the past school shootings that we've had in other area.” “Just based upon the drills that we've had last year, I feel like they are. I feel like, when it comes to lockdown drills, it's pretty on point. You don't see students roaming the hallways.” “I looked at the policy and what the school's lockdown procedure is when it comes to this situation, and I feel like it's the best bet.” “Yes. Yes, we have. Me being the school resource officer, I play a big role in that, working with the director of security of the schools. We just feed off each other. He asks me what can the school improve on, and vice versa, as far as our part in law enforcement. What should we do? Where should we stage? Things of that nature.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enhance school security</td>
<td>More secure environment</td>
<td>“It can be improved in many ways. As far as entering the school, I feel like there should be a more secure environment, whether it be from the outside or inside.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
"We just have to make sure that all the doors are secure because if somebody knows this school, and they know there's a door that's always open, let's say the janitorial door or the door by the side entrance to the school, the gym, they can get in through that way."

"I feel like the police, but I feel like we should all work as a team, but ultimately, the police is going to neutralize the threat or the threats involved in the active shooter."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resolve</th>
<th>Police</th>
<th>Team work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“We just have to make sure that all the doors are secure because if somebody knows this school, and they know there's a door that's always open, let's say the janitorial door or the door by the side entrance to the school, the gym, they can get in through that way.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I feel like the police, but I feel like we should all work as a team, but ultimately, the police is going to neutralize the threat or the threats involved in the active shooter.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary of Super-Ordinate and Emergent Themes**

Many emergent themes came into play with each participant, however eight superordinate themes were demonstrated through the interviews. These superordinate themes are as follows: *Experience of trauma, Mental illness, Violent tendencies, At-risk students, Preparedness of staff/students during an active shooter situation, Role during an active shooter situation, Enhance school security, and Resolution of an active shooter situation.* According to Smith et al. (2009), “Different participants may manifest the same super-ordinate theme in different themes.” While each participant discussed varying ideas regarding each concept, there was a degree of commonality among all participants.

Table 7 identifies each superordinate theme and how each participant identified with that theme throughout the study. This table demonstrates the commonalities and areas of divergence among the participants. Those ideas will be summarized below.
Table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Super-ordinate Theme</th>
<th>Emergent Theme</th>
<th>Noah</th>
<th>Vivian</th>
<th>Nathan</th>
<th>Jessica</th>
<th>Charles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experience trauma</td>
<td>Death of parents</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trauma in the family</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sexual assault</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Domestic violence</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Witness violence outside of school</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of awareness by faculty/staff regarding trauma</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Homelessness</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental illness</td>
<td>Present in the school system</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At-risk students</td>
<td>Withdrawn from friends/social group</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Withdrawn from teachers</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Going through the motions</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Violent writing pieces</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Playing violent video games</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Target</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Concerns/issues in their personal background</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of family support</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mental health issues not addressed</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A major life stress</td>
<td>Uncontrollable emotions/outbursts</td>
<td>Violent tendencies</td>
<td>Role during an active shooter situation</td>
<td>Preparedness of staff/students during active shooter situation</td>
<td>Enhance school security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical violence demonstrated in the school year</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No threat to the school system</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelter in place/lockdown</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evacuate</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Await direction over the loudspeaker</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe the shooter</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preserve Life</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of knowledge of the multi-hazard evacuation plan and medical emergency response plan</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of student awareness during an active shooter</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of formal staff training</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of law enforcement assistance with formal staff/student training</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not able to perform under intensive pressure</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate/formal training of staff</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More training for teachers</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactive approach</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Random intervals</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Students Who Experience Trauma

The superordinate theme *Students Who Experience Trauma* included various emergent themes. Noah and Vivian both stated that students had witnessed trauma such as the death of their parents. Noah, Vivian, and Nathan discussed trauma in the family as part of their students’ experience. Only Noah brought up sexual assault as a type of trauma experienced. Nathan, the dean of students, stated that the root of the issue might be a lack of awareness by the staff regarding student trauma. Jessica discussed issues such as homelessness or poverty, but other participants did not bring this up. Lastly, all participants agreed that bullying was part of the trauma students have experienced within the school.

Mental Illness

All participants agreed that there were children with known mental illnesses within the middle school. While one of the participants was licensed to deal with a discussion on mental illness, the other participants did not expand on this topic as it was out of the scope of their practice.

