Article

JSW

Journal of Social Work
12(3) 300–319

DOI: 10.1177/1468017310386426
jsw.sagepub.com
SAGE

The norm of solidarity: Experiencing negative aspects of community life after a school shooting tragedy

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Abstract

• *Summary*: Recent rampage shootings at schools have provoked intense academic discussion. While there have been two recent school shootings in Finland, there is not much empirical research focusing on these incidents. What is particularly lacking is research on community reaction to this type of mass violence. In this article, we take a look at the negative aspects of solidarity after a shooting incident in a small Finnish community of Jokela. We explore community experience on shootings through two types of empirical measures. The research material consists of a mail survey of the local residents and focused interviews of professional experts.

• *Findings*: Our results suggest that there was a rise in social solidarity after the shooting tragedy. However, the increased level of solidarity was also followed by a variety of negative phenomena such as strengthened group divisions between youth and adults, social stigmatization, and feelings of collective guilt. These experiences are familiar in the cultural trauma processes.

• *Applications*: In general, the article points out that mass violence has long-term impact on people's social engagement and interaction patterns. Similar processes can be argued to be particularly significant when studying relatively small communities.

Keywords

cultural trauma, mass violence, recovery, social solidarity

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Introduction

On 7 November 2007 an 18-year-old pupil killed eight fellow students and members of staff, before committing suicide, at Jokela high school, Finland. Jokela is a small village of 6000 people, part of Tuusula municipality, and situated close to the Helsinki metropolitan area. Immediately after the shootings, the village was packed with media people from all around the world. The shock value of the incident was huge, since the tragedy took place in a Nordic welfare society and in a very small town. Before this, school shootings were well known to take place in the United States and Canada. In addition, several incidents have occurred in South America, Asia and Australia. However, there have been relatively few European cases before the 2000s, such as the Aarhus University shootings in Denmark in 1994 or the Dunblane massacre in Scotland in 1996. In the last decade, the situation has changed. The shooting rampage in Erfurt, Germany in 2002, was the first tragedy in a new series of school shootings in Europe.

In Finland, another school shooting rampage took place on 23 September 2008 in the small town of Kauhajoki, where a student fatally shot nine students and a teacher, before turning the gun on himself. Similar to the Jokela shootings, this incident created a wave of threat messages in schools all over Finland. By March 2009, as many as 250 threats were reported to the police (Heikkinen, 2009). In this sense the shootings have had an impact on the whole of Finland and through global media on other countries as well.

In Finland and many other countries, school shootings represent the most shocking events individuals can imagine. Statistics show that many of the incidents have happened unexpectedly in small communities; for example, in the United States, as many as 60 percent of all school shootings between 1974 and 2002 occurred in rural areas (Newman, Fox, Harding, Mehta, & Roth, 2004). Generally, however, rural or suburban areas are considered peaceful and safe compared to big cities, and the collapse of this sense of security makes school shootings extremely shocking for local inhabitants (Harding, Fox, & Mehta, 2002). What is also noteworthy is that the recent school shooters of Virginia Tech, Jokela and Kauhajoki, for instance, have wanted to add extra shock to their actions by disseminating media packages consisting of videos, pictures, and even straightforward manifestos, through the Internet.

School shootings have been a tempting topic for the popular press, but a difficult one for researchers. Although the research literature is expanding (see e.g. material published in *American Behavioral Scientist* 2009: 9–10), there is still not much systematic academic empirical research on the topic in the European context. Media and popular books on school shootings usually centre on shooters' psychological state and broad cultural problems, such as antisocial rebellion, family disintegration, or a decline in culturally shared values (Newman et al., 2004).

The media coverage of school shootings has been studied extensively, especially after the shootings at Columbine (Klein, 2005; Muschert, 2007a; Muschert &

Carr, 2006). Studies have concentrated, for example, on the meanings of the Columbine shootings in the media (Altheide, 2009) or on the public commentary on the Columbine shootings (Strauss, 2007). School shootings have also been interpreted as political acts (Larkin, 2009). Psychological and sociological studies, for their part, have mostly concentrated on explaining why school shootings occur and how they could be prevented (e.g. Fox & Harding, 2005; Levin & Madfis, 2009; Newman & Fox, 2009; Newman et al., 2004; Pittaro, 2007).

Not much attention in the academic research has been given to the consequences of school shootings (Muschert, 2007b). A few studies considering the aftermath of school shooting tragedies have focused for example on the effects of the shootings on the criminal justice system (DeLisi, 2002), the pastoral work of school leaders (Fein & Isaacson, 2009) or the impact of school shootings on students' fear of school violence (Addington, 2003). Very few studies have addressed the question of what happens to the local communities after shootings (Ryan & Hawdon, 2008; see Muschert, 2007b).

