



School Safety Newsletter

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Tehama Shooter May Have Been Targeting 7-year-old Boy in School Shooting, Neighbor Says

The Sacramento Bee, Updated on November 18, 2017

<http://www.sacbee.com/news/local/crime/article185268873.html>

The gunman who rampaged through Rancho Tehama Reserve on November 14, 2017, may have been targeting a specific child when he opened fire on the rural community's elementary school – the 7-year-old son of a neighbor he had terrorized for months.

Neighbor Johnny Phommathep, who said he lives about 200 feet away from the house owned by gunman Kevin Janson Neal, said Friday he witnessed escalating violence and regular episodes of gunfire from Neal, directed at Neal's immediate neighbors Danny Elliott and Elliott's mother Diana Steele. The mother and son were among Neal's first victims in the Tuesday rampage, culminating a dispute that had been going on for months.

In January, Neal stabbed Steele with a steak knife as she and her daughter-in-law were leaving their house, according to multiple sources. "Kevin decided to stab Danny's mother and ever since there has been a blood feud," said Phommathep. "He just went crazy from there." Phommathep said he believes Neal was headed to Rancho Tehama Elementary School to kill Danny's son, Gage Elliott. "The school wasn't random," said Phommathep. "He wanted the boy so bad ... because he knows that is going to hurt Danny the most."

Gage Elliott's surviving grandmother, Sissy Feitelberg, said Gage also believes Neal was targeting him. When FBI agents told Gage his father had been killed, Feitelberg said his first response was, "I know who it is. It's my neighbor." "Gage knew immediately," she said. "He did say, 'He came to the school to get me,' and he's probably right. ... I have assured him that the bad man is dead and Grandma is going to protect him."

Phommathep said that a few days before the rampage he heard Neal, 44, threaten to kill both Elliott and his son. He recalls hearing Neal make "a direct threat of killing Gage." Gregg Cohen, Tehama County's district attorney, confirmed that investigators believe Neal headed to the school deliberately, although he said it isn't clear if he was targeting Gage Elliott or an adult who works at the school. "We had information that he was at least focused on the school for some reason, whether it was someone that worked there or Gage," Cohen said. "He did not go to the school as a random act. There was some reason."

Neal shot out windows and doors in the school but couldn't get inside because the facility was locked down by teachers. No children died but several were injured, including Alejandro Hernandez, 6, who remained in stable condition Friday at UC Davis Medical Center, according to his cousin Aly Monroy. Hernandez was shot in the leg and chest.

Neal, who family members said was delusional, had accused several of his neighbors of running a methamphetamine lab and had called law enforcement to investigate them. Cohen said the allegations appear to be unfounded. Feitelberg described Danny Elliott and Diane Steele as "fabulous people" and said Danny was "fun-loving but his priority was Gage." Danny was married to Feitelberg's daughter Cher for six years. The couple lived with Feitelberg until Cher died six years ago in an accident.

California School Shooting Lockdown Saved Lives, But Active Shooter Drills Aren't Universal. Why?

Newsweek, November 16, 2017

<http://www.newsweek.com/california-school-shooting-lockdown-rancho-tehama-712036>

The rapid lockdown that police credited for saving dozens of children during a California school shooting this week is still not a standardized practice across the country—leaving thousands of schools with no rehearsed plan

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California School Shooting Lockdown Saved Lives, But Active Shooter Drills Aren't Universal. Why? (Continued)

in place to save lives during such an attack.

Less than half of states have reported having mandates for schools and districts to carry out active shooter drills, according to a Government Accountability Office (GAO) report. This is despite 40 states saying individual schools are required to run general emergency drills, and an estimated two-thirds of school districts holding active shooter exercises as of March 2016.

Those numbers hint at a larger debate within the school security community about how to prepare kids and teachers for potential mass shootings without freaking them out, sensationalizing violence or over-relying on expensive surveillance gadgets. "Lockdowns work. It's been proven time and time again," said Ken Trump, president of the Cleveland-based firm National School Safety and Security Services. "We need to focus our efforts at least equally, if not more so, from the hardware on procedures, staff training, drills and overall the people side of school safety."

Tuesday's rampage in Rancho Tehama Reserve, which left five people dead and at least eight hurt, was one of more than 40 school shootings so far this year and one of about 200 since 2013, according to Everytown For Gun Safety. But, as superintendent Richard Fitzpatrick told the Los Angeles Times, it "could have gone a lot worse."

