

2020

The Effects of Gun-Free Zones and Mass Shootings

Melissa Gonzalez Rock
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Melissa Gonzalez Rock

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Walden University
2020

Abstract

The Effects of Gun-Free Zones and Mass School Shootings

by

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MS, National University, 2008

BA, North Carolina State University, 2006

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

February 2020

Abstract

There has been an increase in the number of mass school shootings even though there are policies in place such as the Gun-Free School Zone Act (GFSZA) to stop such crimes from occurring. Although there is a divide between supporters of these policies and those who want them revamped or removed, all want the same result: to end mass school shootings. The debate between those who wish to leave policies such as the GFSZA in place and those who seek to replace them with new policies that allow guns on campus for various personnel has strong advocates on both sides. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences and knowledge of teachers and staff regarding the effectiveness of the GFSZA. The theoretical framework used to guide the dissertation was the social construction framework. The study's first research question concerned the perspectives of high school staff and faculty in the southeastern United States on the nature of the relationship between the social construct of social populations related to the GFSZA and the policy's efficacy in preventing mass casualty events on campus. The second research question addressed safety measures that should be implemented to deter school shootings. Data was collected from 25 anonymous online surveys, which were coded and analyzed to determine what themes emerged. Overall research determined that changes needed to be made to the GFSZA policy for it to be more effective in protecting students and staff from mass shooters. The study may have a significant impact toward positive social change by facilitating greater understanding of school shootings and informing the creation of policies and procedures that may be effective in preventing these crimes from occurring.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Steve, who has supported me throughout this process and has motivated and believed in me throughout the entire process. Thank you for all your love and support; there are not enough words for me to express my love and gratitude for you. To my children, Landon and Lourdes, whom I do everything in my life for and want to set the best example for. Your hugs and smiles helped me through the process. I want you to always pursue your goals and passions; do not let anything stop you. I am proud to be the first person in my family to hold the title of Doctor and want to thank my parents, John and Judith, for instilling in me a strong work ethic and the belief that I could do anything I set my mind to. To my sister, Angela, who has always been my cheerleader and supporter throughout my life. Finally, I would like to thank God for the strength and encouragement I needed throughout the process and the love and grace You have always shown me.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my doctoral chairperson, Dr. Marisa Bryant, who guided me throughout the entire process and was eager and ready to provide feedback, guidance, and support. I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Michael Kelmp-North and Dr. Daniel Jones, who were influential in clarifying and revising my dissertation and set me up for success. Finally, I would like to thank my academic advisor, Tzadia Jackson, who has always checked on my progress and encouraged me to continue throughout the process. This was a team effort; thank you to all those who have supported me throughout my dissertation journey.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Mass school shootings continue to occur at an alarming rate in the United States, despite legislation aimed to prevent these occurrences. This issue has generated debates as to whether current policies and procedures are effective. One such policy is the Gun-Free School Zones Act of 1990 (GFSZA), which does not allow guns on any school campus or within 1,000 feet of a school. This act applies to private and public schools but does not apply to colleges and universities. The GFSZA was signed into law by President George H. W. Bush in 1990 (Paulson, 2018).

The goal of the GFSZA was to reduce the incidence of mass shootings, accidental firearm injury and death, suicide, and violent crimes in schools. Proponents of the law contended that eliminating guns in schools would eliminate the risk of firearm injury (RAND Corporation, 2018). However, since the GFSZA's implementation, mass school shootings have continued to occur at an increasing rate. There are those who fully support the GFSZA and believe that it is the best way to protect students and teachers. Opponents such as researcher Murphy (2014), however, argue that it is achieving the opposite of its intent and is making schools targets as attackers know that individuals in schools are not armed. There has been much debate about the effectiveness of this policy but little research on whether it dissuades individuals from committing school shootings.

Research completed by organizations such as the American Counseling Association, Barna Group, and Pew Research Center has been focused on determining what causes an individual to commit a mass school shooting and the most efficient

security measures to prevent these events (Smith, 2018). Nevertheless, politicians and members of society deem existing research on preventing school-based violence to be insufficient, noting that despite policies currently in place, mass shootings continue to occur (Valone, 2018). Activists for Second Amendment rights, including the National Rifle Association (NRA), Representative Thomas Massie of Kentucky, and President Donald Trump, want the GFSZA removed (Barondes, 2017). Those who support the removal of the GFSZA want to allow specially selected and trained school personnel to be armed. Additional research is needed to determine whether the GFSZA is effective and should remain in place or whether it is ineffective and should be rescinded.

There are currently programs in place that allow properly trained volunteers to carry guns to help stop terrorist attacks. One such program is the Federal Flight Deck Officer Program, under which volunteer pilots go through additional background checks and training and are permitted to carry firearms to stop terrorist attacks (Valone, 2018). This program model could be implemented in the school system as an additional protective measure.

Some of those who directly oppose the GFSZA do so under the belief that it is unconstitutional. The act was originally ruled unconstitutional in 1995 but was amended and legalized by the Supreme Court (“U.S. Representative Massie Proposes Repeal of Federal Gun-Free School Zones Act,” 2013). Opponents of the GFSZA do not think that it is effective and argue that it makes schools larger targets. Attackers know that they can infiltrate a school and have access to a large victim pool with little to no resistance. The goal of a mass shooter is to kill a large population in the shortest time possible, and this

act, opponents maintain, enables them to do so (Kopel, 2009). Opponents of the GFSZA identify it as an outdated policy that does not fit the needs of modern society. They believe that there are other solutions that would yield better results in stopping mass school shootings, such as training and arming school employees and working with local law enforcement (Murphey, 2014).

Researchers such as Safra (2000) and Kopel (2009) have opposed the GFSZA, noting that in the almost 30 years that it has been in effect, the incidence of school shootings has continued to rise. Critics contend that the GFSZA is not doing what it was intended to do and needs to be repealed and replaced with alternative options, such as arming faculty and staff. Even with an increase in other security measures, such as metal doors, clear bookbags, video cameras, and locked doors ensuring one entry and exit at schools, the GFSZA has not prevented mass school shootings.

Since the enactment of the GFSZA, 11 mass shootings have occurred throughout the United States. Valone (2018) cited research by Lott and Landes (2000), who discovered that in locations where mass school shootings occurred in conjunction with the expansion of concealed handgun laws, shootings declined by 84%, deaths declined by 90 %, and injuries declined by 82 %. Lott and Landes concluded that the passage of concealed handgun laws was the only effort that positively affected the crime's frequency and offered the only actual deterrent. Opponents of the GFSZA assert that weapons should be allowed on school grounds when they are handled by trained employees who choose to accept this responsibility and receive necessary training (Valone, 2018).

Supporters of the GFSZA, meanwhile, assert that the policy keeps students and staff safe and that removing it would increase the number of school shootings. Advocates such as Eric Heins, President of the California Teachers Association, contend that the GFSZA reduces gun violence in schools, citing statistics indicating that school shootings have decreased since its implementation (Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, 2018). Researchers Trump (2014) and Fleegler (2013) argued that arming teachers is not the solution and would be counterproductive, given that a teacher's role is that of educator, not law enforcement officer. Of all fatal school shootings since 1966, 90% occurred while a security or law enforcement officer was present. Having law enforcement present did not stop the shootings; therefore, it may be argued that arming teachers would likely have no effect toward preventing a school shooting.

A current model that many K-12 school districts and higher education institutions have effectively implemented is the Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, and Evacuate (ALICE) program. This program provides a trainer to instruct teachers on how to plan properly for an active shooter while following all rules of the GFSZA. A police officer whose wife was a principal in an elementary school created ALICE because he wanted to create a program to keep her safe after the events of Columbine. The first step in ALICE, *alert*, involves recognizing the signs of danger in order to make decisions that will improve the survival rate. The next step is *lockdown*, which may include barricading the room or preparing to evacuate, depending on the specific scenario. The third step is *inform*, which involves communicating the intruder's location and direction as events occur. The next step is *counter*, which involves creating a distraction in order to reduce

the perpetrator's ability to shoot. The final step is *evacuate*, which involves safely removing oneself from danger when it is safe to do so (ALICE, 2019). This program has been implemented in several educational institutions successfully while following the tenets of the GFSZA.

There is also concern about allowing guns on campuses because young adults between 18 and 25 years of age have the highest rates of mental illness. Between 9% and 11% of college-age students commit suicide, which is about 1,100 students per year. Statistics show that violent crime for this age group declined from 1995 to 2002. Proponents of this act feel that allowing guns on campus could spark more homicides and suicides. Students are 90% more likely to be victimized on campus than off campus. Additionally, students who keep guns on school campuses in their dorm rooms are more likely to engage in risky behavior, such as binge drinking, drinking and driving, vandalizing property, and having unprotected intercourse (Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, 2018). Proponents of the GFSZA surmise that abolishing it could have severe consequences for both K–12 schools and colleges.

Problem Statement

Research has indicated an increase in mass school shootings at all levels of education throughout the United States. Despite lawmakers creating policies to prevent school shootings, the incidence of these events has increased over the past 50 years (Paradice, 2017). Despite current gun laws, perpetrators continue to bring guns onto campuses. Gun laws including the GFSZA affects about 56 million students every day in the United States (NCES, 2018). Policies mandating “no guns in a school zone” must be

further researched to identify whether the current ban is an effective method of ending school shootings. After the implementation of the GFSZA, all schools became gun-free areas; however, this policy has not prevented mass school shootings from occurring. The policy allows guns on campus for individuals who are law enforcement officers acting in an official capacity (Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives, 2006). The larger problem is that there is not consensus among educators and politicians as to the best method to combat mass school shootings. There is division between proponents of guns for protection in schools and those who oppose gun use altogether and call for stricter gun laws.

Among the sites of the most publicized school shootings are Columbine High School in 1999, Virginia Tech in 2007, and Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012. One of the most recent attacks was at Parkland High School in February 2018. This incident sparked an outcry to revamp U.S. gun policies, which are intended to affect current gun issues in school systems. Research conducted by Barondes, from January 1, 2016 to March 31, 2017, indicated that only 25 defendants had been charged with violating this law in the United States. This federal statute is rarely enforced and therefore does not have a substantial positive impact (2017). These tragedies have led to debates on the effectiveness of the GFSZA, as well as discussions of additional methods of preventing school shootings among educators and politicians. This research addresses the need for politicians and educators to consider revamping or removing the GFSZA in order to fit the needs of modern-day school systems around the United States. As there is research

for and against the GFSZA, I want to fill the gap in knowledge and explore the opinions and experiences of educators and staff who work under the current provisions of the law.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences and knowledge of teachers and staff regarding the effectiveness of the GFSZA. The participants were staff and teachers of high schools in the southeastern United States. There is little existing research on the effectiveness of the GFSZA; those who work with students daily will have firsthand knowledge of whether it is a sufficient deterrent to school shooters. This research may offer an understanding drawn from those who deal with the relevant population daily. This research may also encourage additional research on the effectiveness of the GFSZA in different regions of the United States.

Research Questions

- Q1. From the perspective of high school staff and faculty in the southeastern United States, what is the nature of the relationship between the social construct of social populations related to GFSZA and its efficacy in preventing mass casualty events on campus?
- Q2. What safety measures do school staff and teachers propose should be implemented to deter school shootings?

Conceptual Framework

The research used the social construction framework (SCF). The SCF focuses on dependence on power and social constructions in a target population, which may shape policy designs. In this theory, the scientific and policy community is divided, and

scientific and technical information presents risks to groups with differing opinions on the issue. The information provided by the SCF depends on political context and can challenge or reinforce a target population and policies (Schneider & Ingram, 2008). The SCF was developed in an effort to better understand why public policies fail at solving public problems (Pierce et al., 2014). In this instance, the target group was the staff and students in the school. Politics are directly involved with security and gun policies that affect schools and students. Additionally, there is debate over how forestalling shootings and protecting students should be accomplished, along with discussion of policies that are or should be in place.

This conceptual framework was effective for this research because the SCF worked well with describing the policy making process, understanding if the GFSZA is an effective policy, and if it is not, understanding where the law has failed. This framework was ideal for understanding the experiences and opinions of teachers and staff who worked under the provisions of the GFSZA. This theory is useful in exploring policies that are not effective due to policymakers making quick emotional judgments with selective facts based on their understanding of the policy issue and solution. The psychology of social construction is that people make quick and emotional judgments about populations that they are part of. As policymakers exploit social preferences for political rewards, their judgments create policy design that may not foster the most effective course of action to address an issue (Cairney, 2017). I discuss this theory further in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

I used a qualitative phenomenological research approach in this study.

Phenomenological research was best suited for this study because the goal was to analyze the lived experiences and knowledge of staff and teachers concerning the effectiveness of the GFSZA. The participants in this study all shared lived experiences of being involved as educators in a school system who worked under the provisions of the GFSZA as well as interacted with the population that the law was designed to protect. The research questions were developed with the aim of understanding the effectiveness of the GFSZA through the experiences and opinions of participants. The research offered insight into this phenomenon and illuminated whether the current law is working.

I anticipated that at least 25 participants would consent to participate in the study. If at least 25 participants completed the study, then saturation would be met. Data were gathered through participant surveys administered online through Survey Monkey. The data collection method involved the use of a list of cross-sectional survey questions to gather participants' thoughts and experiences on the topic. The planned location for the study was high schools in the southeastern United States (Patton, 2002). The data were analyzed by finding patterns, themes, and connections between the multiple-choice answers provided by the participants. These themes were used to understand how the participants perceived this phenomenon, and an overall description of common experiences was analyzed.

Definitions

In this study, definitions for appropriate educational and criminal justice terminology were identified and expressed in the simplest terms.

Effectiveness: The degree to which something is successful in producing a desired result; success (Oxford Dictionary, 2019).