In this article, we analyse how negative aspects of social solidarity evolved in the Jokela community after the school shooting tragedy. We ask what kinds of behavioural expectations towards grieving emerge as the community tries to recover from the disaster. Sociological literature on disasters suggests that increased social solidarity after crises helps both individuals and communities as a whole to recover from tragic events (Barton, 1969; Fritz, 1961; Quarantelli & Dynes, 1977). However, it is possible to assume that increased social solidarity itself may have restrictive effects on individuals (Alexander, 2004; Breakwell, 1986). With our data, we examine different components contributing to community's sense of social solidarity after a crisis.

The data consist of a mail survey of local adult residents ($N = 330$) and interview data from six professionals, who were working in Jokela during the crisis. The article starts with a short evaluation of literatures of social solidarity and cultural trauma. After that, we move on to empirical research questions, representation of data and analysis methods. The data analysis procedure is reported in a sequential manner, in which quantitative measures are interpreted before qualitative analysis. The article concludes with a discussion on the long-term consequences that tragic incidents may have for small communities.

Tragic disasters, social solidarity and trauma processes

There is a long tradition of studying community response to different crises, such as natural disasters and accidents (e.g. Barton, 1969; Erikson, 1976). More recently, there has been interest in studying communities after terrorist attacks (e.g. Abrams, Albright, & Panofsky, 2004; Turkel, 2002). Sociological studies on various catastrophes have often underlined that disasters do not drive local communities into chaos, but rather that after disasters there is a rise in social solidarity and co-operation (e.g. Drabek, 1986; Quarantelli & Dynes, 1977; Sweet, 1998). The idea of a sudden rise in solidarity goes back to Émile Durkheim's (1893/1967) classical

writings on communities at times of exceptional crimes. Similar arguments have been presented over the years in social psychological studies focusing on the formation of group identities; when social groups feel threatened, individuals tend to become more aware of their status as group members (Tajfel, 1982). In the field of disaster research, Charles E. Fritz has underlined the notion of the therapeutic community. Disasters temporarily break down distinctions and culturally derived discriminations. In this process, the whole community is deeply affected. Fritz also suggested that in times of disasters, danger, loss and suffering become public rather than private issues (Fritz, 1961).

Solidarity can be defined on a general level as a positive way of relating to others in interaction (Sorokin, 1947, 1954), or as feelings of togetherness and responsibility for others (Wilde, 2007). According to many definitions, social solidarity is manifested in action, as altruistic or prosocial behaviour (see Jeffries et al., 2006; Lindenberg, Fetchenhauer, Flache, & Buunk, 2006). We refer to social solidarity as a broad conception underlining mutual social support and sense of community, which we examine in the situation where a community as a whole is facing crisis. For example, talking and listening, expressions of affection, formal and informal expressions of condolences, and providing help in practical matters (such as food or childcare) are concrete ways to express solidarity through action. By these practices, individuals help other members of their community, as well as themselves, to process the tragedy. Social support provided by members of the victimized community promotes recovery and togetherness (Dillenburger, Akhonzada, & Fargas, 2008; Fritz, 1961; Lowe & Fothergill, 2003; Steffen & Fothergill, 2009). By creating an atmosphere of solidarity, social support also strengthens the sense of unity in the community.

Although it is possible to argue that the rise of solidarity enables the whole community to work as a therapeutic unit, some researchers claim that communities do not only function therapeutically after a disaster or a violent incident. Rather, the disasters themselves might produce new social problems and conflicts between different groups, and there are also economic and psychological factors reducing the possible positive outcomes of social solidarity (Webb, 2002). In addition, social solidarity does not automatically follow dramatic incidents (Collins, 2004; Ryan & Hawdon, 2008). Community disasters may also create social conflicts that relate to the friction between community 'insiders' (e.g. direct victims of the disaster) and 'outsiders' (e.g. members of the community who were not personally affected) (Carroll, Higgins, Cohn, & Burchfield, 2006, p. 262). The type of disaster plays a relevant role in the community response. For example, some researchers have argued that technological disasters in particular create long-term negative consequences, such as lack of consensus, polarization within communities and struggle over affixing blame (Freudenburg, 1997). School shootings are particularly problematic disasters since the offenders are usually members of the victimized community, and the roots of violence emerge from within the community. For local residents, the acts are often extremely difficult to deal with since they must continue their daily life in the same surroundings where the incident has taken place.

While the positive side of increased solidarity is underlined in the traditional sociological literature on disasters, negative consequences of increased solidarity remain understudied. The concept of social solidarity alone is not sufficient to explain the negative side of the collective processing of tragedies, which can be better understood as a part of the community-level trauma process. Since the late 1990s, cultural researchers and sociologists have started to discuss cultural traumas (Farrell, 1998; Seltzer, 1997). Studying the effects of a devastating flood in the community of Buffalo Creek in 1972, Kai Erikson compared individual trauma with collective trauma, and found them different in the sense that collective trauma affects everyone in the community. If only a few individuals in the community experience a crisis, the rest of the community is still able to support the victims. But in the case where the whole community is victimized by a disaster, 'the community no longer exists as an effective source of support', and the trauma becomes collective (Erikson, 1976, pp. 153–154).

