A sense of lethal proportion

February-March 2018

14 March 2018

It didn't take long, did it? And what tiny percentage of teachers are armed yet?

It is simple statistical mathematics: if the known risk associated with a cure far exceeds that of the malady, drop the cure.

Gun-trained teacher accidentally discharges firearm in Calif. classroom, injuring student

One student was reportedly treated for injuries that were not life-threatening.

By Fred Barbash • Read more »

---

23 February 2018

If you arm all teachers in America, that will be **4** million teachers with a gun on the hip. To equal the average **9** students shot every year you would only need an accidental rate of discharge of **0.0002%**, each killing a single student only. Very likely the rate will be higher and more students will be killed accidentally by armed teachers than currently by rogue assassins.

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, about **600** deaths every year are due to "*accidental discharge*" of firearms, and an additional **250** are due to "*undetermined intent*". Additionally, of the **75,000** non-fatal firearms injuries each year, **25,000** are unintentional.

About 30% of Americans own a gun. That's about **100** million gun owners. If the rate of accidental discharge and undetermined intent are the same among teachers and other gun owners – and teachers are by essence in a dangerous environment as far as safety is involved, since students are mostly under age – the number of accidental deaths will be **35**, or **4** times as high as the average number of victims of mass shootings.

Additionally, armed teachers will be directly responsible for **1,000** unintentional non-fatal firearms injuries.

Plus, just think of the likelihood for a teacher to discharge his or her firearm <u>with intent</u>, each time he or she gets exasperated by unruly, or arrogant, or threatening students. Some of the students won't feel safe and will carry a gun to school to defend

themselves against rogue teachers. If the murder rate is the same as among the general population, that would mean an extra **5,000** fatalities.

Arming teachers seems to be a very bad idea indeed. A clear example of hysteria and disregard for data resulting in a cure far worse than the disease.

The fact that someone in America won the Grand Prize at the lottery does not mean that everybody will win the Grand Prize.

The probability that one particular kid will be shot on school premises is infinitesimal, to a point that it can probably not be avoided. If not using guns the crazy assassins will use bombs, or other lethal contraptions.

This analysis is not a moral rumination on the relative horrors of death by murder. It is only meant to put events in perspective. Nothing good is ever achieved in the long term if based on hysteria and disfiguration of facts and data.

This subject is probably taboo. Discussing it will be frown upon. Still, a failure to consider facts and reality will result in more confusion in a society deeply polarized along the geographic lines separating city and countryside.

Nearly all the media concur in reporting a general population desire to stop the "*school mass shootings*". We should all agree and try to find a solution to a problem that is however not universal, but absolutely marginal. Hysteria will not help. On the contrary, it will be counter-productive, since no side will be able to impose its views on the other if not based on facts and logic.

I just heard from a respected journalist that the probability that one of our kids will witness a mass shooting is 100%.

However, it is not so.

Facts

The worst year on record was 2012, when school shootings claimed **42** lives. The average since 1970 is **9** per year, including in higher education institutions.

In **2012**, the figures were as follows:

- General U.S. population: **305,000,000**

- School enrollment, including higher education, age 3 to 29: **78,426,000**

- Number of schools, public, private, and post-secondary: **140,000**

- Deaths, age 3 to 29, of school age (all causes): **58,500**

- Fatalities from school mass shootings, age 3 to 29: **42** (4.6 times the average)

- Other murder victims, age 3 to 29: **6,236**

- Suicide victims, age 10 to 29: **9,500** *(450 of which age 10 to 14)*

- Fatalities from motor vehicle accidents, age 3 to 29: **8,618**

- Deaths, age 0 to 29, from drowning**: 1,800**

- Deaths, infants aged 0 to 1 (all causes): **23,215**

    - of which by accident: **1,160**

- Incidentally, victims of terrorism: **0**

Therefore:

1. An individual aged 3 to 29 was **150** times more likely to be shot dead out of school than on school premises. In an average year the ratio would be **700** times.

2. An individual aged 3 to 29 was **200** times more likely to die in a car crash than to be shot on school premises. In an average year the ratio would be **1,000** times.