Federal Gun-Free School Zone Act (GFSZA): Under this law, it is generally unlawful for any individual to knowingly possess a firearm within a school zone. A *school zone* is defined as encompassing the area within 1,000 feet of the grounds of a public, parochial, or private school. This prohibition does not apply to the possession of a firearm on private property that is not part of school grounds, such as the premises of a business with a Federal Firearms License (FFL). In the following situations, an individual would not possess a firearm in violation of 922(q)(A):

1. The individual is licensed by the State or political subdivision to possess the firearm, and the license was issued after law enforcement officials verified that the individual is qualified to receive the license;
2. The firearm is unloaded and is contained within a locked container or a locked firearms rack that is on a motor vehicle;
3. The firearm is possessed by an individual for use in a school-approved program;
4. The individual or his/her employer is doing so in accordance with a contract between the individual and the school;
5. The individual is a law enforcement officer acting in their official capacity;

6. The individual is crossing school grounds to reach a public or private way.

Their firearm is unloaded, and they have permission from the school. (Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives, 2006)

Firearm: Any weapon, including a starter gun, that will, is designed to, or may easily be converted to explosively fire a projectile, such a weapon's frame or receiver, a firearm muffler or silencer, or any destructive device, such as an incendiary, explosive, or poison gas. Antique firearms and fireworks are not included in this definition. Knives are also excluded; they are regulated only by state law (Texas Association of School Boards, 2018).

Protective factor, buffer, or asset: These terms refer to any one of a number of the community, school, family, or peer-individual domains that have been shown to prevent violent behavior and alcohol, tobacco, or illegal drug use by youth in the community and that promote positive youth development; these results must be demonstrated by prospective research efforts over time or be grounded in a well-established theoretical model of prevention (U.S. Department of Education, 2005).

School-aged population: This term applies to people aged 5 through 17 years, as determined by the Secretary of Education from the most recent satisfactory data available from the Department of Commerce (U.S. Department of Education, 2005).

School personnel: The term includes teachers, principals, administrators, counselors, social workers, psychologists, nurses, librarians, and other support staff who are employed by a school and perform contractual services for it (U.S. Department of Education, 2005).

School resource officer (SRO): The term refers to a career law enforcement officer, with sworn authority, whom the relevant police department assigns for community-oriented policing to a local educational agency to collaborate with schools and community-based organizations to educate students about crime and illegal drug use prevention and safety; develop or expand community justice initiatives for students; and train students in conflict resolution, restorative justice, and crime and illegal drug use awareness (U.S. Department of Education, 2005).

An SRO is a commissioned, sworn law enforcement officer. The National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO, n.d.) recommends that all SROs be issued and carry all of the same equipment that they would have on any other law enforcement assignment. NASRO (n.d.) leaders are aware, however, that a few local jurisdictions prohibit their SROs from carrying firearms when on school campuses.

School zone: This term refers to an area that is in, on the grounds of, or within 1,000 feet of the grounds of a public, parochial, or private school (Texas Association of School Boards, 2018).

Risk factor: The term refers to any one of a number of characteristics of the community, school, family, or peer-individual domains that have been demonstrated by prospective research efforts over time to predict violent behavior and alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drug use by youth in the school community (U.S. Department of Education, 2005).

Assumptions

I assumed that all participation would be voluntary and that respondents would provide truthful and complete answers. I assumed that participants would answer all questions and would provide a variety of responses based on their unique experiences and perspectives. I assumed that all participants would be knowledgeable about the school system and its security policies and would be familiar with the GFSZA.

Scope

The study included high schools in the southeastern United States. The focus was on staff and teachers, under the presumption that they had the most knowledge of local perceptions of the problem. The study participants worked with the population that had been the source of both targeted students and shooters, as well as potential future shooters. As of 2018, there had been 70 incidents of gun violence in this region of the United States since 1990, which had resulted in 136 injuries and 38 fatalities (“United States School Shootings and Firearm Incidents,” 2018). I expected that participants’ knowledge of the effectiveness of the GFSZA would be invaluable to understanding school shootings and working on a deterrent. I chose school staff and teachers as participants because they saw the actual results of security policies being implemented under the guidelines and policies of the GFSZA, had firsthand experience with the policies’ effectiveness, and possessed overall knowledge of the issue. The aim of this research was to understand the effectiveness of the GFSZA in the southeastern United States, thereby addressing a gap in the literature. Several aspects of the study may be transferable to address additional gaps in research on gun control and school safety.

Delimitations

In this study, I focused on the effectiveness of GFZSA as a measure to prevent mass school shootings based on the experiences and opinions of school faculty and staff who were familiar with this policy. Delimitations of this research included the fact that I received input from educators and staff only; substitute teachers were not asked to participate. Additionally, some of the faculty and staff may have had limited experience with teaching, in that there was no minimum teaching requirement for participants in the study. The populations surveyed did not include all geographic regions of the United States. Further, I did not investigate the prevention of school shootings; it is not possible for one study to address all elements of mass school shootings (Astor et al., 2009).

Social learning theory was potentially relevant to this research because this theory is useful in analyzing how individuals create new behaviors based on their surroundings, experiences, and interactions with society. This theory could have been applicable to the reasons why mass shooters bring firearms to school based on behaviors learned in their home and school environments. However, I did not choose this theory to guide the study because I sought to focus on the effectiveness of the GFSZA and how that directly affected students, staff, and potential mass shooters.

Limitations

This research was limited to one school system that contained several schools in the southeastern United States. Participants were limited to high school faculty and staff only. Participants were from a school system that did not allow educators to be armed and that followed the guidelines of the GFSZA. Not all participants whom I invited to

complete the survey responded. The sample size was large due to the size of the school system. Finally, the research was limited by the specific demographics and cultures of the high school populations selected for the study.

Additionally, the study was subject to geographic or regional limitations, in that it was focused on the southeastern United States. Factors of this population that may have caused bias included political party affiliation and religious views. The results of the research may help to promote additional research in various regions of the United States to determine whether one policy can address the needs of people in different regions of the country.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because I focused on a law that is in place in U.S. school systems in order to keep students and staff safe from weapons and mass shooters on campus. The results of this study provide information from staff and teachers who deal with this law daily; participants' knowledge may be helpful in assessing the effectiveness of the GFSZA. The study may bring increased awareness of the issue of mass school shootings and may promote further research into the GFSZA reflecting different perspectives from teachers and staff across the United States. This additional research may help lawmakers understand viewpoints from different regions of the country in order to determine whether the law fits the needs of all school districts nationwide or whether it should be amended or revamped to fit current regional needs.

This research fills a gap in the literature related to understanding the effectiveness of the GFSZA as a primary method of preventing mass school shootings. The re-

evaluation of this policy may help in determining whether it is effective and should remain in place or whether it is ineffective and should be amended or abolished. If the policy is found to be ineffective, this finding could promote future research and policy evaluation as to what security measures should be put into place to prevent mass school shootings. According to Safra (2000), gun-free school zones do not work in preventing school shootings and are not constitutional. The GFSZA was created as a reaction to school shootings, but at the time, there was no research to demonstrate its effectiveness. By addressing the efficacy of such policy measures, this study provides additional data on this highly debated topic, as well as insight into how to address the issue effectively to create positive social change.

Summary

The GFSZA is in place to protect students and staff from violent mass shootings. The law has supporters as well as opponents. The concern is that guns continue to enter school systems, and students and staff continue to be killed as a result. I sought to analyze the effectiveness of this policy by examining the opinions and experiences of participants who worked with this law daily to determine whether the law deters individuals from gun violence. Proponents of the law want it to stay in place, arguing that it is effective in preventing mass shootings and that removing the law would be detrimental to the safety of students and staff. The results of this study may create awareness and understanding of the effectiveness of the GFSZA and prompt further research to determine whether this policy should remain in place or be removed.

The lack of literature in this area is an indicator that further research is called for on the GFSZA and other policies and procedures to protect students and staff from becoming victims of gun violence. Chapter 2 presents a literature review. I examine the constitutionality of the GFSZA, the history of school shootings, reasons that the GFSZA is supported and opposed, current security measures in place with this law, and proposed security measures that are not aligned with the GFSZA.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the experiences and opinions of faculty and staff from the southeastern United States concerning the GFSZA and to gather information on their perspectives on its effectiveness in preventing mass school shootings. Some research has indicated that the GFSZA does not stop school shooters and makes schools more vulnerable as targets for gun violence (Kopel, 2009). For this study, the GFSZA was defined as the law enacted in 1990 under which it became illegal to possess a gun within 1,000 feet of a school zone (Thomas, 1995). There is still controversy over this law's constitutionality and effectiveness. Certain research indicates that it is not effective and that authorizing individuals to carry firearms in schools could serve as a deterrent to school shootings. Proponents of laws such as the GFSZA tend to maintain that gun laws should be stricter; advocates of this approach would keep the current no-gun policy in place and would not allow for armed staff in schools. The opposite view is that a gun is a tool and that the real issue is unexamined mental health issues and breakdown in communities (Donnelly, 2017).

My literature review established the need for additional research to be conducted, because in order to stop mass shootings, it is necessary to develop policies that reflect consideration of many factors. The GFSZA is one policy that has been implemented in an attempt to stop the crime of gun violence in schools. Further analysis of a variety of factors is needed to determine whether it would be best to keep, change, or remove this policy as the main preventative measure against school shootings. School gun violence is

a complex, multifaceted crime; in this study, I was only able to address it with reference to the GFSZA. Important factors in school shootings include, but are not limited to, mental health, gun policy, bullying, community relations, social media, and parental involvement (Johnson, 2017).

The goal of this study was to determine the effectiveness of the GFSZA as the main policy in place to stop mass shootings over the last 20 years. The SCF, which served as the theoretical foundation for this study, was useful in understanding the experiences and perspectives of individuals who worked with this policy daily (Andrews, 2012).

This chapter begins with an overview of my literature search strategy and a discussion of the study's theoretical framework. In the literature review that follows, I address the opposing views of those who support and those who are against the GFSZA, along with their reasons for adopting these stances toward the law. I also discuss the history of school shootings in the United States and why this policy was implemented to address the problem. Additionally, I identify a gap in the literature on school policy studies, community involvement, and the constitutionality of the GFSZA in order to justify my pursuit of this study. I discuss the GFSZA and how it has positively and negatively affected the safety of students and staff.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature search included sources available within the Walden University Library and through search engines such as ProQuest Criminal Justice, Sage, EBSCOhost, and ProQuest. I focused my search on peer-reviewed articles; such sources

have been evaluated by scholars based on research that they have conducted and are therefore considered credible. Search terms included *mass school shootings*, *Gun-Free School Zones Act*, *security measures for school shootings*, *active shooter in schools*, *constitutionality of the GFSZA*, *bullying school shootings*, and *causes of school shootings*. To locate additional sources, I reviewed the reference sections of each article and dissertation that I read.

Theoretical Framework

This study's theoretical framework was the social construction framework (SCF), which focuses on social constructions and power for target populations and how these shape policy. I used the SCF to analyze the GFSZA.

The SCF, created 30 years ago, by Berger and Luckmann, (1991), focuses on how observations accurately reflect the world around the observer, specifically addressing the process of creating, sharing, and modifying meaning. The aim in using the SCF is to understand lived experiences from the perspective of those who have undergone them. The emphasis is on how knowledge is created and understood, particularly in interactions between people and how people construct their reality (Andrews, 2012). Berger and Luckmann had a major influence on this theory, and they acknowledged the work of Mead, Marx, Schutz, and Durkheim.

Schneider and Ingram (1993), argued that existing U.S. government policies meet some standards of fairness, but they do not solve major problems such as crime, racism, poverty, and educational inequality. The process of creating these policies does not reflect the experiences and knowledge of ordinary citizens; rather, the process is driven

by experts with certain credentials, who create policies and laws based on calculations rather than personal experiences (Cairney, 2017).

This theory involves an interpretivist approach and has roots similar to those of interpretivism, but it is distinct from interpretivism. This theory is also compatible with grounded theory, but it is not based on a relative perspective or created to come to terms with reality, and it lacks grounded theory's emphasis on language, which is the main difference between the two theories (Andrews, 2012). The SCF was used to understand the effectiveness of the GFSZA from the perspective of the target population that the law affects.

Review of Relevant Literature

In this review of the literature, I address the history of school shootings, GFSZA opposition, GFSZA supporters, current school security measures, proposed school shooting measures, causes of mass school shootings, school safety effects of school achievement, and lessons learned.

High School Shootings

There was only one school shooting in the United States during colonial times. Mass school shootings might seem like a recent epidemic, but the first significant one occurred in 1927 in Bath Township, Michigan. That shooter was able to kill 45 victims and injure 58 others. In the 1980s and 1990s, there was an increase in gun violence in both middle and high schools. These incidents occurred even after the GFSZA was instituted, and they often involved banned weapons, such as high-powered rifles, the Remington Viper, semiautomatic weapons, and the Savage Springfield. Following the

Sandy Hook shooting in December 2012, state legislatures attempted to address the gaps that remained in school safety. Proposed solutions included creating and updating emergency drills and plans, expanding or introducing police presence in the school system, implementing health services to deal with at-risk students and address mental health issues, and physical security measures such as metal detectors. Since the implementation of the GFSZA, there has been a spike in school shootings and a larger number of high-profile shootings, which have inspired several different viewpoints on the correct way to address this issue. Some of the most infamous sites of school shootings include Columbine High School (1999), Heath High School (1997), Virginia Tech (2007), and Parkland, Florida (2018; Donnelly, 2017).

The number of school shootings is on the rise; there have been 24 school shootings in 2018 (Decker and Blade, 2019), and currently in 2019 there have been 45 school shootings (Wolfe and Walker, 2019). The school shootings this year ranged from New Jersey, Maryland and California. Two of the schools where shootings occurred in 2018, Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida and Santa Fe High School in Texas, had mass deaths of 17 and 10 people, respectively. Numbers of fatalities in such events have increased since the 1960s and have risen even more since the Columbine High School attack.

Columbine was a turning point; those shooters who came after have been referred to as *Colombiners*. Investigators are claiming that school shootings have become tactically equivalent to suicide bombings due to the similar ideology behind them. Generally, the perpetrators are young, depressed men who feel alienated and so are drawn

to the subculture represented by the Columbine shooters. They want to act out and get society's attention for the perceived injustice they have suffered. They dress like the men who were responsible for the Columbine shooting and have even referenced them in their own crimes. They are not simply trying to emulate the Columbine shooters; in fact, they seek to do more damage and have more victims. Such shootings are increasing in frequency. The worldwide news coverage given to the Columbine attack is part of the attraction to such crimes for these individuals ("They Do Royal Weddings," 2018).