At-risk Students

This superordinate theme included the greatest number of emergent themes. Many subjects used characteristics to describe students as at-risk. The Massachusetts Department of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>More secure environment</th>
<th>Resolve</th>
<th>Police/law enforcement</th>
<th>Security in the building</th>
<th>Teamwork from everyone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
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Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) described factors that place students at risk as, “schools, community, and family related factors” (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2008). Some student-related factors are attendance/truancy, behavior/discipline problems, poor peer relationships, and illness/disability. The DESE mentioned family factors such as low socioeconomic status, dysfunctional parental involvement, and domestic violence. School-related issues could be lack of adequate counseling, negative school climate, and suspensions/expulsions. Community-related issues could be lack of community support services, incidence of criminal activity, and lack of school community linkage. Noah and Vivian stated that students who withdrew from friends, social groups, and teachers, or were just going through the motions, were students who may be at risk to be a school shooter. Vivian, the school counselor, brought to light that students who may play violent video games, or have violent writing pieces, were most at risk. Nathan discussed students having a certain target in the school. Only Nathan discussed personal issues and Jessica stated that factors might include mental health issues not being addressed or major life stressors (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2008).

**Violent Tendencies**

All but one of the participants reported that there was physical violence demonstrated throughout the school year. Nathan, the dean of students, stated that while physical violence was demonstrated, the student was not a threat to the school at large.

**Role during an Active Shooter Situation**

All participants responded that they knew their role during an active shooter situation. All participants except Charles discussed shelter in place options. Noah, Vivian, and Nathan discussed evacuation plans. Only Noah and Vivian stated that they would await direction over
the loudspeaker on what to do next. Lastly, Charles, the school resource officer, stated that he would try to describe the shooter and preserve life.

**Preparedness of Staff/Students during an Active Shooter Situation**

All participants reported they had never heard of the Multi-Hazard Evacuation Plan of 2000 or the Medical Emergency Response Plan of 2012. The Multi-Hazard Evacuation Plan is a law that mandates the superintendent of each school in Massachusetts to meet with fire and police chiefs to formulate a school specific plan. This plan must include school violence, natural disasters, and emergency situations such as fires. This plan must include a building crisis response team, designated manager of an incident, communication plan, and protocols for evacuations. This law should be presented to staff at the beginning of each school year. All schools must develop the Medical Emergency Response Plan for Schools. The purpose of this plan is to minimize the incidence of life-threatening emergencies and to promote efficient responses to emergencies. The school nurse, school athletic team physicians, coaches, trainers, and local emergency medical services agency must develop the plan. The school is required to practice this throughout the year. School staff members should be aware of this as it is practiced throughout the year (Cabral et al., 2014).

Noah, Vivian, and Jessica – the teacher, guidance counselor, and social worker -- reported that there was a lack of student and staff training for an active shooter situation. These same participants also responded there was a lack of law enforcement involvement with this topic. Only Nathan and Charles, the dean of students and school resource officer, felt students and staff were appropriately trained. They also agreed that law enforcement had been appropriately involved in the training. All participants agreed that it was uncertain whether the
students and staff would react as drilled under the intense pressure of an actual school shooter situation.

**Enhance School Security**

All except Charles stated that more training needed to be done with the faculty and staff in order to enhance school security. Nathan stated that it needed to be performed at random intervals throughout the school year. Noah, a schoolteacher, stated it needed to be performed in a more proactive manner. Only Charles, the school resource officer, stated that the focus needed to be on a more secure environment, including locking doors and windows so perpetrators could not enter.

**Resolution of Active Shooter Situation**

All participants agreed that police or other law enforcement were responsible for resolving a school shooting. Noah, Nathan, and Charles reported that there might be a period of time before the police came during which the school would rely on its own security within the building to resolve the school shooter situation. Only Charles, the school resource officer, stated that while the police would eventually resolve the situation, it might take a team effort of the entire school to try to resolve it prior to their arrival.

