

RESEARCH BRIEF

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SURVIVOR PERSPECTIVES ON RESEARCH PRIORITIES FOR ASSESSING MENTAL HEALTH OUTCOMES AFTER SCHOOL SHOOTINGS

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BACKGROUND

Firearm violence is the **leading cause of death for children** ages one to nineteen in the US. Although less common than other forms of firearm violence, **school shootings pose a critical public health challenge**. Since the Columbine tragedy in 1999, over 383,000 students have experienced school shootings, including 160 incidents in 2023. Despite the rising frequency of these events over the past two decades, **the long-term mental health effects remain less well understood**.

Incorporating survivor perspectives to understand and measure these impacts is essential for addressing the unique needs of affected communities and enhancing recovery efforts.

STUDY GOAL

This study engaged school shooting survivors in a participant-driven approach to identify key research areas and resource needs regarding their mental health.

There are so many people I know that from before the shooting and after the shooting, the life trajectories they had planned completely changed.

You can't just focus on the numbers. You have to remember these are real, living people you're studying.

APPROACH

Researchers employed a **qualitative design** to investigate the experiences of school shooting survivors through **individual and group interviews**. Participants recruited from survivor support groups were either physically present at school during the event or had an immediate family member present. The analysis aimed to **identify new themes** while also **examining existing categories** based on results of a comprehensive **scoping review**.

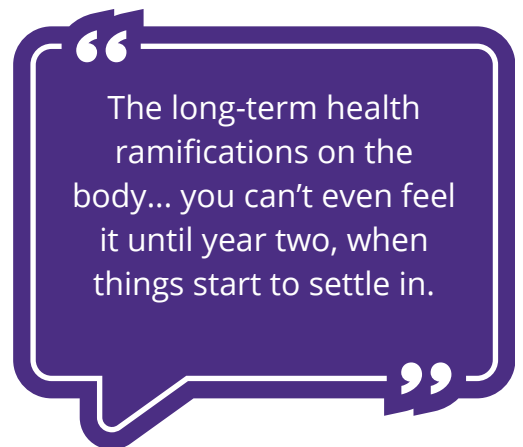
RESULTS

This study identified three key research priorities from interviews with 13 survivors, who had a median age of 40 years (range: 18-47) and included 11 student survivors, one parent, and one sibling of a victim.

Participant-Identified Research Priorities	Proposed Research Directions
Understand the Mental Health Impacts Across the Life Course	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Investigate long-term mental health challenges faced by survivors.• Explore mental distress that arises post-acute recovery.• Examine non-linear trajectories of mental health and recovery among survivors.
Include a Broader Range of Outcomes Beyond Traditional Mental Health Metrics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assess the impact of school shootings on social dynamics and relationships.• Evaluate trauma's influence on survivors' goals and motivation.• Investigate links between school shooting exposure and substance use.• Analyze the financial implications of trauma and recovery for survivors and families.• Examine effects on academic performance and educational outcomes.
Diversify Research Approaches and Study Designs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Broaden study population of individuals and communities impacted• Include all types of school shootings (e.g., incidents where less than four individuals were killed)• Amplify and center survivors' perspectives

IMPLICATIONS

This study highlights **key research priorities** from school shooting survivors, emphasizing the need to address long-term mental health impacts, incorporate more outcomes, utilize diverse study designs, and engage a wider participant base. Integrating these insights into research will help facilitate **development of evidence-informed interventions** that effectively meet community needs.



FUNDING INFORMATION

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FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, REFER TO:

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