GFSZA Opposition

Representative Ron Paul instituted the GFSZA, making it "unlawful for any individual knowingly to possess a firearm at a place that the individual knows or has reasonable cause to believe is a school zone" ("U.S. Representative Massie," 2013). This act was ruled unconstitutional in 1995 by the Supreme Court, which caused Congress to amend it; the Supreme Court has not since ruled on its constitutionality. In 2013, Congressman Thomas Massie introduced the Citizens Protection Act of 2013, which set out to repeal the GFSZA. The reasoning behind this appeal was that

Gun-free school zones are ineffective. They make people less safe by inviting criminals into target-rich, no-risk environments. Gun-free zones prevent law-abiding citizens from protecting themselves, and create vulnerable populations that are targeted by criminals. A bigger federal government can't solve the problem. Weapons bans and gun-free zones are unconstitutional. They do not and cannot prevent criminals or mentally ill from committing acts of violence. But

they often prevent victims of such violence from protecting themselves. (“U.S. Representative Massie,” 2013)

This quotation reflects the popular opinion that the GFSZA is not constitutional and should never have been implemented. Adherents of that belief do not think that banning guns from school zones is the answer, believing instead that a ban makes a school a large and easy target for criminals because they know there is no means of protection and they can kill a large population in a small area in a short time. The belief in the unconstitutionality of the GFSZA has caused opponents to go to the Supreme Court to seek removal of the law.

In the case of the Supreme Court case *United States v. Lopez*, the GFSZA was declared unconstitutional. There were several reasons for this decision. The statute does not fall under any of the three categories of Congress’s Commerce Clause powers: over channels of interstate commerce, over the instrumentalities of interstate commerce, and over activities affecting interstate commerce. The possession of firearms is outside federal jurisdiction over interstate commerce. In response to the ruling, Attorney General Janet Reno amended the act. The original GFSZA stated that it was illegal to possess firearms in a school zone. This act was later amended to illegally possessing firearms in a school and also included this additional phrase “that has moved in or that otherwise affects interstate or foreign commerce” in a school zone (Safra, 2000). The amended clause creates the jurisdictional element that allows the federal government to implement the policy.

Even with the modifications, the law offers little power to prosecute the offense, according to President Clinton at the time of the 1995 Supreme Court case. There remains the concern that Congress intruded on an area that is regulated by states, translating commerce power into police power to pass the law (Safra, 2000). The constitutionality of the GFSZA and its effectiveness remain a sticking point for those who are against it. It is also difficult to prosecute in court. This act does not seem to be working in the way in which it was intended, in that there is still an issue with school shootings in the United States. Opponents of the GFSZA want to replace the law and allow teachers and professors to be armed.

Kopel (2009) discussed policy regarding teachers in Grades K-12 and professors in universities carrying firearms. Making schools gun-free zones, Kopel suggested, renders them targets. Kopel's article contains a qualitative review of laws and policies in Connecticut, a case study, and an examination of examples of mass shootings on campus, including the methods that were in place during each event and what happened afterward. Kopel concluded that making schools gun-free zones is dangerous, does not stop mass shooters, and renders schools more vulnerable as targets. The limitations of the study included the fact that it was conducted in one geographical area and might not be generalizable to the whole country. The article offers an analysis of mass shooting events and gun-free school zones and provides clearly researched points on how gun-free school zone policies do not work and why.

There are more than two dozen states that allow adults, including teachers, who legally own guns to carry them into elementary through high schools. There are currently

seven states that allow teachers and staff to be armed. Due to open records law in those states, staff members who choose to carry firearms do not have to share this information with students, parents, teachers, or principals. This means that there is no way of knowing how many teachers and staff at a school are arming themselves because they are operating under a “don't ask, don't tell” guideline, and records are not kept.

After the Sandy Hook Elementary shooting, five states gave their administrators authority to arm teachers. There were more than 80 bills introduced in 33 states relating to arming teachers in schools in 2013 alone. These bills were introduced and enacted in the following states: Alabama, Kansas, South Dakota, Tennessee, and Texas. In 2014, Georgia passed a guns-in-school bill similar to policies created in schools that already had this policy in place. Each state handles the implementation of such policy differently. In Rhode Island and Utah, anyone who has a concealed weapon permit can carry weapons into a school. In Colorado and Arkansas, staff play the dual role of both educator and security officer so that they can carry guns into schools. In Utah, staff have been carrying firearms for 10 years in Grades K-12, and there have been no fatal school shootings. There was a recorded incident in which an elementary school teacher in Salt Lake City, Utah who had a concealed carry permit accidentally shot herself in the leg. There was no one else injured during this accident (Murphy, 2014). These are examples in which arming teachers in some school districts has occurred with little incident.

These are reasons why people who oppose the GFSZA feel that it is an outdated and inefficient policy and that it needs to be removed and replaced with a policy that is more current in responding to the school massacre situation. However, the GFSZA also

has many supporters who want to keep this law in place in school systems because they believe that it is the most effective method of deterring mass school shootings.

GFSZA Supporters

There are several groups that support the GFSZA and believe that it is effective and should not be abolished. Such groups include the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA), which have created a social media movement called #ArmMeWith in response to social media comments made by President Trump that encouraged arming teachers on campus as a method of stopping these attacks. These teachers have rebutted this idea by stating that teachers need to be armed with school supplies, books, and tools to build relationships with students, including tools to address students' emotional needs. These groups claim that most school personnel have no interest in carrying a weapon into school. The president of the National Association of School Resource Officers, Randi Weingarten, was disgusted by the notion of arming teachers and turning schools into militarized fortresses, and he argued that anyone who wants this to become school policy does not understand what is happening in the school system. He spoke with 60,000 educators in a town hall meeting, and the response was universal, even from those teachers who were gun owners, that they did not want to be armed—they wanted to teach. Broward Teachers Union President Anna Fusco stated that teachers are not trained to make “split-second, life-or-death choices, and evaluat[e] if a shot can be taken without harming innocent children with friendly fire” (Bacon, 2018). Faculty and staff who work with students daily feel that they are not properly trained to

undertake being armed. Many teachers also feel that this burden distracts from their primary purpose.

There are educators and unions all over the United States that want to keep the GFSZA in place. Eric Heins, the president of the California Teachers Association, thinks that bringing more guns to school is a misguided and dangerous idea and would not even work if it were to be put into action. President Trump proposes arming anywhere from 10% to 40% of staff; based on those percentages and using California as an example that would be 30,000–120,000 teachers. This also raises the question of the feasibility of replacing the GFSZA and implementing Trump’s plan. There are several factors to consider, such as cost, who would pay for the training, who would provide the training, and whether teachers would be compensated for their time and training. These questions have not been thoroughly discussed or shaped into a feasible plan. The teachers would more than likely have to attend a course presented by police officers, because there are several factors to weapons training that need to be considered. For example, the teachers must learn to be calm and not panic, as they might shoot any nearby civilian instead of the intended target. The teachers would need to know when to draw the gun, when to shoot, and how to be able to aim at the intended target. Teachers are opposed to undertaking this training because they do not feel comfortable doing so and do not want to distract from their focus on education and engaging with students. They feel that being armed and trained would be disservice to the students. Even if all the funding for training were approved federally, those in the school system expect great resistance from the communities and parents of the students (Freedburg, 2018). Teachers and staff believe

that GFSZA should remain in place and that arming staff and teachers is neither safe nor feasible.

There is another alternative to preventing school shootings that have garnered recent media attention, and that is to train and arm teachers professionally. There are strong support and opposition on this topic. Ken Trump is a school safety expert, who has worked for 30 years, and has advised schools and safety officials all over the United States and Canada. His concern with implementing this policy is the issues of a liability this could pose if implemented and the enormous responsibility this would place on the school systems and the staff (Trump, 2010). His main concern is the large and dangerous task that arming teachers could create, and many teacher and parents have the same concern.

There is a huge difference between having trained, certified and commissioned law enforcement officers who are full-time, career public safety professionals that are armed and assigned the duty of protecting students and staff versus having teachers, custodians, cafeteria workers and other non-public safety professionals packing a gun in school and tasked with providing a public safety function for hundreds or thousands of children (Trump, 2010).

This quote discusses the main concern that many teachers and society members have about creating this policy over the current GFSZA policy that is in place. The main concern is that the staff is not adequately equipped to deal with this implementation that the provided training will not be adequate to ensure that everyone is properly trained and that the students will be safe. In order to properly implement this policy, the school will

have to create adequate policies and procedures that would govern how the firearms were carried and used by the staff and teachers. The type of firearms would have to be considered factors such as the caliber of weapons and types of guns, and if these guns will be issued by the school or personal firearms owned by the staff. The school would have to create a detailed plan that would thoroughly discuss the use of force, and how and when to use the firearms. There will also have to be an accountability procedure that would include inspections of the firearms to ensure that the weapons are properly functioning and abide by the school's gun policy. This also creates the issue of who will enforce these inspections and are they qualified to conduct these inspections. There also needs to be consideration for initial and continuing training for the staff and how often this will occur. The school may need to have access to a firearms range and have the staff certified. There will need to be procedures in place to deal with mismanagement of the weapons such as lost or stolen firearms on and off campus. There is also the concern for an accidental shooting and what protocols will need to be in place to prevent this from occurring and then protocols in place to deal with this incident in case of an emergency where this happens. There is also the issue of the carrying insurance and the cost of the policy, and if the school will be able to handle a lawsuit or if an insurance company will be willing to ensure the school for this matter (Trump, 2010). These are some of the concerns that can occur if schools elect to have a staff to carry weapons on campus. It is not merely training and arming teachers several factors need to be taken into consideration to implement arming teachers correctly fully. If all these factors and more

are considered the school systems will need to decide if this is a task they can handle financially as well as with their primary duty of educating the students.

Research has indicated that with an increase in firearm legislation there will be a decrease in the number of firearm fatalities. Those that support the GFSZA firmly believe that this policy and other policies regarding the purchase, sale, and use of firearms is vital in keeping society and students safe from firearm-related tragedies. The following study analyzed firearm-related deaths from 2007 to 2010 with information gathered from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention database. They analyzed state-level firearm legislation to create a legislative strength score and measured that score with state mortality rates. The study concluded that state that had a higher number of firearm laws had lower firearm fatalities. There are currently 300 state firearms laws, and this is a difficult number to calculate as a single law can have multiple parts and can pass at national, state, county, and city level, and these laws are continually changing (Fleegler et al., 2013). These are reasons that supporters of the GFSZA want to keep this policy in place because they believe that more gun-related legislation does work, and they by removing these bans and bringing guns into the school creates a more dangerous environment for the students and staff. In addition to the GFSZA there are other security measures in place in the education system to prevent school shootings.

Current School Security Measures

The public has demanded that schools take measures to prevent shootings. The responses have included increased security measures, such as armed guards, metal detectors, tighter control over school entry, and surveillance systems. There has also been

a focus on creating a safer school environment and programs to detect and stop bullying. Creators of these policies feel that they can prevent mass shootings by dealing with what they think is the root of the issue. There is also an issue with a lack of communication prior to and during mass shootings that can be key to prevention. Students and staff can be trained on what to look for as far as reporting suspicious activity, and a mass communication system can alert those on campus of possible intruders. These improvements are currently being implemented or, for some school systems, already exist (Johnson, 2017).

Schools around the country are providing mass shooting drill training. There are programs in place that have qualified police officers teaching students as young as kindergarten. These programs teach children to stack desks and chairs in the classroom, follow instructions from teachers on how to safely exit the building through windows, counter a shooter using zigzag patterns, and throw objects and yell at the perpetrator to hamper aim and focus. There is currently a program called Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, Evacuate (ALICE), developed after Columbine by a police officer and his wife, who was a high school principal. This program has grown in use since the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting. Around 4,000 school districts have implemented it, and about 3,500 police officers are trained for it (Blad, 2018).

This section also discusses the importance of safety drills and the pros and cons of implementing them. The challenge with this safety measure is that many parents oppose it because they are afraid of the psychological effects it could have on their children. Preparing school shooting drills is a method of prevention, but some parents have even

protested if it is implemented in their schools. I will analyze the pros and cons of implementing a mass shooting school drill and discuss the importance of knowing additional prevention methods and the possible complications that come with this safety mechanism (Blad, 2018). An additional policy that could be implemented is the lockdown policy.

After the Columbine school shooting, a lockdown policy was implemented to help minimize the effects of an active shooter. The policy includes gathering students and teachers into a locked room, darkening the windows, hiding in the place furthest away from the door, and quietly waiting for law enforcement to arrive. The reasoning is that a mass shooting lasts 12.5 minutes on average, and it takes law enforcement 18 minutes to respond. This procedure allows first responders to act more efficiently because it creates a controlled environment in a chaotic situation. It also makes it harder for the active shooter to obtain targets because once the assailant exits the room, they will not be able to enter that room or any additional rooms. This protects potential victims and helps law enforcement locate the assailant faster. The only issue with this procedure is that it might not be a feasible option for every campus, depending on the structure of the facility. For example, Virginia Tech might find completing a full lockdown difficult for several reasons: there are neither interior locks in the classrooms nor an efficient communication system throughout the campus to notify everyone, and locking the campus down could create traffic jams and potential victims at bus stops. This is a large campus with a large population, so this method would not be effective (Ergebnicht & Hubbard, 2012). This policy can stop mass shootings, but it is not the right procedure for every school, and it

only addresses the crime as it is being committed. In addition to these policies which some school systems have implemented there are proposed school shooting measures that legislators want to consider to replace the GFSZA.

Proposed School Shooting Measures

There are legislators who feel that the GFSZA is not constitutional and does not work; they are looking for replacement policies that they believe would be more effective. Congressman Steve Stockman, a Republican from Texas, has introduced the Safe Schools Act (Stockman introduces, 2013). He hopes it will replace the GFSZA because, according to GeorgiaCarry.org crime statistics, mass school shootings have increased five times since the enactment of the GFSZA. This new act would allow armed staff and students on campus. The concern Stockman addresses is that disarming qualified staff and students causes them to become victims of mass shooters (Stockman introduces, 2013). He claims that before the GFSZA was established, there were two mass shootings, and since then, there have been at least ten. He states that there could have been school massacres at campuses in Grundy, VA and Pearl, Mississippi, but these were forestalled because there were students and staff who were armed and able to stop the perpetrators before mass casualties.

