



School Safety Newsletter

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Sandy Hook Families Sue Newtown, Schools, Citing Lax Security

Courant, January 12, 2015

<http://www.courant.com/news/connecticut/hc-sandy-hook-town-lawsuit-20150112-story.html>

At least two families of victims in the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting have filed a lawsuit against the town of Newtown and the school board, alleging lax security on the day 20 first-graders and six adults were shot and killed.

The 66-page lawsuit was given to a state marshal on Dec. 14, the last day under state statutes that legal action could be taken against the community, and recently served at the town clerk's office. The plaintiffs are the estates of slain students Noah Pozner and Jesse Lewis. The children's parents, Leonard Pozner, Neil Heslin and Scarlett Lewis, are the administrators. The families are represented by Norwalk attorney Donald Papsy, a Sandy Hook resident, who could not be reached for comment Monday.

Adam Lanza shot his way into the Sandy Hook Elementary School on Dec. 14, 2012, and opened fire in two classrooms. Lanza entered the school by shooting through the front glass windows and entering near the school offices. He killed school Principal Dawn Hochsprung and school psychologist Mary Sherlach before entering the classrooms. In one of those classrooms, substitute teacher Lauren Rousseau was unable to lock the door because she did not have a key.

Rousseau was assigned to the class shortly before school was set to open when the regular teacher called in sick. Rousseau tried to hide the students in a small bathroom but Lanza walked into the room and opened fire, killing all but one girl. The lawsuit alleges that Rousseau "had neither a key to lock the door nor any knowledge of the ... safety and security protocols rehearsed at the Sandy Hook Elementary School in case an intruder or other dangerous individual gained access to the school."

The lawsuit also alleges the town was negligent in not having a more secure entrance way to the school because it did not have bulletproof glass on the front windows and for having doors that couldn't be locked from the inside.

"We are hopeful that the Town of Newtown's elected and hired representatives will work with these families, who have already suffered, and continue to suffer, unimaginable loss, to help resolve this matter in the most efficient and constructive way possible," Papsy said in a statement. "As residents of the town, we all either have, or are going to have, students in our Sandy Hook schools, and we promote the idea of learning from the past and protecting our children in the future."

Town Attorney David Grogins acknowledged that the lawsuit has been filed, but declined to comment on it Monday. The lawsuit is seeking more than \$15,000 in damages.

The lawsuit names the town, school board and Sandy Hook Principal Kathleen Gombos, who is erroneously referred to as Sandy Gombos. The lawsuit also inaccurately names the school superintendent.

As is standard, the lawsuit seeks more than \$15,000 in damages.

The lawsuit is the second one filed since the shooting. The first one against the gun manufacturer, filed at Superior Court in Bridgeport, claims that the Bushmaster AR-15 used by Lanza in the shooting should not be sold to the public because it is a military assault weapon designed for war. Ten families, including the Pozner and Lewis families, and one of the teachers who was shot and survived are involved in the lawsuit.

That lawsuit will attempt to use what is known as the negligent entrustment exemption. In a negligent entrustment case, a party can be held liable for entrusting a product, in this case the Bushmaster rifle, to another party who then causes harm to a third party.

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ISIS recruiting teenagers: Why the Government is Sounding the Alarm

CBS News, March 10, 2015

<http://www.cbsnews.com/news/isis-recruiting-teenagers-why-the-government-is-sounding-the-alarm/>

The U.S. government is finding that in addition to fighting the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) on the ground, it must also fend off the growing threat of ISIS online.

The jihadist group has proven adept at outreach to teens who are fluent in digital communication. Last week the FBI and Homeland Security Department issued a joint alert warning that ISIS's message is increasingly resonant with Western youth. The alert advised local and state law enforcement agencies that ISIS has been having some success with social media campaigns that invite youth to join jihadists for the fight in Syria.

"The concern is that you have a message that is proving romantic, heroic and alluring to a swath of the western population that's dangerous," said CBS News Senior National Security Analyst Juan Zarate. "The messages that are out there are really messages not just to local law enforcement but to communities and families to be on the lookout and to be vigilant about the potential that their youth are being drawn like the Pied Piper to this movement in the Middle East."

In recent months, there have been regular reports of teenagers fleeing their homes in places like Colorado and England to travel to Syria to join the ISIS fight, or to marry its fighters. Just last week, a high school student from Northern Virginia was taken into custody because authorities believed he helped a man travel to Syria to fight with ISIS.

A recent report from SITE Intelligence Group details how ISIS has moved beyond the typical password-protected jihadist forums and now operates on Twitter, YouTube, Tumblr, Ask.fm and other social media sites. The three suburban Denver girls who tried to join ISIS communicated directly with its recruiters.

During a speech to the Brookings Institution last fall, National Counterterrorism Center Director Matthew Olsen said that ISIS "operates the most sophisticated propaganda machine of any extremist group."

"ISIL disseminates timely, high-quality media content on multiple platforms, including on social media, designed to secure a widespread following for the group," he said.

It has become a top concern for law enforcement officials. "You have the Islamic State using all forms of media and outreach to include peer-to-peer social media outreach to the youth to try to draw them to the fight," Zarate said.

