

# The School Shooting Crisis: How Do We Move Forward?

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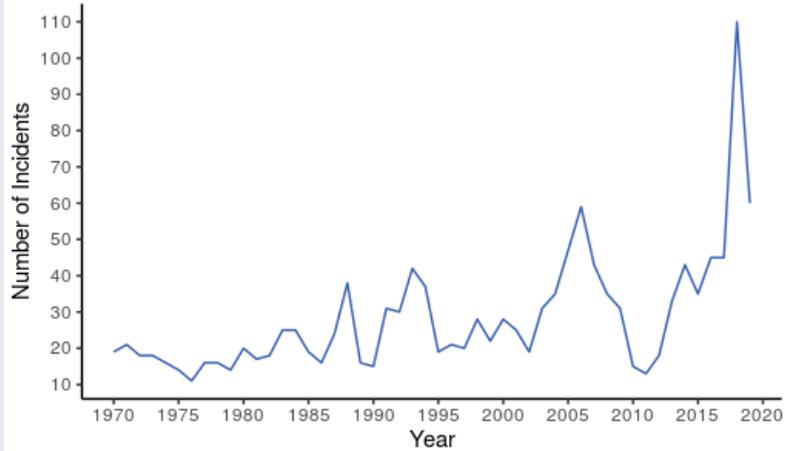
## BACKGROUND

- Over the past decade, we have witnessed a striking increase in instances of school shootings (Riedman et al., 2019).
- Most legislation tackling the issue has been focused on gun control; however, this has become a heated disagreement between political parties, with no foreseeable solution.
- Because these school shootings encompass perpetrators with various backgrounds, ages, and motives (Langman, 2008), it is impossible to determine with certainty who will commit this crime in the future.
- Implementing strategies for early mental health intervention for ALL students will result in an increase in social-emotional well-being (Fazel et al., 2014), and a reduction of aggression, which in turn may lead to lower rates of school shootings.

## THE NEED FOR MENTAL HEALTH INTERVENTIONS

Many shooters (75%) report depression, suicide ideation, and/or plans before the act (Vosseukil et al., 2002). These are issues associated with mental health; however, they are not exclusive to school shooters (1 in 5 young people struggle with severe mental health problems, and many more have less severe mental health issues (Merikangas et al., 2010). Thus, attaining the resources to implement mental health programs in all schools will be effective in increasing the emotional stability and well-being of all students.

## K-12 School Shootings in the United States



## WHAT'S WORKED FOR OTHERS

There have been several studies conducted to examine programs addressing mental health issues. Effective interventions include:

- **Second Step Program** - a social-emotional learning program covering empathy, anger management, impulse control, and problem-solving skills, in Illinois and Kansas (Espelage et al., 2013). Students who participated in this program were 42% less likely to display physical aggression one year after participation.
- **Responding in Peaceful and Positive Ways Program** - a program in Virginia focused on conflict resolution (Farrell et al., 1996). Students who participated showed greater knowledge of problem-solving skills, while the students outside of the program were 4.9 times more likely to receive an in-school suspension (Farrell et al., 2001).
- **Seattle Social Development Project** - an elementary-school delinquency prevention project started in 1981 (Catalano et al., 2004). Participants reported better regulation of emotions and fewer symptoms of social phobia and suicidal thoughts (Wike, 2009). They also scored higher on work and school outcomes (Hawkins et al., 2007).

**\$1.46 /  / year**

The Mental Health Student Services Act distributes 10 million dollars per year to select CA schools. If they were to serve all 6.84 million K-12 students in the state, each student would only receive \$1.46 per year. Funding needs to be increased, and expanded to all students.

# 75%

of students with mental illness do not receive treatment (Stagman & Cooper, 2010).

# 167

school shootings have occurred in CA since 1970, making it the leading state in school shootings (Riedman et al., 2019).

# 24%

of American teens report that threatening or physically harming others is an acceptable action to take when angered (Josephine Institute of Ethics, 2012).