There are other courses of action for security beyond repealing the GFSZA. The schools could include metal detectors, have more armed resource officers, and offer bulletproof backpacks. An additional avenue that has been discussed is the actual architecture and design of the school buildings, which would follow a theory known as the Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design, creating a balance between

security and education. The idea would be to keep the space inviting for students to learn but safe and secure and without aspects of a prison in the design. There would be perimeter landscaping that would make visitors more visible to those on campus. The main idea of the design is to have several layers of security, which would start at the perimeter of the school and then come inward. Each layer would delay an intruder until police officers were able to arrive. A single entrance point is key in this design because one of the issues with the shooting at Santa Fe High School in May, Texas was that there were too many entrances and exits. This single entrance would render all visitors visible through it and then create a filtering process for those who enter the school. The visitors would have to show identification and speak with an administrator before being allowed to enter. Reinforcing doors is also another element of the plan, and having multiple doors makes this a less cost-effective measure. If the school creates a single entrance and exit point, reinforcing that one door is cost effective. Another design element is wider open hallways because this creates a better line of sight and gives surveillance cameras fuller views of the schools (Levenson, 2018).

Creating architecturally sound schools works for schools that have not been built but does not solve the problem for current schools. All districts will not have the government funding for a newly designed school, so this is an expensive option that is possible only for those systems that can afford it. There are schools that employ these methods, such as metal detectors, and have some resource officers on campus, but this has not been enough to stop school shootings. Creating a structurally sound environment with metal detectors could work with those systems that have the funding, but for many

school systems, this is also not economically an option. The topic of creating new and improved legislature for preventing school shootings is revisited each time there is an event.

After every school shooting, there is usually a response from the public for swift legislative changes that generally involve gun control. This is referred to as “feel-good legislation,” and it provides the public a false sense of security but does not necessarily forestall these crimes. The laws do not have the intended effect and offer only the illusion of safety and change. Gary Kleck conducted research on mass school shootings and discovered that “the specific gun control measures proposed in their aftermath were largely irrelevant and most certainly could not have prevented the incidents or reduced the death tolls” (Schildkraut and Hernandez, 2014). After the Sandy Hook and Columbine shootings, thousands of pieces of legislation regarding mental health, gun control, and reporting gun sales have been proposed, but relatively few have been passed. Andrew Golden, Eric Harris, Dylan Klebold, and Mitchell Johnson were all minors and in violation of the current gun control policies when they committed their crimes. In the Columbine shooting, sawed-off shotguns were used, which was in violation of the National Firearms Act of 1934. Klebold, who was a shooter in Columbine, had a banned semiautomatic handgun. He had cleared background checks due to failed reporting by the mental health system and violated the Gun Control Act of 1968 and the Brady Law by purchasing guns after being declared mentally ill. It can be argued that this legislation does deter these crimes, but the key reason underlying the legislation is to reassure people in the community that something is being done after a tragedy. Research needs to be

conducted into whether society thinks that the legislation being passed is preventing crime or is merely a feel-good effort. Research should also examine all the bills that are proposed and never passed to determine what is required to pass such legislation. To better understand these random acts of violence, it is important to see the impact of legislative response and how people perceive both the crime and legislative response (Schildkraut and Hernandez, 2014). It is important to understand why mass school shootings occur in order to create legislature to prevent this crime.

Causes of Mass School Shootings

To understand the phenomenon of mass school shootings, it is important to comprehend why this crime is committed. This is also up for debate, but there are several possible factors. Understanding the crime could help policy makers create policies that would be effective in preventing it.

There has been research done to understand what factors make students more likely to bring weapons to school. The risk factors include rural location, substance abuse, the perception of peers carrying weapons, and being of the male gender. There are also protective factors that are considered preventative measures for bringing weapons in school; they include a positive and close relationship with parents, religious activities, clubs, social support, and parental monitoring. A study conducted in four drop-in centers in San Diego, CA. These centers are youth centers that provide free services and information regarding skills training, health and social services, recreational activities, and conflict management. This study analyzed the percentages of patterns of weapons carrying, predictors of weapons carrying, and the strongest significant risk factors

associated with carrying weapons. The study found that in the last three months 17.2 % of students had brought a weapon to school, and this is similar to the national rate of high school students carrying a weapon which is 18%. The reasons for carrying the weapons were as a source of protection (66%), criminal use (3.8%), holding it for a friend (3.8%), and no reason (36.4%). The most influential risk factor is school suspension, followed by jail time, physical fighting and employment (Blumberg et al., 2009). These risk factors help schools and the government understand the population that the current legislation is trying to prevent from bringing guns to school. This information can help legislators create policies to stop this crime by understanding the reasons these students commit these crimes and try to target those issues.

A study by Baird, Roelke, and Zeifman (2017) consisted of analyzing twenty-two mass shootings from 1995 to 2014, using media and researching existing school shooting databases. The study concluded that schools with higher enrollments were more likely to experience a school shooting. Perpetrators also generally were enrolled in a school with a smaller student body before transferring to the larger school. This research is important to my dissertation because it enforces that predictive models to prevent school shootings need to include school size, the support provided for students, and school transitions. However, each school is unique because of its location and student body, and one blanket policy may not work for all schools. This needs to be taken into consideration when analyzing the GFSZA or any policy that legislators implement in the school systems to try to protect students.

The article by Madfis (2016) reflected qualitative research via analysis of the motivations of perpetrators of several mass shootings. The researcher concluded that most shooters suffered from mental and personality disorders, and the common side effects are suicidal tendencies and depression. There are also other issues, such as bullying, wanting fame, and societal acceptance of gun culture, which make it easy for the shooter to obtain weapons. Typically, the shooters are White men. The author concluded that these crimes are not random and pattern-less and that there are factors that can be studied to determine what type of people will commit these crimes, as well as why and where. This article shows that prevention of mass shootings is possible if society can analyze and understand why they are occurring and be able to recognize the signs. This knowledge can help policy makers because if they are aware of the signs of potential shooters, they can create programs and policies that incorporate this information, which could affect how they revamp school safety methods. New policies could implement awareness signs and have counselors available to deal with students who need help or are exhibiting warning signs, rather than merely the current no-gun policy.

Mears, Moon, and Thielo (2017) revisited Columbine and discussed the myth that school shootings are perpetuated due to students being bullied. They concluded that there is not enough evidence to link the two; some school shooters were bullied, but some were not. They conducted qualitative research via case studies and analyzed previous mass shooters' backgrounds to determine if bullying played a role in the shooting. Perpetuating false ideas with no scientific backing, such as with the topic of bullying and school shootings, is counterproductive. Due to all the media attention that this type of crime

receives, it is easy for misleading information to be portrayed to the public that can create misunderstandings of what policies are necessary. Therefore, my research is important to ensure that legislators are creating and revising policy based on evidence and not popular beliefs and myths. I address a gap in the literature in that more research is required for legislators to be certain that their efforts are effective. It is also important to understand the perpetrators who commit this crime in order to create effective policy to prevent this crime.

Part of understanding this crime is understand the assailants. Research conducted by Rural Education analyzed 700 incidents and found the following major themes. The assailants ranged from in age from 6 to 66, and they were former students, community members, and people who had no connection to the school. The assailant's backgrounds varied, and all came from different income levels, ethnicities, and levels of disability and social difficulties. Students of the school made up three fourths of the assailants, and unknown intruders only accounted for about 10% of all incidents. Most of these incidents occur in high school, averaging about 70%; middle school accounted for 20%, and elementary school was 10%. Elementary schools have a 40% chance of the intruder being an adult, although that number is significantly lower for middle and high schools, ranging by about 25%. Shooting accounted for 99% of deaths and 76% of injuries sustained by the victims. Perpetrators of mass shootings in high school and middle schools were mainly students aged 13–18. In the 700 incidents studied, there were 600 deaths. Motivation for a crime is always a key factor, and they found that the most common was revenge because the assailant had suffered a real or perceived injury and wanted justice.

The next major reason is copycatting, which is a more common motive for student assailants versus their adult counterparts. Triggering is another common motive; it is different than copying because the incident is provoked by a heightened atmosphere after a mass shooting and a rise in anger and tension. There is also a connection between the location of a school shooting and the general gun violence in that area. For example, South Carolina has high gun violence rates, and researchers found 20 school incidents (Lambert, 2013). Understanding the perpetrator is vital information to analyze and address this crime. The effectiveness of the GFSZA can also be analyzed in the students achievement rates because the students learning environment, and perceived safety affect all aspects of their learning.

School Safety Effects of School Achievement

The importance of determining the effectiveness of the GFSZA and similar policies and procedures lies in not only students' personal safety but the effects on their achievement in school. The way students perceive their safety at school affects their mental health, their school, their motivation and engagement, their dropout and achievement rates, clinical and community psychology, and sociology. School safety affects teacher attrition and community poverty. There is evidence that school disorder impairs a student's ability to learn and achieve and exacerbates mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety. The threat of violence produces psychosocial adjustments, such as inability to focus, withdrawal, and avoidance of school, resulting in a failure to engage in learning activities. Cornell and Mayor conducted studies in urban and suburban K–12 schools (2010). Teachers are also affected when they feel that their safety is in

danger. Overall, students cannot be expected to learn and teachers cannot be expected to teach in what they perceive to be a hostile environment, including one that has experienced a mass shooting or other forms of daily violence on campus.

Research shows that students that are exposed to unsafe school conditions are at heightened risk for academic failure. Empirical research has found that a positive school climate, which includes safety as a major factor, results in higher achievement. Fear of violence extends from the school to the neighborhoods where the students live. This study compared achievement and school climate, and there was a direct correlation between poorer school climate and lower achievement scores (McCoy, Roy, & Sirkman, 2013). The physical environment of the school affects students' aggression and violence, which must be curbed in order to prevent violent occurrences, which, in turn, affect student success and safety. The policies to stop students' bringing weapons to school are important (Basch, 2011). The importance of creating and revamping policies to prevent mass school shootings goes beyond keeping students safe. These policies are also extremely important in student and teacher success. It is imperative that they are effective for the sake of students' safety, mental health, and academic success. Analyzing past school shootings, and security measures can help legislators refine and create effective school safety policies or determine if the implementation of the GFSZA is effective.

Lessons Learned

The greatest resource for analyzing the GFSZA would be to study documented school shootings and analyze that data to see what researchers and legislators can learn that could be implemented in the current policy or whether the policy needs to be

replaced. Analyzing the crime would include understanding the perpetrator, school system, community, victimology, and postcrisis responses.

The research by Thompson, Jerome, Payne, Mazer, and Pfohl (2017) was qualitative; they conducted ten in-person interviews with several members of K–12 school crisis teams that had experienced school shootings. The findings were that the schools faced several communication issues dealing with the postcrisis recovery phases, including counseling services, notification, emotional communication, event commemoration, legal problems, and donation management. This article emphasizes that a school safety plan needs to not only prevent and prepare for a school shooting, but, in the unfortunate event that one occurs, have a postcrisis strategy in place for the students and faculty.

Summary and Conclusions

Major Themes in Literature

A recurring theme throughout the literature is that certain people strongly defend the GFSZA and others want it replaced with a different policy that they feel is a better fit for the current context of this issue. There is concern that this policy be investigated to confirm that it is the best method to deal with the situation, as there has been a rise in active shooters in the last several years (Bonanno & Levinson, 2014). There is also concern about creating and revamping policies to avoid feel-good efforts, because that can cause more problems and yet not address the issue. There are several methods that accompany the GFSZA, such as the lockdown policy, metal detectors, clear backpacks, intercom and communication systems, and revamping the architectural structure of the

building. Though these methods work for some school systems, they are not plausible for every school system due to, for example, money and the size of the school. There is also push for a new policy to replace the GFSZA and allow more armed security officers and trained armed personnel to be allowed in the building, which has garnered major support, even from the current president, Donald Trump. As much support as this policy has, there are still organizations and members of the population that are strongly against it. Another important theme is that students' safety and environment affects them mentally and academically, so school safety is imperative for their success and well-being. A final major theme is that gun control and gun-related policies will be consistently debated, as seen with the GFSZA. There will be a perpetual argument over whether more, less, or any gun control is needed, which will definitely affect any gun-related policies for the schools. Regarding the GFSZA, there is a common theme that it does need to be analyzed and revamped; some proponents want it abolished, but others want it updated to provide greater more gun control.

Filling a Gap in the Literature

There are differing opinions on the GFSZA and little research on its effectiveness. Its constitutionality has been questioned since its creation, and the extant research does not show a significant impact on keeping staff and students safe at school. This study will address the gap in the literature relating to its effectiveness and whether it ensures student safety or should be updated or even replaced by a more effective policy. Examining this issue may encourage policy makers to reevaluate the GFSZA and make it more effective or eliminate it altogether and create new policies and procedures that will be more

effective for modern times and challenges. It is also imperative that the new or updated policies are based on research and are not a hasty response to outcries from the public to fix this issue immediately. Policy choices based on opinions and myth will not prevent school shootings. This is a topic that gathers great media attention. Nevertheless, with each attack, there is new and renewed interest in this issue but no actual change to policy, and the same events occur with the same results.

Summary

The objective of this qualitative study is to explore the effectiveness of the GFSZA keeping students and staff safe from school shootings. This study contributes to the current body of literature by adding information from a population that fewer gun legislations and regulations but abides by the current GFSZA policy, which there has not been a significant amount of research done. The results of the study are to provide a deeper understanding of the GFSZA and whether this law is effective in protecting students and staff from mass shootings. This research can be utilized to conduct further research into additional gun legislature that could be more effective than the current legislation. This research also promotes additional research into additional programs and policies that can be created to help those students at risk for committing these crimes, and possibly preventing the crimes from occurring. Chapter 3 is the methodology section which will discuss the research design and rational, ethical procedures, issues of trustworthiness.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to explore the effectiveness of the GFSZA as a method of protecting students and staff from mass shooters. The study design included identifying a subset of educators in the southeastern United States to understand their perceptions and views of the policy's effectiveness.

