

Comment on April 16, 2007, Virginia Tech student homicide.

Newspaper accounts suggest the student shooter at Virginia Tech was mentally ill. Not all such shooters are. My research shows that many, many things contribute to endorsement of homicide as a solution to personal problems, including feelings of career or school failure, rigid thinking, impulsiveness, low guilt for wrongdoing, unresolved anger, enjoying hostile activities, including watching violent movies and playing violent video games, gun skill and access, being closed to help with personal problems, not willing to help stop violence, lying on questionnaires and feelings of social rejection. That is, persons who report having these views of their personal lives also report willingness to entertain thoughts of homicide. Persons who report these many experiences are more likely to be incarcerated as teens or adults.

Kicking a student out of school to protect the school can be seen by the student as "social rejection", precipitating violence. Thus, preventing access to handguns is one practical way to minimize student shootings. Until the majority of citizens, who want better solutions to such problems, have more power over politicians than special interest groups currently have, we can expect only slow government progress in making constructive changes. Special interest group money is a very powerful influence on politicians of both major parties, often overruling the will of the majority of citizens, as on the war in Iraq and local violence prevention. There is much money to be made in war armaments and handguns. Even our universities are heavily funded in research grants by the Department of Defense. Many industries that make this money also have lobbyists in Washington. The general public has no comparable lobbyists with money to trade for legislative decisions, as far as I can tell. Thus, research that can find ways to help politically empower the majority of wise, caring citizens is of central importance to communities. This is one of the missions of PPRI.