"This isn't just about going to fight apostates or to right oppressors or occupiers. This is about a broader project, [the] establishment of an Islamic caliphate, that holds some allure to those who want to see a pure form of Islam and are willing to draw themselves into this heroic and romantic cause," he added.

The White House turned its attention to violent extremism last month with a summit that brought together governments, civil society groups and community leaders from more than 60 nations to talk about ways to combat the threat.

Meryl Chertoff, who heads the Justice & Society program at the Aspen Institute penned an op-ed in The Hill about what she learned at the summit about the jihadi recruitment process--"scary stuff," she called it. There are, she wrote, social media tools "pairing the incipient recruit online with the fighter of their choice, and then sending them to Sharespot or Kick to allow the grooming to continue out of the reach of standard internet tracking tools, which can lead to mobilization in a matter of weeks."

In the past, the U.S. has tried using Islamic rap groups to help counter extremists, and Tweeting to undercut extremist messages.

Since the summit, Zarate said, there has been a commitment to more resources to attack the ISIS narrative online and amplify the credible voices that are trying to counter the movement.

But will any of it make a difference? Zarate isn't exactly sure. "Are we able to inoculate youth and those who would otherwise be susceptible to the message from the allure of what the ISIS folks and the propagandists are selling?" He suggests that their appeal is surprisingly broad. "[E]ven among non-Muslims you see some polling numbers, for example in France, where there is an allure to the Islamic state, an allure of the romanticism of what they are building and I think that's part of the ideological battle in addition to the theology that's hard to combat."

Part of what is so dangerous for western youth also lies in what they don't know. Secretary of State John Kerry, addressing the White House summit, put it this way: "Those recruiting for [ISIS] are not looking for people who are devout and knowledgeable about the tenants of Islam," Secretary of State John Kerry said at the summit. "They're looking for people gullible enough to believe that terrorists enjoy a glamorous lifestyle."

**Monthly
Webinars!**

First
Wednesday of
Every Month
at 10 am.

**Next Webinar
- June 3, 2015**

Each webinar
has a round table
discussion at the
end. Questions
are always
welcome!

To participate, you
must be a vetted
member. For more
information please
email
schoolsafety@isp.
state.il.us

Harvard Study Finds Anger Issues, Not Major Mental Illness, Tied to Gun Violence

Huffington Post, April 8, 2015

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/04/08/americans-anger-management-guns_n_7021192.html

Nearly one in ten U.S. adults have both a history of impulsive anger and access to a firearm, according to a new study by researchers from Duke, Harvard and Columbia universities. The researchers also found that 1.5 percent of adults with impulsive anger issues carry a gun.

The study, published in *Behavioral Sciences and the Law* this month, analyzed data from 5,563 face-to-face and household interviews that were part of the National Comorbidity Study Replication, a Harvard-led survey conducted in the early 2000s. The survey assessed respondents' mental health, including several questions about whether or not they had patterns of impulsive anger, how many guns they owned and whether or not they carried guns outside of the home (respondents who were headed to a target range or who carried a gun as part of their job were excluded).

One of the most significant findings was the three-way association between individuals who owned multiple guns, carried a gun outside of the home and expressed a pattern of angry, impulsive behavior. Study participants who owned six or more guns were found to be four times more likely to carry guns outside of the home and to be in the high-risk anger group than participants who owned one firearm.

Participants who were considered to have a high risk for impulsive anger responded affirmatively to some or all of the following questions: "I have tantrums or angry outbursts;" "Sometimes I get so angry I break or smash things;" and "I lose my temper and get into physical fights."

Married men under the age of 30 who live in outlying areas around cities were more likely than other demographics to show a pattern of spontaneous anger while simultaneously having access to guns. There were also significant regional differences in gun ownership rates among respondents. Respondents from the Midwest, South and West were much more likely to own a gun than those from the Northeast.

Gun violence is a major problem in the United States. As *The Atlantic* reported in January, although the United States makes up less than 5 percent of the world's population, it contains 35 to 50 percent of the world's civilian-owned guns. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in 2013, there were more than 33,000 firearm deaths in the U.S., 11,208 of which were deemed homicides.

The relationship between gun violence and mental health is a divisive issue. "So we have a problem with gun violence," said Jeffrey Swanson, Ph.D., professor in psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Duke University School of Medicine and lead author of the study. "When do we focus on it? We tend to focus on it when there's a horrifying mass-casualty shooting by a disturbed young man," he said. "But the thing is, mental illness and gun violence are two very important, very complicated population health problems that come together only on their edges."

Indeed, while the *Behavioral Sciences* study showed a relationship between impulsive violence and gun ownership, the study did not find much overlap between having major mental illness -- such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder -- and being impulsive, anger-prone and having access to firearms. This corroborates previous research indicating that the majority of people who suffer from mental illness are not likely to be violent. (Only about four percent of violence can be attributed to major mental illness -- interpersonal violence is usually caused by other factors, such as substance abuse).