**Conclusion**

This chapter reviewed the findings of the study. The first section summarized each of the participant interviews, and provided tables that appropriately and sequentially linked the superordinate themes with the emergent themes and participant responses. Following that section, a summary chart showed the commonalities and divergences of all participants’ summary statements regarding each superordinate theme. There were many common findings throughout the interviews. Participants unanimously agreed that bullying was part of the trauma
students had experienced within the school. Participants unanimously agreed that there were children with known mental illnesses within the institution. All but one participant reported that there was physical violence demonstrated throughout the school year. All participants responded that they knew their role during an active shooter situation. All participants reported that they had never heard of the Multi-Hazard Evacuation Plan of 2000 or the Medical Emergency Response Plan of 2012. Participants unanimously agreed that police or other law enforcement were responsible for resolving a school shooting.

There was a discrepancy noted among the responses of the classroom-based school staff (social studies teacher, guidance counselor, and social worker) and the administration and safety staff (dean of students and school resource officer). The classroom staff reported that there was a lack of student and staff training for an active shooter situation, and that there was a lack of law enforcement involvement with this topic. The dean of students and school resource officer felt students and staff were appropriately trained and that law enforcement had been appropriately involved in the training. However, all of them agreed that it was uncertain whether the students and staff would react as drilled under the intense pressure of an active school shooter situation. All participants agreed that police or other law enforcement were responsible for resolving a school shooting, with only one participant saying that it may require a team effort from the whole school to resolve an active shooter situation.
Chapter 5: Summary and Discussion of the Findings

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this dissertation was to investigate the profile of school shooters as a way to prevent further shootings, investigate current emergency protocols used at a school in Massachusetts, and understand the level of training provided to faculty and staff to help them respond to a school shooter. School shootings and tragedies can be avoided through understanding certain patterns of violence and having a response protocol (Everett & Price, 1995).

This dissertation focused on three research questions:

• Prevention: Is it possible to profile and anticipate school shooters in order to prevent shootings?

• Preparedness: What are the emergency protocols in place at the middle school in Massachusetts that was the focus of this study, and how can they be strengthened?

• Response: What is the role of faculty and staff in the resolution of an active shooter situation?

The research on active shooter situations within schools is limited. Minimal research has been directed toward strengthening emergency protocols by properly training school staff in order to limit the destruction caused by incidents of school violence (Lunenberg, 2011). Many studies focused on the role of students and teachers, probing how to promote a positive school climate with the hope that this alone will prevent violence from occurring. Other accounts used interviews with teachers to gauge their feelings towards violence in schools (Grayson & Alvarez, 2008).

The findings of this dissertation could help create the safest possible learning
environment for all students. The significance of school violence was shown on many levels; preventing such violence is part of a broader goal of building safer communities. Stakeholders across all levels are affected by the threat of violence in schools. School staff and families have the same goal of a positive and safe school climate. Additionally, many community members have a vested interest in establishing safe learning environments for students and in ensuring that safety in schools is a top priority for all stakeholders (Stichter, 2008).

**Summary of the Problem of Practice**

There has been an increase in school violence over the last decade (Dogutus, 2013). Even after the devastating mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School on December 14, 2012, there have been many school shootings (Gunter, 2015). Following each deadly shooting, there was much national debate level about gun control laws and increasing mental health funding. While political stakeholders have been in a stalemate over these important issues, schools must put forth better solutions for stopping school shootings.

At the level of the school, this problem was examined through three lenses—prevention, preparedness, and response. Many schools are aware that they cannot wait for national legislative and policy changes to address this problem. Massachusetts in particular has adopted legislation to ensure school safety and an improved climate of security for children.

**Summary of Findings Related to Theoretical Framework**

The Emergency Management Cycle (EMC) focuses on four phases: prevention, preparation, response, and recovery.

**Prevention**

The idea of this phase is to provide directives to set up a system to avoid the occurrence of a school shooting or lessen the harm resulting if one is unavoidable. This phase is related to
the section of this dissertation that focused on profiling school shooters, considering factors such as age, gender, race, mental health diagnosis, whether students are victims of bullying, and prior school incidents. Through the coding process and understanding of superordinate and emergent themes in the data collected, it was determined that further prevention through identifying possible characteristics of school shooters and threat assessment profiles needs to be performed at the institution studied. This investigator believes that while a positive school climate is crucial to preventing school shootings, there must be a focus on identifying the at-risk students at the school.