According to Erikson (1976, p. 154), collective trauma 'does not have the quality of suddenness normally associated with trauma', but is a slow process following a crisis or a disaster. Similarly, the concept of the cultural trauma process has been used to analyse communities experiencing tragic events such as wars, natural disasters, or terrorist attacks (e.g. Alexander, 2004; Smelser, 2004a, 2004b; Sztompka, 2000). Different events can initiate trauma processes by creating culturally relevant memories as well as negative feelings such as shame, disgust, or guilt (Smelser, 2004a).

School shootings can lead to cultural trauma for several reasons. First, shooting incidents are often sudden, and thus communities cannot be prepared for such acts. Second, shootings are perceived by residents as unexpected, shocking, and repulsive. Third, shootings often touch the roots of everyday social interaction, especially the feelings of security. Finally, school shootings typically have particular social origins compared to, for example, accidents or natural disasters. The offenders in school shootings are usually members of the attacked communities.

Following the previous conditions, cultural trauma is seen as a social construction, and communities experiencing it are undergoing fundamental processes in which the origin and the consequences of the traumatic events are being processed over and over again. Although the trauma process can be difficult, it allows communities 'to define new forms of moral responsibility and to redirect the course of political action'. During this process, the local community's collective identity is also likely to alter. The production and restriction of solidarity are remarkable parts of identity revision. Communities are expected to find unity through shared experience of misfortune and suffering, and they tend to encourage the expressions of solidarity inside their own group but not toward outsiders (Alexander, 2004).

As Alexander (2004) points out, cultural trauma processes – increased social solidarity being understood as one of them – may also have strong normative implications for the conduct of social life. For example, after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, New Yorkers faced behavioural expectations in expressing

solidarity and patriotism (Abrams et al., 2004). The normative implications might also involve collective guilt and a crisis of identity in terms of the struggle to include the tragic experience in the collective identity (Sztompka, 2000). Thus, an increased level of social solidarity after a crisis does not necessarily lead to solely positive consequences.

Research questions, data and methods

Our empirical study examines how local residents experienced the high school shootings in Jokela. We approach the research problem from the point of view of everyday life and disruption of everyday social interaction. Our focus is especially on examining interaction patterns among the residents, and evaluating what kinds of behavioural expectations emerged after the crisis. We summarize the following three research questions:

1. What kind of community was Jokela in the aftermath of the shootings?
2. What kinds of negative processes related to the shootings were identified in the community by professionals working with the crisis?
3. Which of the negative processes were considered to have a relatively long-term impact on the daily life of the community?

We draw our interpretations from two types of data. Our first data were derived from a mail survey of adult population living in the Jokela area, Tuusula municipality ($N = 330$). These data were collected in May to June 2008, approximately six months after the shootings. In this way, the data provide a means to examine community life only six months after the tragic incident. While it is obvious that our survey data do not enable us to say anything about the actual changes brought about by the shootings, the data can provide accurate estimates of social interaction and participation patterns within the Jokela community. Over the course of the empirical research, we followed the Finnish National Advisory Board on Research Ethics' ethical principles of social sciences. The collection of our data and the publishing of the results did not require a statement of ethical approval.

The survey used simple random sampling and it was sent to 700 residents, aged 18 and over. The sample was picked up from the Central Population Register data base in May 2008. After one reminder, which was posted three weeks after the original questionnaire, the survey gave a response rate of 47. Despite this, the sample represents relatively well the adult population of Tuusula municipality, at least in terms of gender and age. Gender distribution in the data (51.7% male) is close to population's actual distribution (50.4% male). In the data, 71.0 percent of the respondents are under the age of 60. In Tuusula population aged 18–74, on the other hand, the proportion of residents aged 60 or below is 80.0 percent (Statistics Finland, 2010).

The survey focused on local residents' subjective perceptions of the shootings, their evaluations of the community and their experiences of social solidarity in the

neighbourhood. These data are used to frame the general characteristics of the community response to the tragedy in the aftermath of the shootings. As the second data, we use focused, in-depth interviews of six professionals who were working in the Jokela community during the 2007–2008 period. The interviewees were chosen by snowball sample technique on the grounds of their work experience and their knowledge of Jokela community before and after the shootings.

The first criterion we used was that all the interviewees had participated in the crisis work or the aftercare of the incident. The activities concerning crisis work and aftercare were organized by the municipality of Tuusula, the congregation of Jokela, and the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) functioning in the area, which is why we chose the participants so that all these organizing instances were represented. Five of the interviewees worked with the crisis as part of their regular work, and one assisted in the crisis work as a volunteer. The second criterion was that the participants were familiar with the community both before and after the shootings; except for one, all had worked in Jokela, or the Tuusula municipal area, prior to the shootings (work experience in the area varied from six months to ten years). Four of the participants lived either in Jokela or in other villages of the Tuusula municipal district, and two lived in Helsinki.