Chapter 3 presents the study methodology, including a discussion of the research question, research design and rationale, my role as the researcher, participant selection, data collection, data analysis, and ethical procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

I used a general phenomenological design to explore faculty and staff's perceptions of and experience with the GFSZA. This method aided in the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data. The survey questions for the data collection explored how individuals understood this social problem. I aimed to set aside bias and understand how teachers and staff experienced the problem as it related to this situation, and the study design focused on the experiences of individuals (Creswell, 2013). A quantitative method would not have been suitable for this study because it would have excluded analysis of experiences associated with the policy.

The following research questions were used for the study:

- Q1. From the perspective of high school staff and faculty in the southeastern United States, what is the nature of the relationship between the social

construct of social populations related to GFSZA and its efficacy in preventing mass casualty events on campus?

Q2. What safety measures do school staff and teachers propose should be implemented to deter school shootings?

The phenomenological design reaches the core of the human experience in an effort to understand a shared phenomenon through the viewpoint of the participants while still allowing them to be impartial and independent. The researcher using this design analyzes data from shared experiences to determine what themes emerge (Creswell, 2013). In the research study, the faculty and staff all had experience with students, the school system, and the GFSZA, as well as other safety and security measures in the schools to prevent mass shootings. I chose phenomenological design because I wanted to understand the perceptions of faculty and staff who worked daily with the target population (and with students who might represent potential mass shooters) and the implications of the GFSZA.

Other methods of qualitative research were considered and discarded. The case study method was ruled out because it would have involved looking at a program in depth over a certain period (Creswell, 2009), and time constraints could have prevented such an approach. My investigation might have required an extended process, and I wanted to study more than one school and collect more data from high schools in the southeastern United States. A case study would have limited me to one school and would have yielded insufficient data and observations for themes to emerge for analysis. I would also have required permission to study the population, which would have been difficult or

impossible to obtain. Therefore, the phenomenological research method was the best option for this study.

Role of the Researcher

The purpose of this research was to understand the subjects' experiences with the GFSZA. My role as the researcher was to discover these experiences, connect them with the phenomenon (Dowling & Cooney, 2012), and analyze the data obtained from the survey. I had no personal or professional relationships with any participants and was not acquainted with them in any manner. I was objective in collecting the data because all data were anonymously submitted through SurveyMonkey, which was vital to avoid bias. I explained my role to the participants and acknowledged that this study would benefit my professional career. It was imperative to be objective through data collection and analysis, which were performed through the survey tool.

Participants of the Study

The population for this qualitative study was high school educators and staff in the southeastern United States. Five to 25 participants are recommended as a sample size to reach saturation but avoid redundancy for this type of qualitative research (saturation is achieved when no new themes or information are gathered from the participants; Creswell, 2009). Purposeful random sampling was done to select the participants, as educators who met the criteria were given the option to participate. Educators were chosen because they dealt daily with the student population that this policy directly affected so they knew its efficiency. The inclusion criteria were met by any faculty or staff member who had worked in the high school system in the southeastern United

States. The multiple-choice survey questions were administered through SurveyMonkey, and the participants could answer anonymously.

Ethical Considerations

The school board provided permission to conduct the survey. The research was also approved by the Walden University IRB. The people who took part in the study were volunteers and were under no duress. There was no monetary compensation promised or given to any participants. Participants submitted information anonymously through SurveyMonkey so that their identities and answers could not be linked back to them. There was no harm or risk for any of the participants. Each participant signed a waiver before beginning the survey to assure confidentiality. All data were stored and organized in files that were password protected on my computer, which was locked in my home. Participants were sent an email with an invitation to participate and a letter attached explaining the purpose of the study. The data will be destroyed after 5 years have passed, according to Walden University policy.

Procedures

The procedure for this research study involved recruiting participants, informing participants, collecting and analyzing data, and then validating the findings. To recruit the participants, I needed to contact the school board and request its permission to send out an email in which I explained the purpose of the study and invited people to participate. The email included the invitation letter, according to Walden policies, and the study link, and it was sent to every school in the parish. Those who wanted to participate and met the criteria could click on a link to access the survey. The survey was active until 25

participants had responded, and contained open-ended and probing questions for the participants to answer anonymously.

I provided the consent form to the school board to obtain approval to send out the survey. I included the introductory letter in the survey so that the participants understood that it was anonymous and optional. This letter also contained an overview of my research, the time frame that the survey would be available for data collection, and participants' confidentiality rights. The survey had no time limits, and participants could take it at any location with a computer.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data were collected through open-ended questions on SurveyMonkey and were coded to identify emerging themes and patterns (Creswell, 2009). I chose a survey because surveys can be helpful in reaching a larger population and can provide a broader idea of the characteristics of that population. Surveys can also be flexible and anonymous and may appeal to more people because participants can complete a survey when they have time to do so and do not have to worry about any of their information causing professional repercussions. Anonymity also allows participants to provide more honest answers.

The survey site highlighted emergent themes that I could compare by coding the data by hand. These themes were used to write descriptions of how each participant experienced the phenomenon and were then put into clusters to try to understand the overall experience by conducting coding (Creswell, 2009). The overall experiences were

then analyzed and reported. The desired outcome was that the reader would have an account of the effectiveness of the GFSZA from people who were daily affected by it.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Issues of trustworthiness were verified through the following steps: credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability.

Credibility

To achieve credibility, a researcher must explore a study without bias and create confidence in the audience that this was achieved (Yin, 2013). This was accomplished by obtaining approval from Walden University's IRB to conduct the research according to university guidelines. The participants' responses were accurately recorded via a computer-generated survey system in which participants were anonymous. I also attained credibility by using open-ended survey questions and ensuring honest responses from participants by promising that their identities would not be shared for this study.

Dependability

I reviewed the data multiple times to ensure that bias and errors were eliminated. I also followed Walden University's guidelines for the preservation and presentation of data for 5 years. I used two fellow Walden University students who were knowledgeable in qualitative research to peer review the data. I selected one male and one female student to eliminate gender bias. This provided an external check of the research and data.

Transferability

This additional form of verification enabled rich and thick description intended to provide the reader with the opportunity to transfer the information to additional settings

and ascertain whether this could occur due to shared characteristics (Creswell, 2013). The research had copies of the open-ended survey questions and the answers. The themes found throughout the surveys and the coding were also provided. This description served to verify the findings of my qualitative research.

Confirmability

I clarified any bias via self-reflection to eliminate bias during data collection and analysis (Yin, 2013). I had 2 years of experience as a teacher with the school system and the GFSZA in the school. I also had experience as a student protected by the GFSZA and in the teaching field. I had never personally experienced a mass shooting.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to analyze the effectiveness of the GFSZA as a method of protection for students in the event of a mass shooting. I performed this analysis using a qualitative research design. In this chapter, I outlined my role as the researcher and provided information on the research and design rationale. All study participants were volunteers, and all ethical considerations were factored in.

I fully discussed the methodology in this chapter, presenting detailed descriptions of procedures for participant selection, data collection, and data analysis. The issue of trustworthiness was also addressed for credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transformability. In Chapter 4, I discuss the findings and data.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences and knowledge of teachers and staff knowledge concerning the effectiveness of the GFSZA. The research provided insight from administrators and educators on their previous knowledge and experiences with the effectiveness of the GFSZA, as well as additional methods that they thought would be as effective or more effective than the GFSZA. The two research questions provided in Chapter 3 are discussed further in this chapter. In this chapter, I address data collection and the results and analysis of the data. I present details on the participants, such as setting and demographics. I explain themes, relationships, patterns, and trends in the findings. This chapter contains sections addressing the study setting, demographics, data collection, data analysis, and results, concluding with a summary.

Setting

Data were collected over a 7-week period beginning in July 2019 via Survey Monkey. To address the two research questions, a survey was emailed to high school educators and staff in the southeastern United States. The survey consisted of 17 questions, and the saturation number for responses was 25; over the 7 weeks of data collection, that number of participants responded. Participants had an unlimited amount of time to complete the survey, which was optional and anonymous. Participants had no limitations to participating in the survey. As the researcher, I did not influence the participants in any manner, as the survey was online and anonymous. Participants were

able to complete the survey at any time and at locations that they chose, such as their homes and classrooms.

Demographics

There were six questions at the end of the survey that could only be answered with one response. The demographic information collected from each participant included gender, age, ethnicity, level of education, marital status, and number of children in the home. The total sample size was 25, and the percentage of female participants was higher (72%) than the percentage of male participants (28%; see *Figure 1*).

What is your gender?

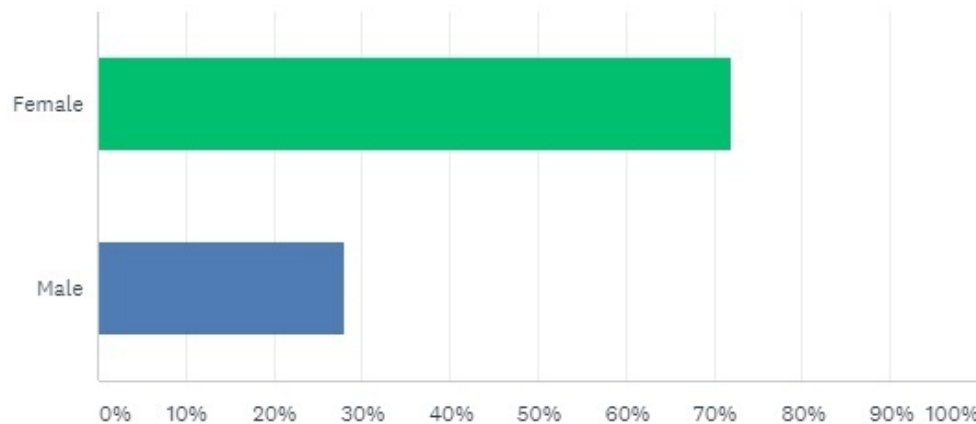


Figure 1. Gender of the participants.

Figure 2 represents the age levels of all participants, which ranged from 18 to 60-plus years of age, with the median age being between 25 and 39 years.

What is your age?

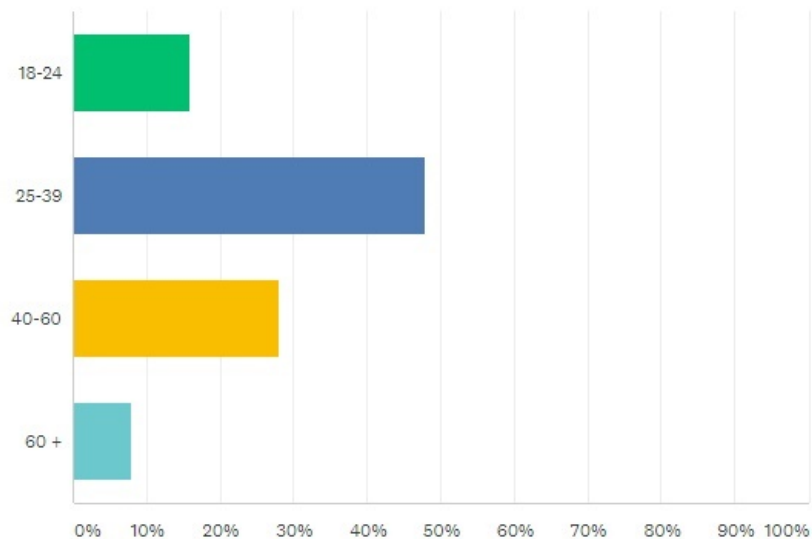


Figure 2. Age of participants.

Figure 3 represents the ethnicities of the participants: White or Caucasian (52%), Black or African American (24%), Hispanic or Latino (20%), and Native American or American Indian (4%). Participants also had the option to select the categories *Asian or Pacific Islander* or *Another race*, but none did so (see *Figure 3*).

What is your ethnicity?

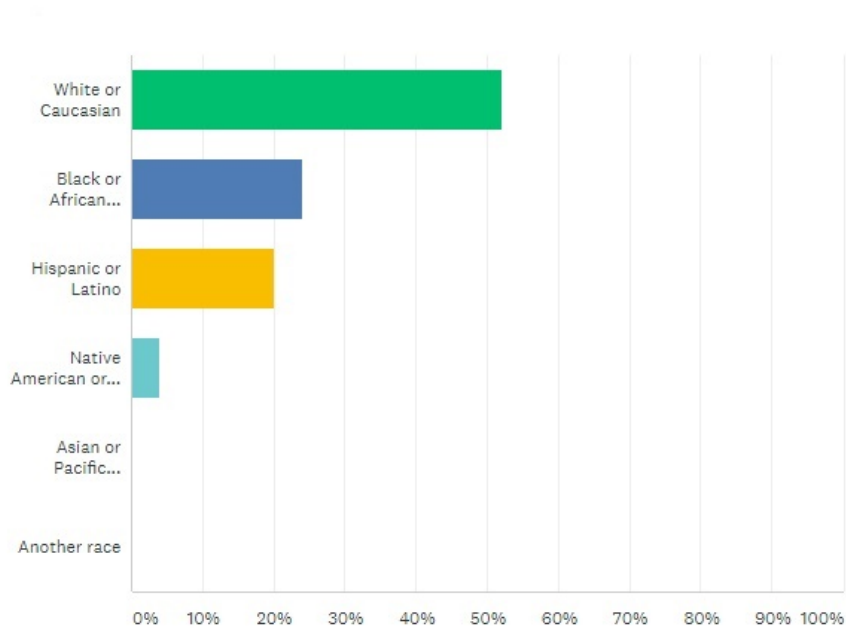


Figure 3. Ethnicity of participants.

Figure 4 represents the highest level of education for each participant, with categories including less than a high school degree (0%), high school degree or equivalent (4%), bachelor's degree (76%), master's degree (20%), and doctoral degree (0%).

What is the highest degree or level of school that you have completed?