Each of the participants was able to identify certain aspects of the profile of a school shooter that are supported in the literature. The participants discussed trauma, for example death of parents, trauma in the family, or domestic violence. Bullying was a topic unanimously mentioned by the participants in regards to identifying at-risk students. Another common topic was the idea of students being withdrawn from social circles or friends and lacking engagement in the classroom. Other concerns stemmed from unaddressed mental health issues and lack of family support. All of these at-risk behaviors have been supported in the literature. It is crucial for the reader to understand that while many students may exhibit behavior closely related to what is found in the literature, there are many false positives. Many of these at-risk students never commit a school shooting crime.

**Preparation**

The idea of this phase is to minimize harm and increase staff preparedness. The investigator identified areas needing improvement. All participants lacked knowledge of the Multi-Hazard Evacuation Plan and the Medical Emergency Response Plan, two Massachusetts state laws that focused on school safety. Interviews revealed a discrepancy in preparation, as the
school resource officer and dean of students both felt the staff and students were prepared for a school shooting, while other participants, including a social worker, guidance counselor, and social studies teacher, felt more training needed to be provided. There was a consensus among all participants that drills needed to be performed more often using various scenarios. All participants believed that there needed to be more formal training as well as more law enforcement assistance with training staff and students.

**Response**

The idea of this phase is to understand the response plan and to execute its roles during a school shooting. Each of the participants reported they would shelter in place or evacuate depending on the situation and location of the shooter. It was determined during the interviews that there was some confusion about how they may become aware of the location of the active shooter, and that they would rely on the administration and overhead speaker for direction. All participants were concerned that under intense stress, they might not perform their roles to the best of their ability.

An important aspect of this phase is identifying who is responsible for resolving an active shooter situation. While the school resource officer was able to identify a team approach to this matter, each participant believed it was the responsibility of the police or other law enforcement and security in the building. Research has determined that a team approach may be best utilized because there is a lag period in the response time of law enforcement during which other faculty and staff would be responsible for preserving life.

**Summary of Findings Related to the Literature Review**

**Prevention**
The literature suggested that the majority of school shootings were carried out by white lower to middle class males between the ages of 10-19 living in suburban or rural areas (Rocque, 2012; Legge, 2008; JeeHae, 2013; Langman, 2016c). The literature also suggested that many school shooters experienced feelings of depression and social rejection. Research revealed that school shooters typically fell into one of three categories: traumatized, psychotic, or psychopathic. Threat assessment was most effective when schools created a multi-disciplinary team to assess the seriousness of threats made by students. The literature suggested that students who carry out shootings may have family issues (Burns, 2001; O’Toole, 2000; Cornell, 2006; Brock et al., 2009).

The participants were able to identify most of these at-risk concerns. They viewed bullying and lack of social classroom engagement as major indicators of at-risk students. According to the literature and the responses of the participants, this institution did include some high-risk students who could have the potential to demonstrate violent acts toward faculty, staff, or other students. It is noteworthy that profiling can produce a high number of false positives, and the literature has suggested that there is no single profile of a school shooter.

**Preparation**

Research suggested that the physical makeup of the building could assist in determining the organization’s preparedness for an active shooter situation. In order to mitigate damage, school staff must frequently practice emergency drills. According to all participants, school-shooting preparedness drills must be practiced on a more consistent basis, at random intervals, and using different scenarios. Ways to enhance the physical aspects of school security, such as locking doors throughout the day, were also discussed.

**Response**
Duration and police response time are critical to reacting to a school shooter. Most school shooting attackers are neutralized by on site law enforcement or school staff (Jeehee, 2013). This demonstrates the importance of school staff being properly trained on what to do during a school shooting. On average, law enforcement response time was approximately three minutes from the time of notification to the time of arrival (Jeehee, 2013; Langman, 2009; United States Department of Homeland Security, 2008; O’Toole, 2000). With the exception of the school resource officer, the participants were unaware of what they could do, other than waiting for law enforcement, to mitigate an attack, preserve life, and minimize casualties. There is minimal literature on this topic. Staff members must be trained more frequently, with law enforcement instructing them on best practices and a multi-disciplinary approach.

**Implications for Educational Leadership Practice**

**Prevention**

Implications for future practice include educating school staff on all the laws involving emergencies and crises. All participants reported that they had never heard of the Multi-Hazard Evacuation Plan of 2000 or the Medical Emergency Response Plan of 2012. These laws must be discussed and communicated throughout the school year, and there must be follow-up to ensure they are being executed within the institution throughout the year.