The first author of this article conducted the interviews in Jokela in January and February 2009. Interviews were conducted approximately 14 months after the shootings, so that the participants could evaluate the consequences of the shootings in the local community. Themes discussed covered various topics ranging from organization of crisis work and aftercare of the crisis to community-level experience and consequences of the shootings. The duration of the interviews was from 60 minutes to almost 120 minutes.

All the interview participants gave permission to state their names and occupations in the publications of this study. However, since it would not significantly add to the analysis, we decided not to publish the names of the participants. Although the participants did not request anonymity, the possibility to link interviewees with the quotes from the interview data would still present an ethical problem if detailed descriptions of the participants' occupational positions were given. Thus, to avoid the recognition of the interviewees, we do not provide detailed information about the participants.

The professionals we interviewed could assess the consequences of the shootings in the community, because they knew what kind of community Jokela had been before the incident. Our qualitative interview data can thus give us a wider perspective on the local experience of the shootings than our survey data, where there is no starting point from which to measure the results obtained six months after the shootings.

The main focus of each interview was on the experiences that the interviewees had of the local residents' grieving strategies. These data offer us an expert view of the whole community as it tries to recover from the disaster. While it is true that the interview data enable us to evaluate only the experts' views of the residents' experiences, it is an incomparable source for understanding the overall atmosphere in

Jokela. To some extent, the participants were also members of the studied community and had experienced the crisis on a personal level. It is likely that the interviewees stressed the negative consequences and problems that they encountered during their work. These aspects are acknowledged in our interpretations of the expert interviews.

Our methods of analysis include descriptive quantitative techniques (namely, frequency counts) and contextual interview analysis (thematic parsing). After each quotation or interpretation derived from the interview data, we indicate the interview(s) from which the quotation or interpretation is derived (interviews 1–6). The survey data are used to describe the community as a social context six months after the shootings. Some of the basic results of the survey data are presented as the complimentary findings for the interview analysis. The analysis of the interview data, on the other hand, aims at explaining why some of the social practices after the shootings had so much negative influence on the community life. In practice, the interview data provide retrospective accounts of the professionals from the first 14 months after the tragedy.

With our interview material as the primary data, we look for similarities in what the interviewees stressed as negative consequences of the shootings in the community. As the interviews are collected from experts in different fields, the elements that can be understood as shared among the professionals are used to describe and summarize the key findings. More generally, we approach the research questions by triangulating the survey and interview analysis. In general, methodological triangulation is understood as a means of cutting across the qualitative vs quantitative divide (e.g. Cresswell, 2003; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Our decision to apply this approach to data analysis was made to provide us with more integrated results. In practice, we aim at validating the findings that we have made in the analysis of one type of material with the findings from the other source. In this sense, our approach is multi-method and aims at a realistic interpretation of the social process taking place in the Jokela community after the shootings.

Social interaction and participation in Jokela

The first task of the analysis was to describe the basic characteristics of the Jokela community six months after the shootings. In particular, our aim was to examine how residents evaluate their engagement with local activities, and how they perceive the social milieu of the neighbourhood. Answers to these questions will provide us with a clear starting point for a closer examination of the changes in the atmosphere after the shootings. We rely on findings presented in numerous studies showing that crises change solidarity levels in communities (Barton, 1969; Fritz, 1961; Quarantelli & Dynes, 1977).

Both our survey and interview data provide possibilities to make interpretations about social solidarity in the community. In the survey questionnaire, there was a set of questions asking about the frequency of engagement with local activities. The variables were elicited with the question: ‘How often do you participate in the

following activities?' The respondents gave their answers using options: 1 = Several times a week, 2 = Once a week, and 3 = Less often. A total of the four different items was used in the analysis. These items measured typical daily activities such as shopping, meeting neighbours, watching local TV channels, and attending local gatherings. Percentages of responses are presented in Table 1.

At first glance, it appears that Jokela residents are engaging relatively well with the local community. For example, a clear majority (74%) shop at a local store several times a week. In addition, more than half (54%) meet their neighbours, and half (50%) watch local news on television more often than once a week. On the other hand, however, less than 2 percent of the respondents report participating in local gatherings more than once a week. In fact, 87 percent participate in these kinds of social activities clearly less often than on a weekly basis.

In the questionnaire, the respondents were also asked to rate such items as trust in neighbours, values, and co-operation. The items were evaluated on five-point Likert scales, in which 1 = Disagree completely, 5 = Agree completely. Four items were selected for the analysis. Table 2 shows the results as means (standard errors in parentheses) for each variable.

As the table indicates, respondents obviously consider Jokela a good place to live in ($M = 4.3$). Local residents also report that they trust their neighbours a lot ($M = 3.7$). But what is perhaps surprising is that while residents trust their neighbours, they do not consider that there is a lot of co-operation ($M = 3.0$). In addition, the mean for item-measuring values is located just above the mid-value of the scale ($M = 3.2$).

Table 1. Frequency of engagement with local activities in Jokela

	Shopping at a local store	Meeting neighbours	Watching local news	Attending local gatherings
Several times a week	72.5	54.0	50.0	1.6
Once a week	23.2	29.1	21.0	11.7
Clearly less often	4.3	16.9	28.6	86.7

Note: The table gives percentages for each category.