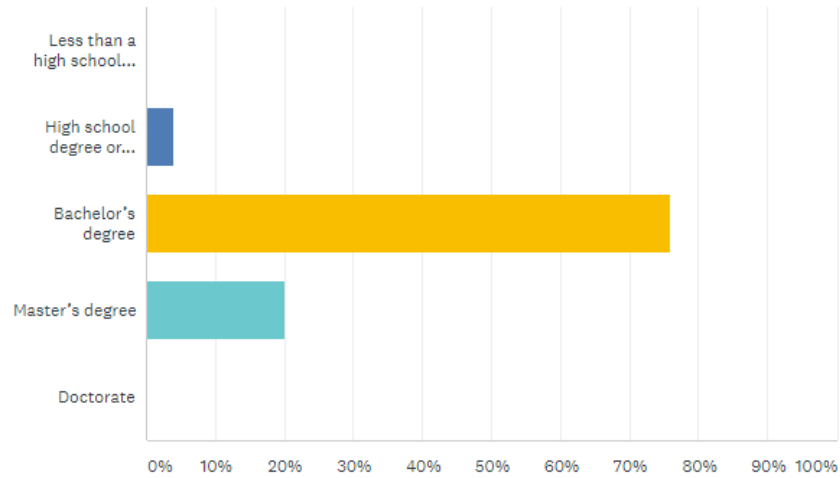


Figure 4. Participants' highest level of education.

Figure 5 represents the participants' marital status, for which options included single (never married), married, in a domestic partnership, divorced, and widowed.

What is your marital status?

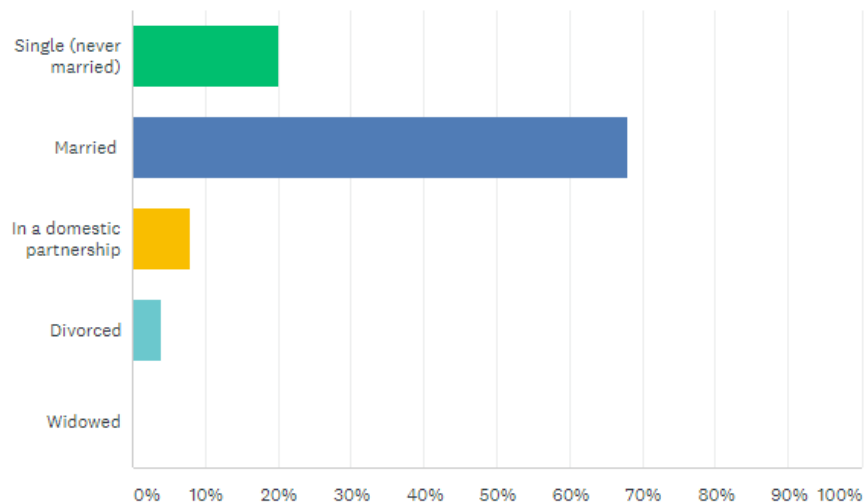


Figure 5. Participants' marital status.

Figure 6 indicates how many children each participant had in the household under the age of 17 years.

How many children are in your household under the age of 17?

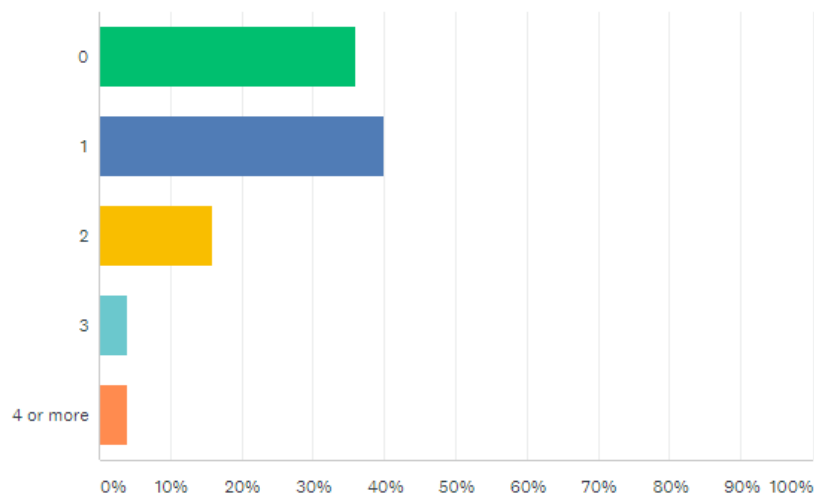


Figure 6. Children under the age of 17 years in participants' households.

Data Collection

The survey was placed on Survey Monkey, and data was collected from 25 participants. Survey Monkey secured and stored the data from all participants anonymously. Survey Monkey was checked daily over 7 weeks to analyze the results and note any common themes. The survey was closed once it reached the previously discussed saturation number of 25 participants. All notations were electronic and stored securely on a computer. There were no variations to the data collection method that was outlined in Chapter 3, and there were no unusual circumstances encountered by the researcher during data collection.

Results

Through this qualitative research, I analyzed the experiences and opinions of staff and educators to determine the effectiveness of the GFSZA. This research provided

insight into gun policy in the school system as experienced by those who dealt with students and potential perpetrators. The researcher read through all of the responses in order to code information and establish themes throughout the survey. A majority of the 25 participants (64%) felt that the GFSZA was not effective in protecting students and staff. There was also a common theme that the GFSZA needed to be removed (44%) or revamped (36%). The participants were not confident in the GFSZA as it was currently enforced as an effective method of protecting staff and students from a mass shooter.

Throughout the survey, there was a common theme that educators preferred various other methods and programs in lieu of the GFSZA to protect students and themselves. About 56% of the participants preferred policy and funding to provide for mental health, and 28% preferred social programs for students such as antibullying policies rather than additional gun control policies. The findings from this study are reported in relation the two research questions below.

Research Question 1

The first research question was the following: From the perspective of high school staff and faculty in the southeastern United States, what is the nature of the relationship between the social construct of social populations related to the GFSZA and the GFSZA's efficacy in preventing mass casualty events on campus?

See Figure 7.

Do you think that the GFSZA is permissible under the Constitution or conflicts with the 2nd Amendment?

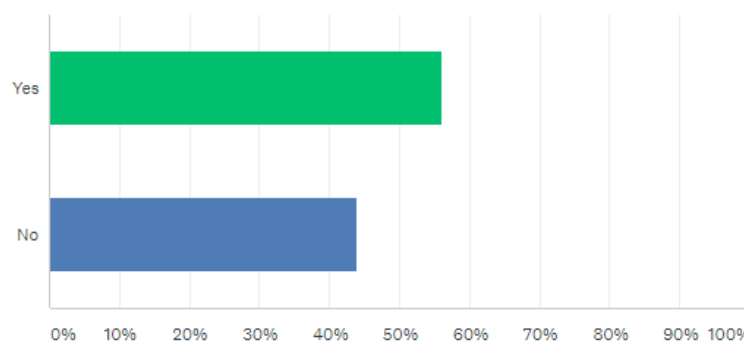


Figure 7. Do you think that the GFSZA is permissible under the Constitution or conflicts with the Second Amendment?

Overall, 56% of respondents felt that the GFSZA conflicted with Second Amendment rights. For the *yes* response, 79% of respondents were female and 21% were male. In terms of age, for the *yes* response, 14% of respondents were in the range of 18-24 years, 57% were in the range of 25-39 years, and 29% were in the range of 40-60 years. In terms of highest level of education attained, for the *yes* response, 85% of respondents had a bachelor's degree and 14% had a master's degree. In relation to the presence of children in the household, for the *yes* response, 29% had no children at home, 36% had one child at home, 21% had two children at home, 7% had three children at home, and 7% had four or more children at home.

See Figure 8.

Do you think that allowing teachers to carry guns on campus would have a negative effect on the learning environment?

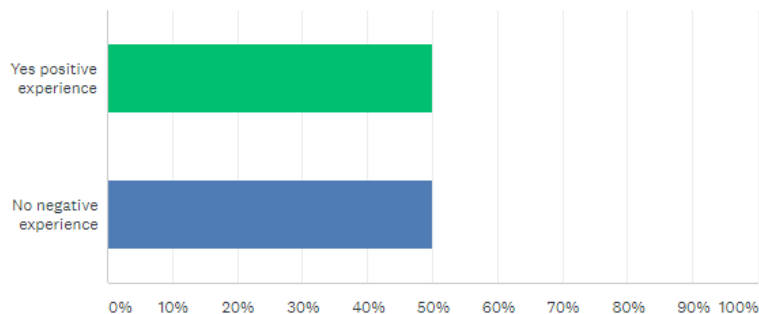


Figure 8. Do you think that allowing teachers to carry guns on campus would have a negative effect on the learning environment?

In their answers to this question, 50% of the respondents indicated a belief that teachers carrying a firearm would not negatively affect students' learning environment. Of those respondents who thought that teachers carrying firearms would be a positive experience, 75% were female, 17% were in the 18-24 age range, 67% were in the 25-39 age range, and 17% were in the 40-60 age range. Of those who responded positively, 33% were Caucasian, 17% were African American, 42% were Hispanic, and 8% were Native American. For education, among those who responded positively, 92% had a bachelor's degree and 8% had a master's degree. Further, for this group of participants, 33% had no children, 50% had one child, 8% had two children, and 8% had three children.

See Figure 9.

Are there other threats to students that affect school safety other than guns?

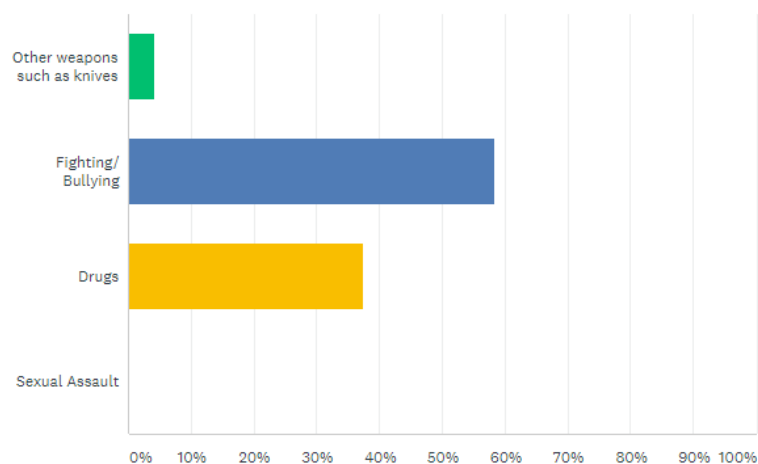


Figure 9. Are there threats to students that affect school safety other than guns?

Of these participants 4% felt that knives were a larger threat, 58% felt that fighting and bullying was a larger threat, and 38% felt that drugs were the larger threat. The respondents that were female and felt knives were a larger concern made up 4%, female respondent and fighting and bullying was 79%, drugs and female respondent was 56%. The age range of 25-39, and knives made up 4%, fighting and bullying and 18-24 age range was 21%, 25-39 age range was 36%, 40-60 age range 36%, and 60 plus age range was 7%. For drugs comparison and age range was 18-24 age range made up 11%, 25-39 age range made up 67%, 40-60 and 60 plus age range each had 11%. There were no concerns addressed for sexual assault. Those that had 0 children in the home felt that fighting and bullying was a concern at 36%, and drugs a concern at 44%. Those participants that had 1 child in the home felt that knives were a concern made up 4% of respondents, 29% were concerned with fighting and bullying, and 44% with drugs. For

those respondents that had 2 children in the home 21% were concerned with fighting and bullying, and 11% were concerned with drugs. For those respondents that had 3 children in the home 7% were concerned with fighting and bullying, and for those with 4 or children in the home the main concern was fighting and bullying at 7%.

See Figure 10.

What do you believe to be the biggest cause of youth gun violence in the United States?

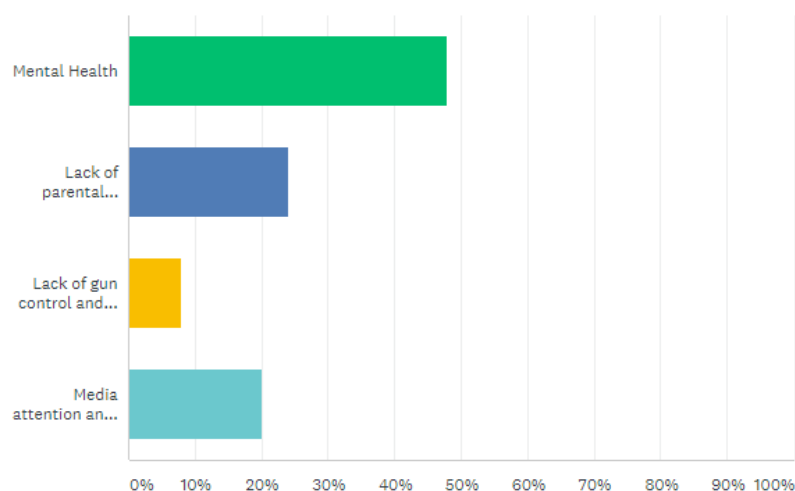


Figure 10. What do you believe to be the biggest cause of youth gun violence in the United States?

For this question 48% of the respondents felt that mental health was the cause, 24% felt that lack of parental control was the main issue, 8% felt that lack of gun control and restrictions was the issue, and 20% felt that media attention and glorification of gun violence was the main concern. Female respondents made up 75% of those concerned with mental health, 66% lack of parental control, 100% of those who responded with lack

of gun control and restrictions, and 60% of those that thought media attention and glorification was the main concern. The age range of 18-24 had 33% concerned with mental health, the age range of 25-39 had 42% concern with mental health, 50% concern with lack of parental control, 50% concern of lack of gun control and restrictions, and 60% of those concerned with media attention. The 40-60 age range made up 25% concern of mental health, 17% concern of lack of parental control, 50% concern of lack of gun control, and 40% of media attention. The 60 plus age range made up a 33% concern of lack of parental control. The respondents who have no children in the home were concerned with mental health at 50%, and lack of parental control at 50%. Those who had 1 child were concerned with mental health at 25%, lack of parental control at 17%, lack of gun control at 100%, and media attention and glorification at 80%. Those that have two children in the home were concerned with mental health at 8%, lack of parental control at 33%, and media attention at 20%. Those that have 3 children in the home were concerned with mental health at 8%, and those with four or more children in the home were concerned with mental health at 8%.

Research Question 2

This question asked: What safety measures do you propose that should be implemented to deter school shootings?