Police said gunman Kevin Janson Neal murdered his wife and stuffed her body under floorboards, then killed two neighbors and started driving around in a random shooting spree that claimed two other lives. By the time he arrived at Rancho Tehama Elementary, a 100-student school about two hours from Sacramento, teachers and administrators had already swept students into classrooms, under desks and behind locked doors. Neal rammed his stolen truck through the school's front gates and fired randomly, wounding one boy who is expected to survive.

But no other students were shot by the time Neal fled. Police eventually shot and killed him during a pursuit. "All of the staff were absolutely heroic in making sure that students were getting into the classrooms as shots were being fired," Fitzpatrick said afterward. "This was a question of minutes."

Trump said school trainings for lockdowns—especially those associated with shooter-type threats—have been growing in popularity since the Columbine High School shooting in Colorado in 1999. Interest ticked up after the Sandy Hook Elementary massacre in Newtown, Connecticut in 2012, which left 20 children and six adults at the school dead.

By the 2013-2014 school year, 88 percent of public schools said they had a plan for what to do if there's a shooting, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. Seventy percent said they had drilled students on it, matching up with the estimate in the GAO report. "There was a very understandable, visceral punch-in-the-gut reaction by parents and everybody because the most vulnerable of our vulnerable were hurt: kids," Trump said.

But what exactly these drills entail is difficult to pin down. A spokeswoman for the U.S. Education Department told Newsweek there's no national procedure schools are required to follow. Instead, protocol is set at the local level. Community leaders often have to figure out for themselves whether active shooter drills are worth the resources and, if so, how they should be conducted. It's a daunting task from the outset because such plans aren't one-size-fits-all.

Even the terminology can be confusing. The word "lockdown" is often used as an umbrella term to mean a school's response to any threatening situation, said Amanda Nickerson, a school crisis prevention and intervention expert at the University at Buffalo. What constitutes an "active shooter drill"—and whether kids are told that they are specifically preparing for an active shooter situation—varies.

For example, the Government Accountability Office report details how agencies have different ideas when it comes to the "Run, Hide, Fight" response to an active shooter. A 2013 guide made with input from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Education Department, FBI and Department of Homeland Security features "Run, Hide, Fight" as a survival method for adults who end up in a confrontation with a gunman. It doesn't mention students running, hiding and fighting. The Education Department wanted that recommendation for students to be left out of the guide, and the FBI said community leaders can decide if they want to teach it.

The GAO concluded that this and other factors have led to "the absence of a well-coordinated strategy for school emergency management planning efforts" at the federal level. There's also an ideological split between those who advocate for a hardware-based approach to security and those who want to focus on human training. The market for products like Bullet Blocker backpacks, which start at \$210 and come in colors like magenta, pink and army green, is growing. But experts like Trump argue that high-quality equipment alone is not enough to keep kids safe.

That said, there's disagreement over where to draw the line. Nickerson explained that some people insist school personnel and students need to feel a level of anxiety during shooter drills in order to take them seriously. That has led to full-scale exercises like the one at Troy Buchanan High School in Missouri in 2014, in which police officers fired blanks to simulate an attack while theater student "victims" sustained faux bullet wounds. Or the one at Jewett Middle Academy in Winter Haven, Florida the same year, which caused a brief panic because administrators didn't tell teachers or parents about it in advance.

Monthly Webinars!

First Wednesday of Every Month

at 10 am

(Except January, July, and August).

Next Webinars

Wednesday,
December 6,
2017

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

California School Shooting Lockdown Saved Lives, But Active Shooter Drills Aren't Universal. Why? (Continued)

Intense approaches like those can traumatize young students, Nickerson said. The National Association of School Psychologists and National Association of School Resource Officers have said maneuvers like simulated gunfire can trigger everything from asthma attacks to hysterics, so drills need to be conducted carefully. "The message needs to be, 'We're doing this to keep you safe. Not, oh my gosh, you could be the next one because school shootings are rampant,'" Nickerson said.

The psychologists and resource officers associations have released best practices (<https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-safety-and-crisis/best-practice-considerations-for-schools-in-active-shooter-and-other-armed-assailant-drills>) for crisis exercises. Among the recommendations: Form a school safety team; tell students and staff ahead of time if props will be used; make sure drills are age-appropriate; monitor kids how kids are coping during the drills; focus on empowerment over fear; and give everyone access to mental health resources afterward.