Table 2. Respondents' experiences of solidarity in Jokela

	Trusts neighbours	Shares values with neighbours	Jokela is a good place to live in	Residents co-operate a lot
M (Std)	3.74 (0.93)	3.23 (0.95)	4.25 (0.88)	2.97 (1.05)

Note: The table gives means for each variable on a five-point scale (standard errors in parentheses).

Basically, both our survey measures suggest that Jokela was a community in which residents like to live. At the same time, however, it is obvious that the respondents felt that co-operation and social participation in community activities were not common. Furthermore, all the professionals interviewed described Jokela as a safe, tightly-knit village with a high sense of community and a strong local identity (1–6). Still, the sense of community was also seen to be threatened by the growth of population in the area (4, 6). Jokela was also described as an active community where numerous associations gather the inhabitants together and help especially parents of young children to form informal support groups (2, 4–5). Yet one of the interviewees (6) was worried about the lack of participation in local activities. She mentioned that social participation, in, for example, parents' associations activities at Jokela's schools had not increased after the shootings of 2007.

Our general interpretation is that the local community of Jokela appears to be quite active, especially when compared with the neighbouring villages, as the participants did in the interviews. On the other hand, only a small number of inhabitants frequently take part in the activities. It is not possible to argue that our survey data show a peak of solidarity or an increased sense of community among the Jokela residents. This results of course from the fact that we have no data available, which would give comparable information of the time before the shootings took place. In the interview data, when the experts could compare the situation before and after the incident, a rise in solidarity was in fact reported. This finding will be analysed in more detail in the following section of this article. At this point, we can also notice that results indicating a sudden rise in solidarity have been reported in many case studies focusing on natural disasters, terrorism, and school shootings (e.g. Quarantelli & Dynes, 1977; Ryan & Hawdon, 2008).

Expectations of solidarity

When a community is facing a crisis that may lead to collective trauma (Erikson, 1976) and initiate cultural trauma processes, normative expectations of solidarity emerge from the shared experiences of the victimized people (Alexander, 2004). A collective tragedy leaves the whole community victimized and unable to help each other. Collective trauma is created by a disaster that 'damages the bonds attaching people together' (Erikson, 1976, p. 154.) In Jokela, in addition to the people killed or injured in the shootings, the 500 students and members of staff of the school, as well as their families can also be considered victims in the sense that the events completely disrupted the course of their everyday lives. But what can be said about the victimization of the community at large?

The interviewees described the school shootings of November 2007 as a shared experience for the Jokela community. In addition to the immediate victims and their families, the incident was seen as affecting everyone in the community in one way or another. In a small village where a lot of the inhabitants knew at least one of the eight victims or the perpetrator (or at least their families), the school

shootings constituted a crisis that the whole community had to go through (1–6). In fact, one third of the questionnaire respondents (34%) reported that they were acquainted with, or at least knew someone who died in the shootings. On the basis of these accounts, we can state that the whole community was emotionally damaged in the shootings. Mass violence in Jokela was experienced as a collective crisis, even by the inhabitants who were not directly and personally affected by it (1–2, 6). In this sense, the collective trauma was inevitably associated with the community's identity (see Smelser, 2004a).

Whereas Erikson states that the community must be literally 'stripped away' by a disaster for collective trauma to emerge, we propose that physical devastation of the community in terms of material loss or mass casualties is not necessary for the trauma to become collective. In the case of the school shootings in Jokela for example, the entire community was in fact a victim of the shootings, because the incident devastated at least temporarily the image of a safe and quiet community that the residents of Jokela had cherished before the shootings. Questions voiced by the inhabitants in the course of the crisis, such as 'How could it happen here, where nothing ever happens and where it is supposed to be safe?' (1, 3, 4) reflected the sudden loss of a secure and peaceful community.

According to all our interview participants, social interaction and expressions of solidarity in the Jokela community increased immediately after the shootings and remained high at least during the following few days. People sought comfort mostly by staying close to family members, but face-to-face interaction between neighbours and other acquaintances also increased substantially. The inhabitants of Jokela spontaneously gathered together, and the interviewees reported having seen, to an unusual extent, groups of people chatting together all around the village centre. The young especially walked around the village in groups a lot more than before (1–6).

Clearly, a norm of social solidarity, emerging from the shared feelings of victimization, existed after the incident as part of the trauma processes initiated by the shootings. There were certain common practices to express solidarity for the victims' families and for the community at large. Collective rituals of mourning played a strong part in the trauma processes of the Jokela community. In Jokela's two crisis centres that were operational during the four days of the acute crisis period, people grieved together and comforted each other by hugging, sitting close together, holding hands, and talking. A pond which was just next to the school became a site of collective mourning as people placed candles and notes around it. The same ritual of collective mourning was also repeated on the first anniversary of the shootings. Neighbours, who previously had been too busy with work and other activities to meet each other, now brought food as well as condolences to the victims' families (1–6). Such displays of solidarity help to create a common narrative of the events in establishing the inhabitants' collective role as victims, as opposed to actors who might indirectly be blamed for not preventing the tragedy (Ryan & Hawdon, 2008). This aspect of solidarity, as is argued later in this article, was however notably weakened by the common

feelings of guilt and stigmatization experienced later during the trauma process of the community.