What the study *did* show is an association between individuals who showed signs of a mental disorder and an increased risk for impulsive gun-related violence. These common mental disorders, however, include extremely wide-ranging group of conditions, from depression to post-traumatic stress disorder to substance abuse to eating disorders and more -- conditions that when considered in tandem, affect a substantial portion of the population.

Federal laws mandate that individuals who have been involuntarily committed or legally deemed mentally ill can have their weapons taken away from them, but some states, like New York, have taken gun control legislation a step further. Under New York's 2013 Safe Act, mental health workers are responsible for reporting patients who are "likely to engage in conduct that would result in serious harm to self or others."

According to the *New York Times*, the database of individuals considered too mentally unstable to carry a firearm had grown to 34,000 names by the end of last year, creating an environment that mental health advocates fear could stigmatize mental illness and prohibit people from seeking treatment for mental health issues.

Even beyond the possibility of further stigmatizing mental illness, as the *Behavioral Sciences* study authors wrote in their report, restricting gun access based on common mental disorders that affect a wide swath of the population would be an unpopular and impossible proposition:

Only a small minority of the people with such disorders are subject to current gun restrictions based on mental disorder, as they are never involuntarily hospitalized. Nor would it be easy for authorities otherwise to identify many of them as having one of these common mental disorders, as they will never have sought treatment. Even if these common disorders could be identified, furthermore, gun exclusions that swept up such a large proportion of the general population are not likely to be politically viable.

The study authors argue that a more effective policy measure might be to restrict gun access based on an individual's arrest history. Arrests that could indicate a history of impulsive or angry behavior (for example, criminal records of misdemeanor violence, DWIs and domestic violence restraining orders) would likely serve as a more feasible and less discriminatory indicator of an individual's gun violence risk.

"The group that we focus on goes far beyond regular anger," Swanson told *Mother Jones*. "The most volatile people are slipping through the cracks."



Did You Know? Preventing Teen Tobacco Use— There's an App for That

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, May 1, 2015

Use of e-cigarettes and hookah skyrocketed among middle and high school students between 2013 and 2014, offsetting declines in use of other tobacco products. http://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2015/p0416-e-cigarette-use.html?s_cid=ostltsdyk_govd_601

About 4.6 million middle and high school students currently use tobacco products. Youth use of tobacco in any form — combustible, noncombustible, or electronic — is unsafe. http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6414a3.htm?s_cid=mm6414a3_w

Apps, text messages, and other tools (<http://teen.smokefree.gov/default.aspx#VUjZLPCMCXM>), as well as resources (http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/quit_smoking/cessation/index.htm?s_cid=ostltsdyk_govd_602) from state tobacco control programs, can help keep teens from using tobacco.

The Lancet Psychiatry: Childhood Bullying Has Worse Effects on Mental Health in Young Adulthood Than Being Maltreated

The Lancet, April 28, 2015

http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2015-04/tl-tlp042415.php

Being bullied in childhood has a greater negative impact on teenager's mental health than being maltreated (Child maltreatment is defined as any physical or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, or negligent treatment resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, or dignity), according to new research published in The Lancet Psychiatry journal.

The findings show that individuals who are bullied in childhood are around five times more likely to experience anxiety (odds ratio 4.9) and are nearly twice as likely to report more depression and self-harm at age 18 (odds ratio 1.7) than children who are maltreated.

The study, led by Professor Dieter Wolke from the University of Warwick, UK, is the first of its kind to directly compare the effects of maltreatment (by adults) and peer bullying in childhood on mental health outcomes (ie, anxiety, depression, self-harm, suicidal tendencies) in young adulthood.

The findings come from the UK Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC) and the Great Smoky Mountain Studies in the USA (GSMS). The current study includes 4026 children from ALSPAC whose parents provided information on maltreatment between the ages of 8 weeks and 8.6 years, and their child's reports of bullying when they were aged 8, 10, and 13; and 1420 children from GSMS who reported information on maltreatment and bullying between the ages of 9 and 16.

The harmful effects of bullying remained even when other factors that are known to increase the risk of child abuse and bullying, including family hardship and the mental health of mothers, were taken into account.

According to Professor Wolke, "Until now, governments have focused their efforts and resources on family maltreatment rather than bullying. Since 1 in 3 children worldwide report being bullied, and it is clear that bullied children have similar or worse mental health problems later in life to those who are maltreated, more needs to be done to address this imbalance. Moreover, it is vital that schools, health services, and other agencies work together to tackle bullying."

Writing in a linked Comment, David Finkelhor and Corinna Jenkins Tucker from the University of New Hampshire, Durham, USA discuss the fragmented response to child maltreatment and the need for protection lobbies to join forces, saying that, "This new study illustrates the growing consensus that children are entitled to grow up free from violence, denigration, and non-consented sexual activity at the hands of both adults and young peers. That growing consensus might be responsible for the fact that, if the epidemiological data are to be trusted, in spite of the fragmentations of response systems, the toll of some of these various scourges seems to be on the decline in the past 20 years."

The research is being presented at the Pediatric Academic Societies (PAS) annual meeting in San Diego, USA. Professor Wolke will also give a talk covering this research at The Times Cheltenham Science Festival, UK, in June.

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