Nickerson said administrators can also switch up the times lockdown drills are conducted to give them a more realistic feel. It shows teachers and students how to react if a crisis were to strike during lunch, for example, or in between classes. In Tuesday's case at Rancho Tehama Elementary, the school day hadn't even started when the gunman began shooting. But staffers knew what to do, and their hasty lockdown likely ensured students and staff left the school alive. "We need more examples out there that show when schools are doing what they've been trained to do that it helps, that it does make a difference," Nickerson said.

Teen Threatened School Violence Hours After Another Student Shot, Killed Himself at Florida High School

NY Daily News, November 15, 2017

<http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/teen-threatened-violence-hours-florida-student-suicide-article-1.3634814>

A Florida student posted his final messages on social media before killing himself at a high school — and hours later, another student made an online threat, police said. Seth Sutherland, 17, sent private messages to his parents and friends before posting one final public message. "Rest in peace. F--k all of you who contributed to this," he wrote, according to Lake County Sheriff's Lt. John Herrell.

Shortly after the messages were sent, Sutherland shot himself in a courtyard near the administration office at Lake Minneola High School, Herrell said. A Florida student posted his final messages on social media before killing himself at a high school — and hours later, another student made an online threat, police said.

Seth Sutherland, 17, sent private messages to his parents and friends before posting one final public message. "Rest in peace. F--k all of you who contributed to this," he wrote, according to Lake County Sheriff's Lt. John Herrell. Shortly after the messages were sent, Sutherland shot himself in a courtyard near the administration office at Lake Minneola High School, Herrell said.

Jonathan Voros, 16, sent a photo of a gun in one hand and another hand on a steering wheel to a friend with a caption that said something along the lines of, "I'm heading to Lake Minneola High School to finish what wasn't started," according to Herrell. Voros is not a student at Lake Minneola or nearby East Ridge High School, which the friend he sent the message to attends, but is instead enrolled in a GED program.

The friend who received the Snapchat alerted his school and contact was quickly made with Lake Minneola High School and the suspect's parents. The teen was identified and located at a traffic stop, according to a statement from the Lake County Sheriff's Office. "He thought it was something he would send to his friend in jest," Herrell said. Voros was arrested and a BB gun was found in his possession. Deputies charged him with written threats to kill or do bodily harm.

The Texas Church Shooter was 26 - And It Shows A Disturbing Trend About Millennial Men and Mass Murder

Business Insider, November 6, 2017

<http://www.businessinsider.com/why-most-terrorists-and-mass-shooters-are-millennial-men-2017-11>

On November 5, a 26-year-old killed at least 26 people in a mass shooting that took place in a church in Sutherland Springs, Texas. After a brief chase, the shooter was found dead by gunshot wound and later identified as Devin Patrick Kelley, a former airman in the US Air Force. The events took place less than a week after a man in a Home Depot pickup truck named Sayfullo Saipov veered into a New York City bike lane, killing eight people and injuring a dozen more. It was the city's deadliest terror attack since September 11, 2001.

Over the past decade, the demographic profile of terrorists like Kelley and Saipov have begun to come into focus. Men between 20 and 30 years old are overwhelmingly more likely to commit mass shootings, attacks, and acts of terrorism than any other gender or age group in the US, the evidence suggests. Psychiatrists and social scientists believe the trend can be explained by a mix of factors, including a lack of neurological development, the need for belonging, and an evolving trend of past attacks that make future ones seem less horrific to perpetrators, and perhaps even noble.

The Texas Church Shooter was 26 - And It Shows A Disturbing Trend About Millennial Men and Mass Murder (Continued)