Faculty, staff, and students must also be educated on the at-risk factors and possible common characteristics of a school shooter so they can assist in identifying such students. Standardized threat assessments must be put in place and everyone must know the appropriate protocols to follow after a student is profiled. If faculty, staff, and students demonstrate a community effort in identifying these students, prevention can be proactive so these violent acts do not have a chance to occur.
Educational leaders need to establish clear systems and procedures within their school setting to be able to understand possible indicators of a school shooter. Tiered systems of support or response to intervention models are in place to intervene with students with academic needs. Similarly, there needs to be more emotional support offered to students who may be experiencing trauma or challenges at home. Educational leaders must focus more on possible student violence and learn how to best combat that within a school setting, in order to prevent it. Educational leaders need to make as much time for students’ emotional needs as their academic needs.

**Preparation**

Implications for future practice include identifying ways to improve effective training for staff and administration, specifically focusing on effective communication. Minimal research has been directed toward strengthening emergency protocols by properly training school staff on what to do during an active shooter situation (Lunenberg, 2011). Combining this research with this dissertation’s interview results, in which participants gave a variety of answers about where students and staff would go in the event of an active shooter situation and lacked consensus on whether there was adequate training at the school, there needs to be training clarifying the responsibilities of each staff member and students in the building.

**Response**

Implications for future practice include educating staff on who resolves school shootings. All participants agreed that police or other law enforcement or security were responsible for resolving a school shooting. The literature did suggest that law enforcement is responsible for resolving a school shooting (JeeHae, 2013). Literature also indicated that even though law enforcement is ultimately responsible for resolving school shootings, school staff members were
just as likely to actually be the ones responsible for resolving school shootings (JeeHae, 2013). As a result, future practice must be geared towards helping teachers understand their responsibility as first responders during a school shooting. Specific professional development and training must be mandated at the federal and state levels in order to see effective change in school staff response.

**General Implications**

Collectively, we need to improve future practice by identifying ways to improve effective training for staff and administration in schools, specifically focusing on effective communication; educating school staff on all the laws involving emergencies and crisis; educating staff on who resolves school shootings, and school violence training during teacher preparation. With the seriousness of school shootings, combined with their visibility on the national stage, it is time education preparation programs take them more seriously and design specific training requirements within teacher preparation programs focused on school shooting prevention and response.

**Future Research**

Additional research should be focused on the best practices for architecturally designing buildings for safety. The physical design of a school is a great indicator of the overall safety of a building (United States Department of Homeland Security, 2008). Research should also focus on the best practices for assessing threats in the school system by identifying characteristics of students who are at risk or who may be possible candidates for causing harm or violence in the school setting. To help identify possible risk factors, future research should be explored at major mental health institutions or organizations at the government level, and what supports these institutions already have in place in regards to mitigating risk factors surrounding school aged
Further research should also focus on a course within the teacher preparation curriculum that reviews these important safety scenarios and topics so schools can be on the front line in combating these violent acts.

Most school shooting research has been directed at the school staff level. Examples of this include perceptions of school staff regarding school shootings, as well as prevention and threat assessment strategies for school staff. Future research should focus on best practices around the role of the student in the prevention, preparedness, and response efforts. These practices can be explored at local school levels and government level agencies or institutions such as the Department of Homeland Security.

**Conclusion**

This study investigated the profile of school shooters as a way to prevent their actions, and also investigated current emergency protocols used at a school in Massachusetts. This dissertation focused on whether schools are able to prevent school shootings through profiling school shooters, the current plans that are place for responding to an active shooter situation, and the role of faculty and staff in the resolution of an active shooter situation.

When focusing on profiling and prevention of active school shooter, there is no one distinct answer, as there is not simply one profile. It is important to note that many characteristics of school shooters can be exhibited in students who will never commit an act of violence, thus false positives are common. The literature suggested that the majority of school shootings were carried out by white lower to middle class males between the ages of 10-19 living in suburban or rural areas (Rocque, 2012; Legge, 2008; JeeHae, 2013; Langman, 2016c). The literature, along with the interviews, suggested that many school shooters experienced feelings of social rejection. Research revealed that school shooters typically fell into one of three
categories: traumatized, psychotic, or psychopathic; aspects of this were reinforced by the interviews (Langman, 2009).

