

Health Talk

What goes in the Minds of Adolescent Shooters

By Dr. Niru Prasad

Gun violence among our adolescents and adults has become a 21st century public health epidemic. Recent data presented by the CDC (nejm.org) showed the approximate number of firearm-related deaths in 2020 in the United States was close to 45,222. Furthermore, homicides involving firearms are affecting both our adolescent and adult population in the United States. In fact, according to recent data, firearm related injuries and deaths are second only to motor vehicle accidents as a leading cause of death. Drug overdose and poisoning increased by 83.6 percent in 2020, becoming the 3rd leading cause of death in adolescents and adults.

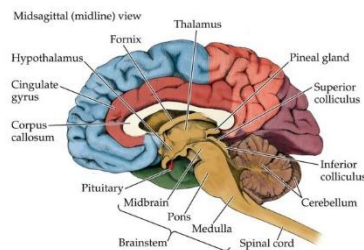
Increasing firearm mortality in the present century reflects a long term trend in society's failure to protect our children. The mass school shooting that occurred on November 30, 2021, in Oxford, Michigan, made national news. A 15-year-old school shooter killed 4 students and left many others injured. The shooter is being tried as an adult, and his parents have also been charged with involuntary murder. This is a senseless tragedy. The Oxford example is not the only example of senseless killing. Just this month, a young adult opened fire in a grocery store in Buffalo, New York, killing at least 10 innocent bystanders.

What are some of the factors leading our youth to violence?

Unemployment and poverty, dysfunctional families, substance abuse. Social media has also been linked to violence amongst our youth. Anxiety, depression, fear of being bullied.

Researchers are now studying "deadly dreams." These are fantasies that young shooters frequently experience. (www.scientificamerican.com)

What goes on in the mind of a juvenile shooter?



Images for anatomy of the teenage brain are being performed. www.amenclinics.com A thorough study of the profile of mass shooters has documented that mentally ill individuals have lower brain activity in their pre-frontal cortex of the frontal lobe (grey matter) that controls their behavior and judgment.

Any damage to areas like frontal lobe, hypothalamus and limbic system, can contribute to extreme aggression, loss of control,

loss of judgment and violence. Researches have also proven the fact that adolescents with poor impulse control, anger outbursts, schizophrenia, and abuse, are more prone to possess guns and become violent.

Research shows that increased time on social media and group chatting can have a negative influence on our youth, causing a decline in mental health and making our young ones more susceptible to thoughts of suicide and violence. Isolating alone all day and excessive use of one's smartphone also causes loneliness and depression.

How can we do our part to prevent mass shootings?

Physical and mental wellness Parental guidance School guidance Education Restrictions on access to firearms Here in America, cycles of gun violence are exacerbated when black and brown communities are not given equal access to education, housing, jobs, mental health and trauma services. President Biden is pledging 5 billion dollars for community violence intervention.

Protective measures to keep guns safe at home include keeping all guns unloaded and secured in a place that children cannot access. In conclusion: Psychological evaluations can predict future psychopathic behavior. Gun control can help reduce senseless gun violence. Parents should be engaged with their children. Educators should be on high alerts with their students.

In closing, the views I have expressed are shaped by 50 years of clinical practice in pediatrics and emergency medicine. It is my hope that stricter gun control and good parenting will help our youth navigate through this difficult time of increased gun violence. As always, I would like to thank my viewers. If you missed my first segment on crime prevention, you can find it on the station's website.