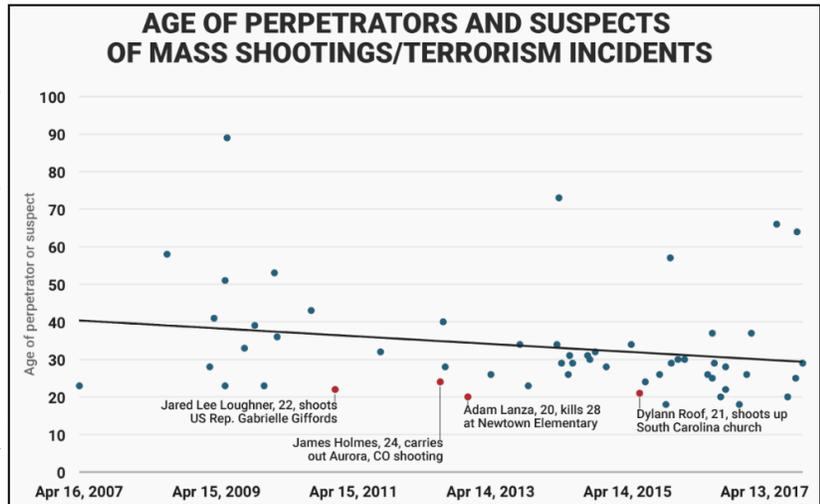


Mia Ray Langheim
School Intelligence
Officer

A 10-year trend is coming into focus - Consider the following chart, which plots every major US terrorist attack, mass shooting, and otherwise politically motivated or premeditated attack over the last 10 years. The full data set can be viewed here (https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1_UU9gCC6rwVby78cl7KC_DZSFJWje76SvBqsXAnAG1o/edit#gid=0).

From the Virginia Tech massacre in 2007, carried out by 23-year-old Seung-Hi Cho, to the most recent attack in Texas, the trend gradually begins to cluster around men in their mid-20s and early 30s.

The most infamous events include James Holmes, 24, killing 12 and injuring 58 in the Aurora, Colorado movie theater killing spree; Adam Lanza, 20, fatally shooting 28 people (many of them children) at Newtown Elementary School; 20- and 26-year-old Dzhokhar and Tamerlan Tsarnaev of the Boston Marathon Bombings in 2013; and Dylann Roof, 21, who killed nine churchgoers in South Carolina in June 2015.



A lack of development in the brain could explain why - Dr. Howard Forman, assistant professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Albert Einstein College of Medicine, believes underdevelopment in the brain's frontal lobes, the areas responsible for controlling impulses and risky behavior, could play a role. In humans, the frontal lobes keep growing until approximately age 25.

"The preponderance of young men engaging in these deadly, evil, and stupid acts of violence may be a result of brains that have yet to fully developed," Forman told Business Insider. Since many of the men are older than 25, Forman also suggested the desire for community could be attracting people on the margins. Forman called this "the allure of evil," and it seems to be consistent with terrorists often showing allegiance to groups like ISIS or other ideological causes.

"Joining a movement of evil, whether fascist, supremacist, or terrorist oftentimes allows an individual to go from feelings of being a nobody to being a somebody," Forman said. "And not just a somebody, but even a leader."

The theory of "thresholds" singles out men - The fact that men, not women, tend to commit terrorist acts makes things more complicated. After all, women's frontal lobes also keep developing until 25, so it's not just a matter of development. To explain that difference, some social scientists have come to rely on the theory of "thresholds," or the idea that each person has a different standard for which they'll engage in certain acts. The theory was developed by sociologist Mark Granovetter in the 1970s.

In his 2015 New Yorker piece "How School Shootings Happen," journalist Malcolm Gladwell unpacks Granovetter's research. He explains that someone who riots by throwing a brick through a store window has a threshold of zero. They can act alone. But someone else in that riot might need to see that first brick go through the glass to pick one up themselves, so they have a threshold of one. And so on. Even if your threshold is 1,000 or 10,000, Granovetter's research suggests that everyone has their threshold to riot.

The same could be happening with mass shootings, Gladwell argues. Ever since Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold committed the 1999 massacre at Columbine High School, young men have had a kind of playbook to carry out mass murder. Young men can point to specific predecessors who paved the way with past attacks, ultimately turning them into idols.

In effect, these attacks have become "a slow-motion, ever-evolving riot," Gladwell wrote, "in which each new participant's action makes sense in reaction to and in combination with those who came before."

The US looks toward the future - Whether the trend abates could depend on how well communities, in addition to local and federal governments, address the psychological and cultural issues affecting men in this age bracket.

Forman's explanation suggests that millennial men who feel ostracized need more productive ways to become part of a group. Criminal psychologist James Garbarino, who has spent 20 years interviewing convicted murderers, has found the majority of men have unresolved trauma in their lives. Granovetter's research also suggests the federal government has a role to play in destroying the ideological networks that link so many killers together, in order to stop the threshold effect. In the meantime, the trend of past attacks, the current political climate, and the sheer size of the millennial population all suggest tensions are unlikely to cool anytime soon.