Staff members from a middle school in Massachusetts reported understanding what to do in an active shooter drill, however their responses ranged from sheltering in place to leaving the building. All interview participants reported they had never heard of the Multi-Hazard Evacuation Plan of 2000 or the Medical Emergency Response Plan of 2012. There was a discrepancy between the response of the classroom staff (social studies teacher, guidance counselor, and social worker) and the administration and safety staff (dean of students and school resource officer). The classroom staff reported there was a lack of student and staff training for an active shooter situation and that there was a lack of law enforcement involvement. The dean of students and school resource officer felt students and staff were properly trained and that law enforcement had been appropriately involved in the training. However, all participants agreed that it was uncertain whether students and staff would react as drilled under the intense pressure of an ongoing school shooting. Additionally, participants unanimously agreed that police or other law enforcement were responsible for resolving a school shooting. Research suggests that law enforcement and school staff are both responsible for resolving school shooting situations (JeeHae, 2013).

Additional research would improve future practice by establishing a course on school shooting preparation and response as part of teacher preparation programs. Additional research would focus on the architectural design of buildings and its impact on school shooting prevention. Educators must make time throughout the school day to focus on students’ emotional needs. Additional research for prevention and response is needed as to what actions are already in practice at federal government institutions and organizations. Additionally,
research is needed on how to structure systems in place to support students who have characteristics that may identify them as a possible school shooter. Finally, research must also focus on best practices for training students regarding prevention of, preparation for, and response to school shooting situations.
References


*BHQ Weekly,* 21(44), 1-3.


Lunenburg, F. C. (2011). School violence in America's schools. FOCUS on Colleges,


Appendix A

Interview Protocol Form

Institution: Northeastern University: 360 Huntington Avenue; Boston, Massachusetts 02115

Interviewee:

Interviewer: Zachary Abrams

Date:

Location of the interview:

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. My name is Zachary Abrams and I am a doctoral student at Northeastern University. This research is being conducted as part of my doctoral thesis. There are two goals to this study: (1) to understand if we can profile for school shooters based on previous school shootings in order to prevent further tragedy and (2) understand how we can better prepare the faculty, student, and staff in case of an active shooter.

Because your responses are important and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like to audio tape our conversation today. I will also be taking written notes during the interview. Only the principal investigator (my advisor: Kristal Clemons), possibly a professional transcriptionist if a transcriptionist is used, and myself will have access to the file. The transcriptionist will have signed a confidentiality statement, and will also only be provided with the recording labeled by pseudonym, meaning they will never even know your name, to maintain confidentiality. The audio files will be destroyed within two weeks after they are transcribed. I can assure you that all responses will be confidential and only pseudonyms will be used when quoting from the transcripts. Only your pseudonym will be attached to the transcript.

I would like to begin recording this session now, is that alright with you?

OK, the audio recording has begun.

To meet our human subjects requirements at the university, participants have to read and verbally agree to the Consent Form that I sent you. I’d like to go over this form with you now. The Consent Form for this study, is titled ‘School Shooting Prevention and Response at the Building Level. We will go through this now line by line (review consent form). There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you for taking part in this study, and there are also no direct benefits to you for participating in the study. Your part in this study will be handled in a confidential manner. Only the researchers will know that you participated in this study. Any reports or publications based on this research will only use pseudonyms, and will not identify you or any other participant as being part of this project. The decision to participate in this research project is up to you. You do not have to participate and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may withdraw at any time. You will not receive remuneration following this interview. If you have any questions about this study, contact information for me as well as the Principal Investigator is listed, and contact information is also listed for the Director of Human Subject Research Protection at Northeastern University should
you have any other questions about your rights in this research (and you can call that person confidentially, if you wish).

This will only be a one time interview that will last about 60 minutes or less. There are three sections of questions in this interview. The initial questions are criteria based to determine your eligibility to continue participation in this study. The second sets of questions are based on our faculty/staff ability level to profile for school shooters. The last section will determine your understanding of our current emergency plans.

Do you have any additional questions or concerns about the interview process or this form? Do you give your verbal consent? Great, thank you.

I will begin with the initial eligibility questions at this time. This should only take about 5 minutes.

1. Could you please state your name and job title
2. Please state the race you identify with?
3. What is your highest degree received in school?
4. Are you employed by this public school in Massachusetts?
5. How long have you been employed by this school in Massachusetts?
6. How many years have you been in the education system? 
   a. Has your job title changed throughout your career?