See Figure 11.

What methods could be put into place that would be effective in preventing school shootings?

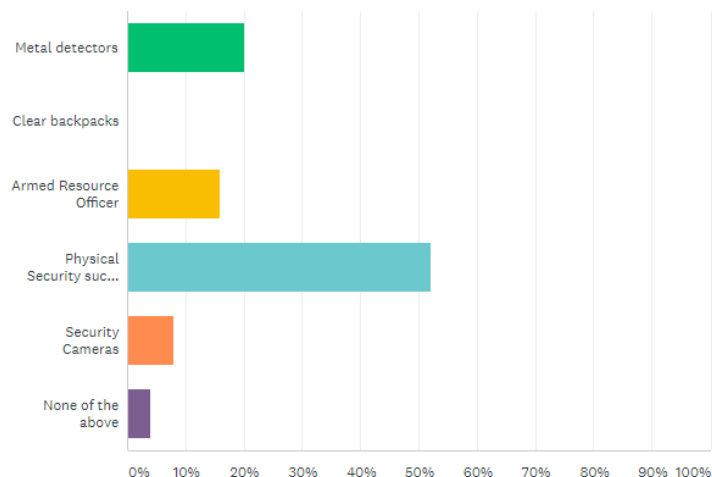


Figure 11. What methods could be put into place that would be effective in preventing school shootings?

Metal detectors were favored at 20%, armed resource officer at 16%, physical security at 52%, security cameras at 8% and none of the above at 4%. The female ratio was 60% for metal detectors, 75% for armed resource officer, 62% for physical security, 100% for security cameras, and 100% for none of the above. The age range of 18-24 had 20% for metal detectors, 15% for physical security, and 50% for security cameras. The age range of 25-39 had 20% for metal detectors, 50% for armed resource officer, 62% for physical security, and 50% for security cameras. The 40-60 age range had 40% for metal detectors, 50% for armed resource officer, 15% for physical security, and 100% for none of the above. The 60 plus age range had 20% for metal detectors, and 8% for physical security. For respondents with no children 40% favored metal detectors, 25%-armed resource officers, 31% physical security, and 100% security cameras. For those with one

child in the home 75% favored an armed resource officer, 46% favored physical and security. For those with two children in the home 40% favored metal detectors, 8% favored physical security and 100% stated none of the above. For those with three children in the home 8% favored physical security, and for those with 4 or more children in the home 8% favored physical security.

See Figure 12.

If teachers were trained and permitted to carry guns to school would this be effective or detrimental to protecting students and staff?

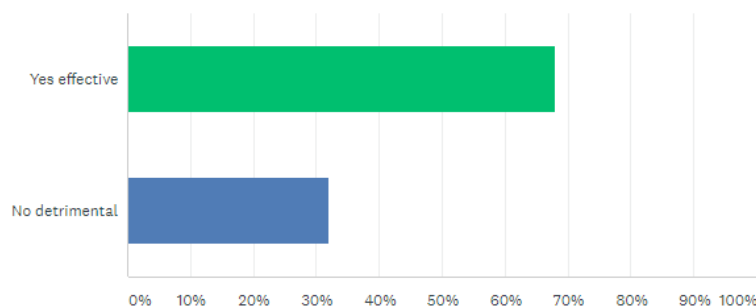


Figure 12. If teachers were trained and permitted to carry guns to school, would this be effective or detrimental to protecting students and staff?

According to the 68% of respondents felt that this would be an effective method. Of those respondents that felt it was effective 70% were female. Those that felt it was effective in the 18-24 age range was 12%, 25-39 age range 11%, and 40-60 age range 26%. Those that felt that this method was effective were 41% Caucasian, 24% African American, 29% Hispanic, and 6% Native American. Those that felt this was effective had a high school degree highest degree at 6%, and bachelors highest degree at 82%, and master's degree highest degree at 12%. Those that felt this method was effective and had

no children in the home made up 29%, one child 47%, two children 12%, 3 children 6%, and 4 or more children 6%.

See Figure 13.

Does your school system partner with the local police for protection or are there armed security/police official on campus to respond to an incident?

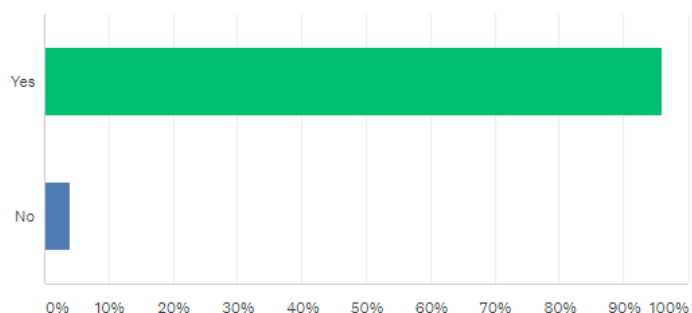


Figure 13. Does your school system partner with the local police for protection, or are there armed security/police officials on campus to respond to an incident?

Of the participants, 96% responded yes of those 75% were female. Comparing the age range and a positive response was 18-24 at 17%, 25-39 at 50%, 40-60 at 29% and 60 plus at 4%. Comparing a yes response and ethnicity was Caucasian at 50%, African American at 25%, Hispanic at 21% and Native American at 4%. For a positive response and children in the household at zero was 33%, one child at 42%, 2 children at 17%, three children at 4% and 4 or more children at 4%.

See Figure 14.

Overall how safe do you feel in the school workplace with the current GFSZA policy and other security measures in place?

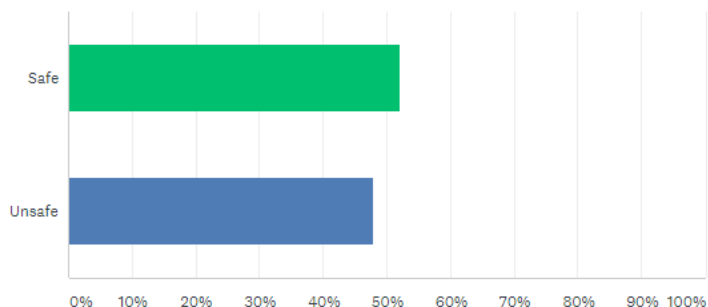


Figure 14. Overall, how safe do you feel in the school workplace with the current GFSZA policy and other security measures in place?

Overall 52% of respondents felt safe with 70% of those respondents being female. The age range for feeling safe was 18-24 at 15%, 25-39 at 31%, 40-60 at 38%, and 60 plus at 15%. For feeling safe and ethnicity Caucasian made up 62%, African American consisted of 31%, and Hispanic at 8%. For those that felt safe and highest education level was 77% with a bachelor's degree, and 23% with a master's degree. For those that felt safe and had no children in the home was 46%, one child at 23%, and two children at 30%.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

As discussed in Chapter 3 in order to achieve credibility I implemented exploring the study without bias and create confidence in the audience that this was achieved (Yin, 2013). The data was checked for error and analyzed multiple times to establish common themes among the participants and understanding the point of view of the participants.

The participants' responses were accurately recorded through Survey Monkey, and participants remained anonymous. The demographics of each participant was also reflected and recorded on each survey.

Transferability

This additional form of verification will provide a rich and thick description intended to provide the reader with the opportunity to transfer the information to additional settings and see if this can occur due to shared characteristics (Creswell, 2013). As recommended by Creswell rich description has been used in the study with the detailed accounts of the study. The reader has a detailed account of the study, research role, and the data collection process. Due to this research being qualitative these results could be unique to this population analyzed and there is no certainty that the findings of this study could be applied to another educational setting in a different geographical location.

Dependability

In Chapter 3 there was a discussion of dependability and the process to be used. This involved reviewing the data multiple times to ensure bias and errors are eliminated and continuing to follow Walden University's guidelines for the preservation and presentation of the data for five years. Future researchers will be able to replicate the data to determine if the GFSZA is an effective policy in protecting students and staff from mass shooters. The researcher took the information that was shared by the participants and used the significant data which thus allowed for credibility,

Confirmability

In this study confirmability was ensured by representing the findings from the study accurately. As a researcher I remained objective and set aside any personal beliefs or opinions on the GFSZA. The focus was the experiences and opinions of the participants, and the participants were not known to the researcher, and the surveys were conducted anonymously online.

Summary

Chapter 4 describes the process of data collection and analysis collected from the survey used in the research, and each research question was answered. This chapter discussed the themes from the data in this study, and figures were used to provide visuals of the information. The discussions of the results, interpretations of findings, implications of practice, recommendations for further study, and the importance to social change will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences and knowledge of teachers and staff concerning the effectiveness of the GFSZA. I collected data through anonymous online surveys, which indicated that participants felt that the GFSZA needed to be removed or revamped in favor of a policy that fit the current student population. This research provided me insight into the perspectives of educators and staff who worked daily with the target population that this policy directly affected, as well as the population from which a shooter would be most likely to come. This research also provided additional understanding of what the participants thought the potential causes of these shootings could be, as well as methods that they would like to see in place to prevent these crimes from occurring.

RQ1: From the perspective of high school staff and faculty in the southeastern United States, what is the nature of the relationship between the social construct of social populations related to the GFSZA and the GFSZA's efficacy in preventing mass casualty events on campus?

RQ2: What safety measures do you propose that should be implemented to deter school shootings?

Interpretation of Findings

The primary research questions that guided the study were as follows:

Many educators feel that the GFSZA does not ensure safety for students or themselves, suggesting that a lack of safety creates a hostile environment for learning

(Neiman & Hill, 2011). I included 17 questions on my survey (see Appendix A). These data were coded, and common themes were analyzed.

Research Question 1 addressed the social construct of social populations in relation to the GFSZA and the policy's effectiveness in preventing mass casualty events on campus. Overall, participants felt that the policy was not constitutional and violated their Second Amendment rights. Half of the participants felt that teachers carrying firearms on campus would be an effective security measure against intruders and would not negatively affect the learning environment. The topic of arming teachers appeared to be controversial, in that half felt that this would be an effective policy rendering the GFSZA pointless whereas the same number of participants did not want to arm teachers, perceiving the presence of weapons as detrimental to the learning environment.

The participants also felt that guns were not the largest threat to most students. A large percentage of participants felt that bullying was the largest concern for the student population. The second largest threat was drugs, with gun violence being the third-greatest concern. This information shows that although mass school shootings occur, they are not perceived as the largest threat to students. Daily challenges with bullying and drugs affect students and staff more often than gun violence. Mass shootings are brought to the attention of the media, which then portray these events as common, everyday occurrences; however, for the participants in this study, shootings were not seen as the foremost concern for student safety.

Finally, the participants felt that mental health was the determining factor in students bringing guns to school. This was followed by lack of parental control, and then

lack of gun laws. These data suggest that mental health is an issue that students face that needs to be addressed in order to prevent violent crimes.

See Figure 15.

Would you like the GFSZA remain in place, be revamped, or removed?

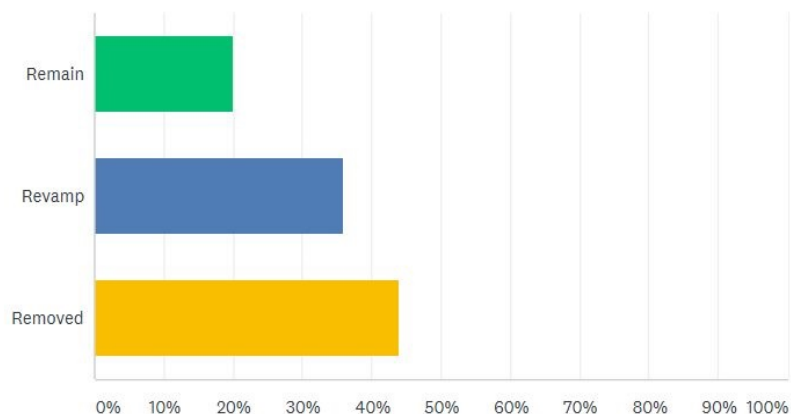


Figure 15. Would you like the GFSZA to remain in place, be revamped, or be removed?

Overall, most respondents to the survey wanted the GFSZA either removed (44%) or revamped (36%). The research showed that teachers and staff thought that the current GFSZA policy needed to either be removed or revamped to address modern issues with the current student population.

See Figure 16.

Do you feel that since the implantation of the GFSZA that school shootings are on the rise, or have remained the same but have been made highly publicized in various media platforms?

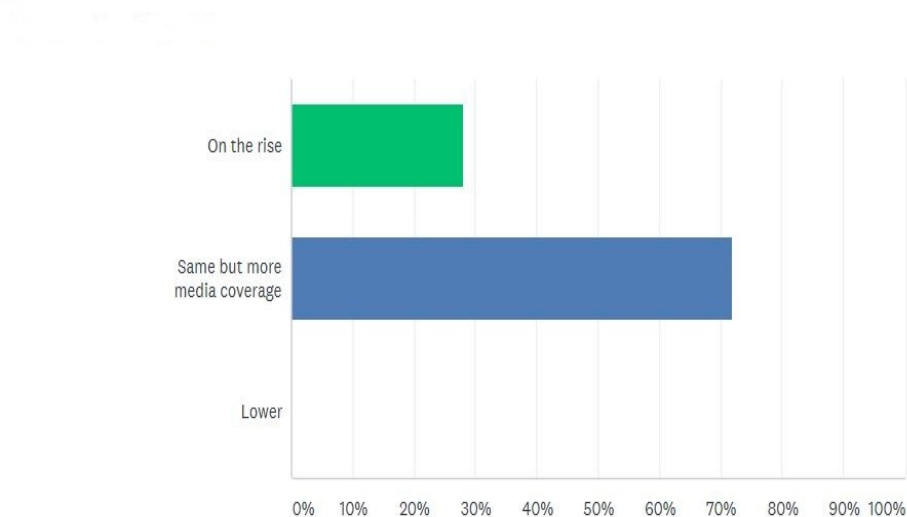


Figure 16. Do you feel that since the implementation of the GFSZA, school shootings are on the rise or have remained the same but have been highly publicized on various media platforms?

The majority of respondents to the survey (72%) felt that since the GFSZA had been implemented, the crime rate had remained the same but there had been more media coverage of school shootings. The remaining respondents felt that such crimes had been on the rise since the implementation of the policy. None felt that the policy had lowered the crime rate.