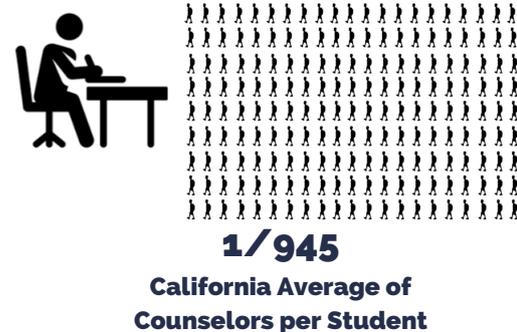
## Recent California Legislation that has Attempted to Better Address Mental Health:

**Mental Health Student Services Act** (passed in July 2019), an act focused on mental health support in schools, distributes 50 million dollars to schools over a period of 5 years. This is a competitive grant program which falls short of reaching all schools/ all students in the state.

**Pupil Health: Mental Health Professionals** (AB-8; bill that died in July 2019) aimed to have one counselor per 600 students in schools. California currently averages one counselor per 945 students. The national average is one counselor per 477 students, meaning even if this bill had passed, the state would still be falling behind the nation.

### WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

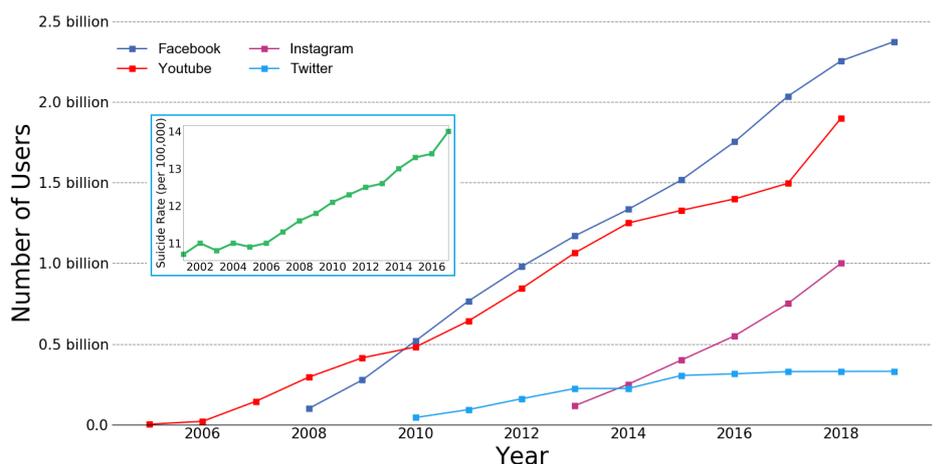
- Extend funding for the Mental Health Student Services Act so that it's benefits can be accessible by all K-12 students in CA.
- Create a state program that not only provides funding for additional counselors, but also trains teachers and community members to recognize mental health issues.
- Instate early social-emotional training to teach students how to effectively tackle difficult or conflicting emotions.



## Additional Consideration: The Role of Media in School Shootings

- **Social media & mental health**
  - Social media is the *primary form of communication* among adolescents (Hawk et al., 2019).
  - Social media *negatively affects* mental health and well-being (Tromholt, 2016).
- **Social media & violence**
  - 30% of active shooters *post online prior to their attack* to claim credit and articulate their motives (Silver et al., 2018).
  - The *FBI is heading research* on pre-attack behavior of shooters (Cohen et al., 2014).
- **Mass media & social contagion**
  - Violence often occur in *clusters*, temporally and geospatially (Slutkin, 2012).
  - *Media reports* have been shown to *increase* homicides and suicides (Gould et al., 2003).

### Use of Social Media in the United States



Social media began to take off around 2006. This is also the time that we can begin to see an increase in suicide rates (Comin et al., 2004; Lee et al., 2019).

### WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

- Evaluation of online/social media activity
  - Teach students that social media should not define their value.
  - Train students to recognize and report suspicious activity or changes in behavior of their classmates online.
- Study the effects of media reports on school shootings
  - Many shooters cite fame as motivation. We need to further research what techniques can be used in media reports to decrease the notoriety of school shooters.

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