(A) If participant meets the criteria: According to your answers, you have met the criteria to participate in this study. The next section of questions will be focused on understanding the ability for school staff/faculty to profile for school shooters. Would you like to continue?

(B) You did not meet the inclusion criteria to participate in this trial (state reasons why). Thank you for your time. Please let me know if you have any questions at time.

1) 1. Do you know the names of any students who have experienced trauma in the school? You do not need to name them at this time, please just discuss your awareness of these students and their situation.
2) Do you know of any students being bullied in the school?
3) Do you know of any students who have mental illness diagnoses in the school?
4) Are there students in the school who you would deem a threat to another’s safety?
5) What do you think are indicators that a student may be at risk to be a school shooter?

(C) Okay, the last section will review your understanding of our current emergency plans. Would you like to continue?

1) Do you know what the Multi-Hazard Evacuation Plan for Schools Developed in 2000 is? If yes, please describe it. ]
2) Do you know what the Medical Emergency Response Plans for schools in 2012 is? If yes, please describe it.
3) Do you know what the school plan is during an active shooter?
4) What is your specific role when there is an active shooter in the building?
5) Do you feel like the school has done adequate training to prepare staff if there were to be an active shooter?
6) Do you feel that students are well aware of what to do during an active shooter?
7) Do you feel as if students have practiced an active shooter situation enough to be able to perform the tasks required under intense pressure?
8) Has there been enough formal training by the school leaders on active shooter situations?
9) Has law enforcement assisted with any formal active shooter school training?
10) How do you feel like our active shooter training can be improved?
11) Who you believe would be responsible for resolving an active shooter situation?

Thank you, that concludes the interview questions.

If I come across a need to ask any follow-up questions, which would most likely only be the case if I felt clarification was needed in regards to one of your responses, would it be alright for me to contact you? Would you prefer I contact you via email or telephone?

Sometime over the next month, I will email you word-for-word transcripts and my initial interpretations of both interviews. If you chose, you can review the information, and you will have one week to provide me with any feedback, alterations, or corrections. Can you please confirm the email address you would like for me to email the transcripts to?

Once this thesis study is complete, which will most likely be 3-6 months from now, would you like to receive an electronic copy of the document?

Do you have any questions for me?
Thank you so much for your participation in this study!
Appendix B
Letter to Superintendent of District

Dear __________

I am currently a candidate for my Doctorate of Education at Northeastern University. In partial fulfillment of this degree I am writing my final dissertation. My dissertation is entitled School Shooting Prevention and Response at the Building Level. As many are aware, school shootings have increased dramatically in the United States over the past 20 years. The purpose of my research is to better understand ways in which schools can better prevent shootings by profiling school shooters to assess the amount of threat they pose to the school climate. I am also looking at current emergency plans and how we can look to improve what is currently in place. Lastly, I will be looking at the research to uncover who is responsible for resolving school shootings.

I am writing to you to ask for your permission to conduct this research. The interviews will last no more than 60 minutes of the participants’ time and will focus on their current knowledge of assessing student threats and emergency protocols in regards to an active shooter at a middle school in Massachusetts. Interviews will be confidential and the research will be using pseudonyms when writing the final product. There will be no remuneration provided for participating in this study. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing back from you,

Zachary Abrams MAT
Appendix C:
Letter to Principal of Middle School

Dear __________

I am currently a candidate for my Doctorate of Education at Northeastern University. In partial fulfillment of this degree I am writing my final dissertation. My dissertation is entitled School Shooting Prevention and Response at the Building Level. As many are aware, school shootings have increased dramatically in the United States over the past 20 years. The purpose of my research is to better understand ways in which schools can better prevent shootings by profiling school shooters to assess the amount of threat they pose to the school climate. I am also looking at current emergency plans and how we can look to improve what is currently in place. Lastly, I will be looking at the research to uncover who is responsible for resolving school shootings.