Research Question 2 addressed the safety measures that participants proposed should be implemented to deter school shootings. Most participants felt that increasing and focusing on physical security would yield the greatest results in protecting students. This was followed by having a resource officer on campus, and then by installing security cameras. Another option that was explored to provide safety to students was training and

arming staff so that if an incident occurred, there would be staff members who could handle the situation. Most of the respondents (68%) felt that this would be an effective method. The participants were also asked if their schools worked well with local law enforcement or had a security officer on campus to handle any issues. Most participants (96%) responded positively to working with law enforcement and having an officer on campus. Overall, 52% of respondents felt safe with the current GFSZA policy in place.

See Figure 17.

Do you feel that the current Gun Free School Zone Act (GFSZA) is effective in protecting students and staff?

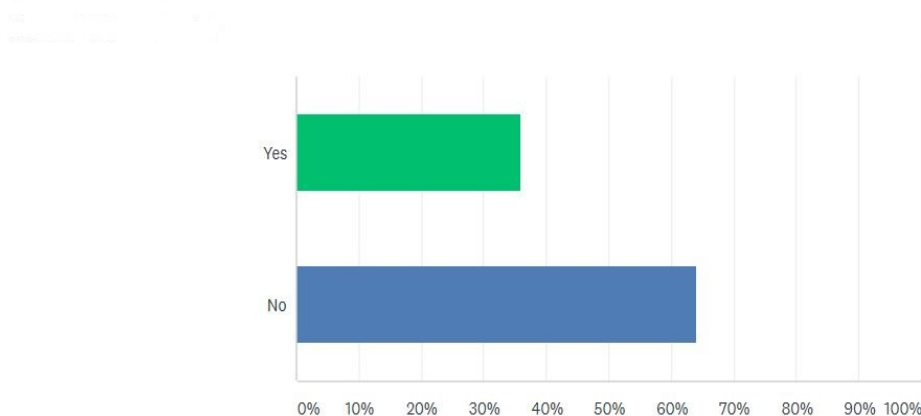


Figure 17. Do you feel that the current Gun-Free School Zone Act (GFSZA) is effective in protecting students and staff?

Overall, 64% of participants felt that the current GFSZA was effective in protecting students and staff from mass school shootings. Respondents felt that this policy had helped to protect students and staff from this crime.

See Figure 18.

With the current security measures in place at your school do you feel like the school is prepared to handle a school shooting? (Average police response time 18 minutes, average school shooting incident 12 minutes).

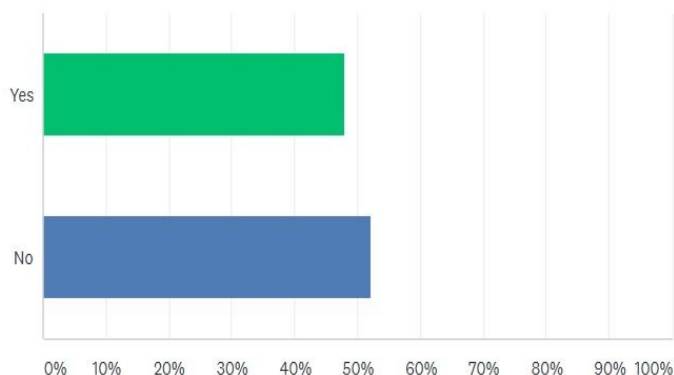


Figure 18. With the current security measures in place at your school, do you feel like the school is prepared to handle a school shooting? (Average police response time is 18 minutes; average school shooting incident is 12 minutes).

Overall, 52% of respondents did not feel that the current school at which they were working was fully prepared to deal with a school shooting. They did not feel that the current practices and policies in place would be capable of handling this crime.

Themes that emerged from the survey indicated that teachers were not opposed to being armed as a method of protection but were concerned about how this would affect the learning environment. Moreover, participants felt that the GFSZA policy was not constitutional and was in violation of their Second Amendment rights. Participants also felt that the largest threats to students were not mass shootings, but rather bullying and drugs. The theme that emerged was that school shootings were an issue but not as large an issue as indicated by news and social media sources. In relation to why students

brought guns to school, participants appeared to suggest that the problem was mental-health difficulties rather than permissive gun policy. Participants expressed that increasing the physical security of the school would be the largest deterrent to students bringing guns to school. The participants felt that they had a good working relationship with law enforcement, and most participants stated that they had a resource officer on campus to deal with any incidents. Finally, the participants were divided on whether they felt that the GFSZA policy as it was written was effective in preventing mass school shootings. Overall, 52% of the participants felt safe at school with the way the policy was written and enforced.

Limitations of the Study

There were limitations to this research study. The research was limited due to the following: (a) the sample was limited to those who participated in the study, as not everyone who could respond to the survey participated; (b) the demographics of the schools that participants represented were limited by their location in the southeastern United States; (c) the sample was limited in size; and (d) in my role as the primary researcher, I was the only one to code, analyze, and present the data (Creswell, 2014). The number of participants in this study did allow for saturation.

Recommendations

The results of this study could provide a foundation for additional research on this topic. This study could be replicated using respondents from various demographic and economic backgrounds in the United States to determine whether the results would be similar or vary greatly. This subject needs additional study in various areas in order to

gain a better understanding of this crime overall, as there is not just one factor that causes this crime or can deter this crime from occurring. Research could be conducted on other issues that staff and faculty deemed a concern, such as bullying, mental health, and socioeconomic status. Further research could be done to survey or perform case studies on school systems that allow teachers to carry firearms on campus to determine what the effects of such policies are.

Additional research could be done in schools that do allow teachers to carry firearms to determine if allowing teachers to be armed has been beneficial in preventing or stopping mass shootings on campus. Another area of future research could involve determining whether students and parents perceive the GFSZA as an effective policy or if they have differing opinions as to what methods and policies would be more effective. This might offer an additional perspective, as students might see issues and safety concerns that adults do not see, while their parents, having raised children, might be able to provide additional insight that staff and faculty might not have. Perspectives from the students could offer insight that would be useful in determining whether social media or new media have a negative effect on these crimes or generate copycat crimes. Understanding this issue from various perspectives could provide a more well-rounded approach to the issue as seen by various individuals who are directly or indirectly affected by it. This issue needs further study in various areas to broaden the information on this topic and assist school personnel, law enforcement, and mental health professionals in preventing these crimes. The information generated could provide

parents and staff with information on warning signs to look for in students who could potentially commit these crimes.

Implications for Social Change

This study presented findings on the opinions and perspective of educators and staff regarding the effectiveness of the GFSZA. This study may have a significant impact in contributing to the understanding of a crime that occurs and creating policies and procedures that may be effective in preventing it. There is no policy that could be implemented that would be 100% effective in stopping every mass shooting. This study focused on the effectiveness of one policy, now over 30 years old, in protecting today's students from school shootings. Hopefully, additional research can be done in various locations across the United States to gather additional research and information to fully address the issue. Social change may arise from many facets of this research, including understanding bullying, mental health, gun control, strategies for law enforcement and schools, and the effect of media attention on these crimes.

Providing students with a safe learning environment is a top priority because students need to feel safe in order to learn. The implications for practice based on the findings concerning the effectiveness of the GFSZA include the following:

- The importance of physical security in schools and not allowing intruders or weapons to enter.
- The need for preventive programs and instructions for students and staff on the effects of bullying and warning signs indicating that someone is being bullied.

- The need for emergency school shooting plans for faculty and students that include what to do when there is no law enforcement onsite and how to react when law enforcement arrives onsite.
- The need to consider whether training and arming staff and faculty would be reasonable for a particular school system based on policies and funding available to the school system.
- The importance of understanding and preparing for copycat behavior, which can occur for up to 2 weeks after an incident has occurred (Towers et al., 2015).
- The need to understand the importance of mental health for members of the student population, for whom mental health is just as important as physical wellbeing.

The GFSZA policy alone cannot effectively stop mass shootings from occurring.

In order to prevent such crime, there are several variables that need to be considered.

Schools and surrounding communities need to have policies in place that work for the areas in which they are located. Policies may vary from region to region, depending on the economic and demographic concerns each area must address.

Conclusion

The goal of this qualitative research was to gather the thoughts, opinions, and perspectives of faculty and staff regarding the effectiveness of the GFSZA as a method to stop mass school shootings. In the United States, since 2013, there have been 190 school shootings (Everytown Research, 2019). The survey that I conducted for this study

supported the conclusion that although the GFSZA can be an effective policy, there are other methods and policies that could be implemented that would be more effective. The survey also showed that although gun violence is a concern, on a daily basis, bullying and drug use are issues that school staff deal with more frequently. Future studies should be conducted as to whether the GFSZA is an effective policy for preventing mass school shootings in different geographic and economic locations so that data may be compared.

This research was conducted to gather the perceptions of faculty and staff to determine the effectiveness of the GFSZA and to determine what other policies participants thought would be more beneficial, whether put in place in conjunction with the GFSZA policy or to replace the GFSZA policy. This research adds to the current literature and confirms some results that other scholars have found. There remains a need for additional research to expand the literature. The themes presented in this study could be further explored in future research and provide solutions for this issue based on information gathered from those who work with victims and perpetrators daily. Educating students in a safe environment is important for the wellbeing and learning of all students. It is important that school personnel know what options are available to them to protect students from mass shootings and are able to properly exercise those options.

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Appendix A: Survey Questions

1. Do you feel that the current Gun Free School Zone Act (GFSZA) is effective in protecting students and staff?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

2. Do you think that the GFSZA is permissible under the Constitution or conflicts with the 2nd Amendment?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

3. Would you like the GFSZA remain in place, be revamped, or removed?
 - a. Remain
 - b. Revamp
 - c. Removed

4. Currently in your school system what other methods of protecting students from school shootings are in place? (May pick more than one)
 - a. Metal detectors
 - b. Clear backpacks
 - c. Armed Resource Officer
 - d. Physical Security such as locking doors, code entry, bullet proof windows
etc.
 - e. Security Cameras
 - f. None of the above

5. What methods could be put into place that would be effective in preventing school shootings?
 - a. Metal detectors
 - b. Clear backpacks
 - c. Armed Resource Officer
 - d. Physical Security such as locking doors, code entry, bullet proof windows etc.
 - e. Security Cameras
 - f. None of the above

6. With the current security measures in place at your school do you feel like the school is prepared to handle a school shooting? (Average police response time 18 minutes, average school shooting incident 12 minutes).
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

7. If teachers were trained and permitted to carry guns to school would this be effective or detrimental to protecting students and staff?
 - a. Yes effective
 - b. No detrimental

8. Do you think that allowing teachers to carry guns on campus would have a negative effect on the learning environment?
 - a. Yes positive experience
 - b. No negative experience

9. In order to prevent mass shootings should policy and funding focus on mental health, gun policy, programs to promote anti-bullying?
 - a. Mental Health
 - b. Gun Control
 - c. Student social programs
10. Are there other threats to students that affect school safety other than guns?
 - a. Other weapons such as knives
 - b. Fighting/ Bullying
 - c. Drugs
 - d. Sexual Assault
11. What do you believe to be the biggest cause of youth gun violence in the United States?
 - a. Mental Health
 - b. Lack of parental control
 - c. Lack of gun control and restrictions
 - d. Media attention and glorification of violence
12. In your education career how often has there been an incident involving students bringing weapons to school?
 - a. None
 - b. 1 incident
 - c. 2-3 incidents
 - d. 4-5 incidents

- e. More than 5 incidents
13. Does your school system partner with the local police for protection or are there armed security/police official on campus to respond to an incident?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
14. Do you feel that since the implantation of the GFSZA that school shootings are on the rise, or have remained the same but have been made highly publicized in various media platforms?
- a. On the rise
 - b. Same but more media coverage
 - c. Lower
15. Overall how safe do you feel in the school workplace with the current GFSZA policy and other security measures in place?
- a. Safe
 - b. Unsafe
16. Do you think that the students in your school system feel safe with the current GFSZA policy and other security measures in place?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
17. There has been discussion of different policy options to keep students and staff safe in addition to the GFSZA or removing the policy completely. Pick one policy option that would be best suited to protect students and staff from mass shootings.

- a. GFSZA remain in place as is
- b. Arm Teachers
- c. Tighter gun regulations such as (Assault weapon ban, background checks etc).
- d. Programs that improve mental, social and emotional health
- e. Increase physical security at the schools
- f. None

Please answer the following demographic information that will aid in the research and analyzing the data in the survey, this is optional.

1. What is your gender
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
2. What is your age?
 - a. 18-24
 - b. 25-39
 - c. 40-60
 - d. 60 plus
3. What is your ethnicity?
 - a. White
 - b. Hispanic or Latino
 - c. Black or African American
 - d. Native American or American Indian

- e. Asian/ Pacific Islander
 - f. Other
4. What is the highest degree or level of school that you have completed?
- a. Less than a high school degree
 - b. High school degree or equivalent
 - c. Bachelor's degree
 - d. Master's degree
 - e. Doctorate
5. What is your marital status?
- a. Single (never married)
 - b. Married
 - c. In a domestic partnership
 - d. Divorced
 - e. Widowed
6. How many children are in your household under the age of 17?
- a. 0
 - b. 1
 - c. 2
 - d. 3
 - e. 4 or more

Disclaimer: Participating in this type of study involves some risk such as minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as fatigue, stress or becoming

upset. Participating in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing. The following risks are minimal: fatigue, stress and becoming upset. The nature of the risks to this study can be emotional as this is a sensitive topic. Examples of emotional risk are depression, anxiety and fear. A list of free or no cost counseling services are provided below:

A) Louisiana Department of Health- Vernon Parish Health Unit

406 W Fertitta Blvd

Leesville, LA 71446

337-238-1274

Website: ldh.la.gov

B) Caring Choices

105 Bellevue Rd.

Leesville, LA 71446

337-238-6431

Website: clhsd.org

C) Outpatient Medical Center

1603 A Boone St.

Leesville, LA 71446

337-238-1274

Website: www.outpatientmedical.org

D) Veterans Crisis Line (Current military, and Veterans)

1-800-273-8255