Each of the participants stated that the sense of community strengthened after the crisis. Mutual feelings of solidarity and responsibility were increasingly felt as the community tried to make sure no one was left alone in the crisis. As a consequence, the collective identity of the village was also perceived to alter during the trauma process. According to the interviewees, the shared experiences of sorrow and insecurity made Jokela a 'more communal village', as 'people's identity as Jokela inhabitants grew stronger' (1–2, 6). Almost all participants (1–4) thought that the crisis had the potential to permanently increase the communality orientation in Jokela, but the change was not seen as permanent by all:

> [A]t least at the beginning I felt that people somehow started to take more responsibility for each other, there was like this feeling that people took care of each other a little more. But I think it has normalized in the course of time, that all the good things that [the crisis] brought are little by little changing. (6)

Although the expressions of solidarity were naturally appreciated and seen as important means of recovery by the professionals, negative effects were attached to the increased solidarity. This resulted from the fact that the tragic event linked individuals' psychological experiences to cultural representations of the trauma (see Smelser, 2004a). Above all, it was evaluated that the young were affected by the negative consequences of the tightening of the community (1–3, 5). For instance, one of the participants expressed her concern about the fact that in Jokela the number of the 15-year-old adolescents not going on to vocational or high school after comprehensive school was a lot higher in 2009 than previously. The adolescents were afraid of going to school in a neighbouring community, because they felt that the young outside their own community would not understand their experiences of the school shootings. This was considered a long-term negative effect resulting from increased social solidarity, since it clearly limited the adolescents' life choices one and a half years after the crisis (1). This is characteristic to the groups formed in threatening situations (Breakwell, 1986).

More generally, young people had formed a group identity as 'the young who experienced the school shootings in Jokela'. Dozens of young people were still fixed to the tragedy, which had become a defining aspect of their collective identity (1). This produced solidarity and support inside the group, but restricted their expressions of solidarity toward outsiders (e.g. adolescents of the neighbouring communities). Some studies (e.g. O'Donnel, Schwab-Stone, & Muyeed, 2002) have shown that peer support can actually hinder the recovery of children and young people exposed to community violence, whereas support from parents and school in general are helpful for the recovery process. Although many adolescents in Jokela found help and support in peer groups at the time of the crisis, the effect of the solidarity and sense of belonging had, for some of them, since turned negative.

Group divisions within the community

In all communities, there are group divisions, but in times of crises these divisions often become more visible and may even become critical (Carroll et al., 2006; Manktelow, 2007). Forming new groups on the basis of shared negative experience is typical in difficult or threatening situations (Breakwell, 1986). In Jokela, however, the participants felt that the divisions within the local community became too strong and created problems especially between the young and the adults (1–4).

According to the notion of cultural trauma, the significance and indelibility of traumatic events are collectively established by recurrent struggle and even conflict between different interest groups in communities (Smelser, 2004a). In the case of the Jokela school shootings, numerous groups were affected by the incident. The shootings were experienced as a shared crisis. However, there were constant negotiations going on in the village about the indelibility of the trauma. This was shown, for example, by one of our participants who told about a meeting held nine months after the shootings in Jokela. In this meeting, some people claimed that the trauma had now been 'worked through', or was being done so separately by the traumatized individuals, and that there was no longer any need to deal with it collectively. However, other actors in the meeting suggested that the crisis should still be treated collectively (2).

Struggle over the definition of the trauma, and especially its indelibility, created group divisions within the Jokela community. The most radical division appeared between the young and adults mainly because young people were more affected by the trauma than adults. Also, the young people in Jokela established their position as one of the interest groups in the trauma process by making claims about the endurance of the trauma and its centrality in their collective identity (1–5). This kind of division between victims and other (not directly victimized) groups is common in the aftermath of both natural and technological disasters, and can lead to severe polarization within communities (see Carroll et al., 2006; Freudenburg, 1997).

This division can be tracked down to the first days of the crisis, when young people and adults found their way to different locations to get help and counselling. When the shootings started, pupils fleeing the school went to a nearby building that hosts local church and congregation facilities, which were designated a crisis centre. Crisis workers of the municipality, congregation and NGOs all operated in this space. Parents too came to the crisis centre to look for their children, and those who were traumatized, stayed there for help. After the first chaotic hours following the shootings, the young however started to gather in the local youth facility, situated on the other side of the village centre (1–6). At its best, the youth facility hosted almost 200 young people, whereas the adults and small children who needed help stayed at the crisis centre. Later on, the youth facility was designated the second official crisis centre of Jokela, with the intention of keeping the media away from the young in shock and mourning (1–2).