Despite the current media hype à-la Moore, school premises are a very safe environment. The probability not to be shot on school premises was **99.999946%** in 2012, the worst year on record, while the probability to be shot was **0.000054%.**

Of the **78,426,000** students aged 3 to 29 in 2014, for each **one** shot by a rogue mass murderer on school premises, **1,400** died of other causes. In an average year that would be **6,500**.

Meanwhile, a whopping **1,160** infants under the age of 1 were killed by accident, out of 4 million babies born each year in the U.S.

The probability for an infant under the age of 1 to be killed by accident is more than **500** times as high as the probability for a student to be killed by a mass murderer on school premises. In an average year the figure would be **2,500**. Since such an infant cannot bear any responsibility for its own demise, it would make sense to blame the negligence of their adult caregivers.

Meanwhile, over **23,000** infants died during their first year. Relative to their respective numbers, that's like **450,000** students dying every year, whereas **42** were shot dead on campus, and that was nearly 5 times the normal average.

Society has to find a way to prevent any individual, whether on or out school premises from killing another. Society has been at it for as long as society has existed. Not one murder is acceptable. Still, disfiguring and manipulating true data is not going to help. Despite the common opinion, the United States is among the countries with the lowest murder rate (4.7 per 100,000). The world highest murder rate is 90, which is 20 times as high. The world average rate is 6.2 and you'll always find a country with a higher rate and a country with a lower rate: the French are twice as likely to be murdered as the Swedes or the Swiss, and Australians are murdered slightly more than the French, which does not mean that France and Australia are significantly more lethal countries to live in than Sweden and Switzerland.

---

18 May 2018

It is odd that journalists in respected news outlets should lambast incessantly the current administration and its cronies for not having any respect for "*facts*", and I'm with them on the subject, while publishing titles such as the following two, today in the New York Times:

> **"I was thinking** it was going to happen eventually, it's been happening everywhere."
>
> That was Paige Curry, a student at Santa Fe High School in Texas, after a fellow student killed 10 people with a shotgun and a .38 revolver.

and

> ### Texas School Shooting: 10 Dead, 10 Hurt, and Many Not Surprised It Happened
> By MANNY FERNANDEZ, RICHARD FAUSSET and JESS BIDGOOD
> "I've always kind of felt like eventually it was going to happen here, too," said one student after the massacre at Santa Fe High School.

I fail to recognize facts in the two statements. They are sensationalist and of no import, and a factual journalist should have reported other aspects of the tragedies. As unacceptable as the killing of another human being may be, it seems to me the statements reflect hysteria more than facts.

The Parkland shooting in southern Florida happened a little over three months ago. Since then there have been 5 lethal school shootings in the country, which together killed 12 students.

1. The statement that "*it's happening everywhere*" is far from being correct, since there are 140,000 schools in the U.S. In the intervening quarter of a year since Parkland, 0.004% of schools were affected by mass shootings, which means that 99.996% of schools were not. That's far from "*happening every*where". Likewise, the school population numbers 80 million, which means that the victims represent 0.000015% of the school population.

2. In the intervening quarter of a year, 1,500 young persons of school age were murdered otherwise, on campus and off, while 15,000 died of other causes, more than 2,000 in motor vehicle accidents, and 2,500 from suicide. During the same period, 6,000 infants less than a year of age died, 300 of them accidentally.

I am not saying that the shootings have no importance. I'm only saying that reporting mass shootings exclusively not only reflects un-factual hypocrisy, but also a taste for sensationalism. If that is what journalism is about, so be it, but please stop dispensing moral lessons about "*facts*".

As much as I mourn the last victims of the school shootings, I am at least equally concerned about the considerably more numerous kids that died of other causes, and particularly about the 300 infants that died accidentally. How could that happen? Isn't there a legitimate cause for national investigation here?

---

19 May 2018

The royal wedding was all over the media today, but I am sure no one will infer that royal weddings happen everywhere and all the time.

Here is an interesting [commencement address](#) given three days ago by that extraordinary journalist, Ira Glass, the producer of that extraordinary weekly radio programme, *This American Life*. Great journalism is essential, although I guess great journalists are as common as great engineers, or great writers, or great artists.