I am writing to you to inform you of this research. The Superintendent of Schools has already been informed of this research, and has granted me permission. The interviews will last no more than 60 minutes of your time and will focus on your current knowledge of assessing student threats and emergency protocols in regards to an active shooter at a school in Massachusetts. Interviews will be confidential and the research will be using pseudonyms when writing the final product. There will be no remuneration provided for participating in this study. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing back from you,

Zachary Abrams MAT
Appendix D
Letter of Participation

Dear ________

I am currently a candidate for my Doctorate of Education at Northeastern University. In partial fulfillment of this degree I am writing my final dissertation. My dissertation is entitled School Shooting Prevention and Response at the Building Level. As many are aware, school shootings have increased dramatically in the United States over the past 20 years. The purpose of my research is to better understand ways in which schools can better prevent shootings by profiling school shooters to assess the amount of threat they pose to the school climate. I am also looking at current emergency plans and how we can look to improve what is currently in place. Lastly, I will be looking at the research to uncover who is responsible for resolving school shootings.

I am writing to request your participation in this research. If you reply yes, I will be contacting you to set up an in person interview. The interview will last no more than 60 minutes of your time and will focus on your current knowledge of assessing student threats and emergency protocols in regards to an active shooter at a school in Massachusetts. The initial questions will determine whether you fit the inclusion criteria of this study. If you do, the researcher will advise you that you meet this criterion and will be asked if you would like to continue with the interview questions. There is no need to prepare in any way for this interview. I would like this interview to be a true testament to how we can improve the preparation and education of our own faculty/staff in order to better serve our communities and the surrounding communities. Interviews will be confidential and the research will be using pseudonyms when writing the final product. There will be no remuneration provided for participating in this study. Please let me know if you have any questions. If you are willing to participate, please contact me back via email stating you will participate in this interview. At the time of the interview we will begin by reviewing and verbally consent to the informed consent form and will complete our interview if you do in fact meet the inclusion criteria. If at the time of the interview you no longer want to answer questions you are allowed to leave the interview and your information will be appropriately disposed of. There will not be any further follow up from this study following this 60 minute interview.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing back from you,

Zachary Abrams MAT
Appendix E  
Consent Form  

Northeastern University, Department of: Education  

Name of Investigator(s): Principal Investigator: Kristal Clemons, Researcher’s name: Zachary Abrams  

Title of Project: School Shooting Prevention and Response at the Building Level  

Request to Participate in Research: We would like to invite you to take part in a research project. The purpose of this research is to understand the trends, motivation, and threat assessment profiles of previous school shooters, which may allow faculty and staff to intervene at the school level and prevent school shootings.  

You must be at least 18 years old to be in this research project.  

The study will take place: at an agreed upon public location and will take about 60 minutes. If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to answer a series of questions. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you for taking part in this study.  

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in the study. However, your answers may help us to learn more about understanding the preparation level of our institution in the time of an active shooter.  

Your part in this study is anonymous. That means no one will know if you took part in this study and no one, including the researcher, will know what your answers are. Any reports or publications based on this research will use only group data and will not identify you or any individual as being of this project.  

The decision to participate in this research project is up to you. You do not have to participate and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may withdraw at any time.  

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to call Zachary Abrams, the person mainly responsible for this research. You can also contact Dr., Kristal Clemons. You may call anonymously if you wish.  

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 490 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.  

You may keep this form for yourself. Thank you, Zachary Abrams
Appendix F
Transcriber Confidentiality Statement

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies
Zachary Abrams
Title: School Shooting Prevention and Response at the Building Level

Transcriber Confidentiality Statement in a Research Study

I am asking you [name] to take part in a research study. The research collected will be one-on-one interviews. Every interview will be audio recorded using the AudioMemos application on the Student Researcher’s Apple iPad and iPhone (two separate devices are being used solely for backup in case of error) to capture accuracy in recording the responses. The use of a recording device is justified in this study because the details of thought and language used by the participants are critical to data analysis.

You are responsible to transcribe the audio-tapes to ensure accurate reporting of the information provided. You will not discuss any item on the tape with anyone other than the researcher. No one’s name will be asked or revealed during individual interviews. The audio-tapes will be stored in locked files before and after being transcribed. Tapes will be destroyed within 2 weeks of completing the transcriptions.

Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?

Zachary Abrams (Student Researcher), Northeastern University Boston, Ma 02115
Kristal Clemons (Principal Investigator), Northeastern University, Boston, Ma 02115

Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?

If you have any questions, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University Boston, MA 02115 tel. 617-373-7570, email: irb@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

Will I be paid or my participation?

N/A

I agree to take part in this research
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