While the policy of the two crisis centres was considered to prevent further conflict between the adults and the youth, at the same time it caused a division between the young and the adults. The policy of the two crisis centres was not planned, but youth workers of the surrounding Tuusula municipality responded to the need of the young to stay close together in the youth facility. Therefore, the youth facility stayed open 24 hours a day for four days after the shootings (1–2). About 30 young people even stayed the night there, and a slightly smaller number of them did not go home at all for three days, after which the youth workers forced them to do so (1–3). Although the crisis centre in the church facilities was mostly frequented by families as a whole, some adolescents formed their own support groups there, and around ten adolescents stayed the first night after the crisis at the crisis centre (4). The division of the community resulted in a situation where some of the young formed extremely tight peer groups, completely excluding adults – even their own parents (1, 3).

> Actually, it was like the young were somehow, some of the young wanted to exclude all the adults and maybe find comfort from one another. (. . .) So then came this feeling that the others don't understand, the parents don't understand, nobody understands me' cause I've been through it. So when you found the others who had been through the same. It became a sort of a community that had undergone something. (1)

The feeling that those who have not experienced the crisis cannot understand the victims is related to the isolation of the victim group(s) from the rest of the community, which is one of the most common characters of the aftermath period of disasters or crises (Hoffman, 1999).

Stigmatized community and collective guilt

Other negative effects of the increased solidarity in the wake of the shootings were the feelings of collective guilt and stigmatization felt by the members of the Jokela community. Although we did not directly ask about this in the interviews, some of the participants (1–4) highlighted this theme on their own initiative. In public discussions on school shootings, as noted by Strauss (2007), there is a tendency to blame social forces or structures for the shootings, rather than the offenders themselves. The perpetrator of the Jokela high school rampage anticipated this, writing in his manifesto: 'Don't blame anyone else for my actions than myself. (. . .) Don't blame the movies I see, the music I hear, the games I play or the books I read. No, they had nothing to do with this.' Despite this, in public discussion, the fault was not laid solely on the perpetrator, but on inefficient mental health care, youth work and school counselling lacking in resources, or the presumed lack of community orientation in Finnish society (Raittila et al., 2008).

It has been shown that after technological disasters, a double victimization may happen as the affected groups enter in a struggle over who is to blame for the tragedy. In this struggle, victims of disaster often become victims of blame as well

(Freudenburg, 1997). Collective guilt in the case of Jokela did not necessarily arise from direct accusations towards specific groups, but more often from the question of why the tragedy happened, which can be rephrased as 'why did we let this happen?' (1, 3–4). As one of the interviewees put it: 'A lot of times when something terrible like this happens, people want to find out whose fault it is. So, maybe it's a kind of . . . a shared feeling of guilt' (4). This feeling, when not directed at a specific person or group of people, can be productive in that it motivates the community to develop ways of increasing solidarity and collective activities. But it can also be a paralyzing feeling that further isolates the community from other communities and leaves them feeling suspicious and defensive. The community can feel that the outsiders blame them for not averting the tragedy.

The feelings of guilt felt by the young seem to differ from the adults' experiences. Participants reported that the young blamed the adults, namely, the teachers and other school staff, for not taking their warnings about the perpetrator seriously, and for not preventing him from committing his actions. But, on the other hand, because of the fact that adults were not able to forestall the tragedy, many of the adolescents were left with a feeling that they should have done something to prevent the shootings themselves (1, 3). One of the interviewees said that the young were asking themselves 'could I have done something?' There was an atmosphere of self-accusation that emerged from the conversations of the young (3). Collective guilt is typical of eye-witnesses of violence who did not act out during the incident or people of the surrounding community who blame themselves for not having done more to prevent the violence (Donnan & Simpson, 2007). In Jokela, the self-accusations were further fortified after the second school shooting case that occurred in Finland, in Kauhajoki, in October 2008:

> [I]t was strange how many of the young thought about it, that if . . . if it could have been prevented what [the perpetrator] did here, would those people [killed in the Kauhajoki school shootings] have survived? (. . .) And that gun shop [in Jokela, where the perpetrators of the Jokela and Kauhajoki shootings both bought their guns] was subjected to an unfair castigation because both of them had a gun from that shop. Somehow it . . . it was like if there was no gun shop in Jokela, then none of this would have happened. (1)

According to interview participants, the inhabitants of the Jokela community felt their community was stigmatized by the school shootings (1–2, 4). After the Columbine school shootings in the United States, for example, 'Columbine' became a keyword for a complex set of youth troubles (Muschert, 2007a). A similar labelling phenomenon was also witnessed in Finland. Indeed, in everyday language, the word Jokela became a synonym for school shootings. That is why people in Jokela feel that whenever outsiders hear the name of their village, all everyone thought of was the shootings (1–2). Jokela was thus associated with a negative phenomenon, which damaged the community's image. At the time of the interviews, there was, for example, talk in the village about the decline in the prices of

properties and about the difficulty to get houses sold in the area (1–2). One of the professionals described this:

> [S]omehow it feels like these people feel stigmatized, but on the other hand they have all been stigmatized, when they find this feeling (...) It sort of glues them closer together. There's a lot of good in it. But then again, if it starts to limit people's lives or the adolescents' lives, that now you can't buy a [train] ticket to Jokela. Or that you can't tell anyone that you live in Jokela. (1)

The fear of social stigmatization was demonstrated in situations where some of the inhabitants felt that it was easier to hide their local identity outside their own community. In some situations, Jokela residents were ashamed to tell outsiders that they lived in Jokela, for example, when buying tickets for the commuter train (1–2, 4). In this sense, the feelings of stigmatization isolated the community from the outside world and helped to form a shared negative identity that labelled outsiders (i.e. people who do not live in Jokela) untrustworthy.

Conclusion: When does strong solidarity become a negative factor?

In the analysis of community response to the shootings at Virginia Tech in the United States, Ryan and Hawdon (2008) identified factors that associate a crisis with a rise of solidarity. They suggested that the tragedy must be defined as affecting the collective, and to disrupt its everyday life. For a tragedy to produce solidarity, the collective facing the crisis must be seen as a 'moral community'. In addition, the whole collective must also be an unwilling participant in the tragedy (Ryan & Hawdon, 2008).

The Jokela community's experience of the shootings of November 2007 certainly resembles Ryan and Hawdon's (2008) analysis. According to the interview participants, a sudden rise of solidarity was definitely experienced. The shootings were described by the informants as a shared crisis affecting the whole community, and interrupting the everyday routines of many of its inhabitants, as well as the functioning of several municipal institutions. In other words, the Jokela collective was perceived as a moral community; it was the victim of a crime, and did not deserve to suffer the tragedy. The incident strengthened social solidarity inside the community and this at least temporarily strengthened the inhabitants' identification with the collectivity called Jokela. Similar findings have been presented in studies focusing on community reactions to crises and disasters (Abrams et al., 2004). Our analysis also shows, however, that although the increase in social solidarity occurs due to a tragedy, it is not always connected to positive feelings only, or to a sense of pride in one's own community. Negative aspects of solidarity, such as collective guilt and stigmatization are also present, when the collective identity is being revised. In addition to creating solidarity and unity in the communities

(see Fritz, 1961), our results suggest that crises may also create new divisions within local communities.

The increase in social solidarity is, without question, a good and necessary phenomenon for a community facing a crisis. Increased solidarity supports individuals during the acute phase of the crisis and can help them to cope with tragedy, providing collective narratives and frames of reference to make sense of the crisis (Abrams et al., 2004; Breakwell, 1986; Ryan & Hawdon, 2008). It can also produce various positive long-term effects such as increased willingness to develop the community (Steffen & Fothergill, 2009). Still, increased solidarity may also bring negative effects, as well as positive ones. It can hinder the recovery of the individuals by encouraging them to stay in groups that have been formed on the basis of shared negative experiences. Although these groups decrease the feeling of insecurity and provide important support and understanding, they can also encourage individuals to cling to the tragedy and not move on with their life. This is exactly what happened to some of the adolescents in Jokela.

The consequences of the Jokela high school shootings were experienced as multiple sufferings by the community. First, the shooting incident was perceived as an attack on the whole community, disrupting social interaction routines and victimizing the community. Second, the collective identity of the Jokela inhabitants was threatened by group divisions within the community and the struggle between different interest groups over the significance and indelibility of the trauma. Finally, the tragedy aroused feelings of collective guilt because of self-accusations as well as real or imagined accusations made by 'outsiders' or the press. Theoretical writings suggest that a community may start to form its identity on the basis of a shared negative experience or a crisis (Smelser, 2004a).

According to the professionals, a shared negative identity centring on the crisis can lead to feelings of insecurity, collective guilt, and distrust towards outsiders. Negative aspects of social solidarity can impede the recovery process and the return to everyday life after a crisis. For example, guilt may hinder collective trauma processes by causing reluctance to discuss and deal with the crisis (Donnan & Simpson, 2007). In other words, cultural trauma processes can be beneficial for the local community, but the crucial question remains as to whether the community can let it wounds heal. Local communities are vulnerable, even those that appear to express solidarity in terms of engagement with local activities. This assumption was supported by our survey and interview data.

It has been argued that the intensive repetition of cultural traumas can hinder the socio-psychological recovery (e.g. Furedi, 2004). The trauma process started by the crisis can further open up a conflict between individuals and groups, some orienting towards playing down the trauma and others keeping it alive (Smelser, 2004a). However, the crucial question is whether the community as a whole can convert a negative experience into a positive one. Thus, professionals working in different fields such as social work and youth work, need to understand that there are many restrictive and enabling components which contribute to communities' level of social solidarity.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the anonymous *JSW* referees for valuable comments. Furthermore, we gratefully acknowledge the financial support from the Emil Aaltonen Foundation.

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