Detailed Breakdown of my selected research papers for ISM 6137 Group Project on School Shootings

# Paper 1: Getting Ahead of School Shootings: A Call for Action, Advocacy, and Research

Problem Investigated: The paper looks into the ongoing issue of school shootings in the U.S. It calls for more focused research, policy changes, and advocacy. The authors argue that school shootings come from larger societal problems, like weak firearm laws, lack of mental health support, and poor implementation of school safety measures.

Authors:

* Lauren W. Collins: Associate professor at San Diego State University, works on applying research to improve student outcomes, focusing on school safety and violence prevention.
* Timothy J. Landrum: Professor at the University of Louisville, researches behavioral disorders and their link to school violence.
* Chris A. Sweigart: Special education consultant advocating for evidence-based school safety, especially for students with mental health and behavioral issues.

Methods and Approach: The paper suggests a multi-faceted approach rather than focusing on a single method to address school shootings:

* Literature Review:  
  The authors review existing studies on school shootings, particularly those that explore gun violence, mental health, and school safety. Key studies include work on zero-tolerance policies, active shooter drills, and firearm access.
* Framework for Action:  
  The paper introduces a framework based on three pillars: Action, Advocacy, and Research. It highlights the importance of evidence-based strategies, advocacy for policy change, and more research to better understand and prevent school shootings.
* Policy and Advocacy Recommendations:  
  The authors call for stronger gun control laws, stressing that most school shooters get guns from family members.
* Mental Health Interventions:  
  They push for better mental health services in schools, noting that many shooters showed signs of mental health struggles like depression and isolation, but these issues were often ignored due to a lack of support.

Key Patterns and Findings:

1. Frequency and Lethality of School Shootings:  
   School shootings are widespread and growing. The authors emphasize the emotional and psychological damage these events cause in communities.
2. Gun Access and Policy Gaps:  
   Most school shooters get their weapons from family members, revealing gaps in gun safety at home. The authors argue that better gun control and secure firearm storage are crucial to prevention.
3. Zero-Tolerance Policies:  
   The authors criticize zero-tolerance policies, which lead to harsh discipline for marginalized students and often escalate violence rather than prevent it.
4. Psychological Impact of Active Shooter Drills:  
   The paper highlights the negative emotional impact of active shooter drills, especially on younger students. These drills often increase anxiety, and the authors recommend schools reconsider their use.
5. Calls for More Empirical Research:  
   The authors stress the need for more research on school shootings. They argue that profiling shooters doesn’t work, as there is no consistent profile. Instead, research should focus on school climate, mental health services, and student-teacher relationships.

Conclusion: The paper argues for balancing immediate preventative actions with long-term, research-driven approaches. It calls for stricter gun control, better mental health support, and smarter policies that avoid making the problem worse, such as zero-tolerance discipline. The authors warn that current interventions, like active shooter drills, may cause harm, and the best solutions are based on evidence and careful research. They urge schools, policymakers, and researchers to adopt sustainable, evidence-based strategies that address the root causes of school violence.

# Paper 2: "American Uniqueness Revisited: A Comparative Examination of Two School Shootings Using the Path to Intended Violence"

Problem Investigated:  
This study, by Jaclyn Schildkraut, Nadine Connell, Nina Barbieri, and Rafael de Azeredo, looks at mass school shootings, often seen as a uniquely American problem. It compares two events: the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in Parkland, Florida (2018), and the Municipal School Tasso da Silveira shooting in Realengo, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2011). The goal is to find common patterns in the path to violence across different cultural contexts and identify ways to prevent future tragedies.

Methods and Approach:  
The study uses a comparative case study method based on the Path to Intended Violence model, which outlines the steps leading up to violent attacks. The authors analyze the behavior of the perpetrators in both incidents, despite cultural and geographic differences, to find missed opportunities for intervention.

Key Methodological Points:

* Path to Intended Violence Model:  
  This model tracks the escalation of behavior, from grievances and planning to the final attack.
* Data Collection:  
  The study uses public sources, legal documents, media archives, and other records, following the TASSS (American School Shooting Study) protocol. It also follows the "No Notoriety" protocol, referring to the shooters by initials (W.M. for Realengo and N.C. for Parkland), to avoid giving them attention.
* Pre-Attack Behaviors:  
  Both shooters showed similar behaviors like escalating grievances and clear warning signs, but these went unnoticed or unaddressed.

Key Patterns and Findings:

1. Prevalence of Mass Shootings in the U.S.:  
   The study points out that the U.S. has more mass shootings than other developed countries. Research shows that the U.S. experiences six times more mass shootings relative to its population, largely due to easier access to firearms.
2. Similarities Between the Parkland and Realengo Shootings:  
   Despite being in different countries, both shooters had similar patterns:
   * Both showed signs of mental distress and isolation.
   * They both prepared for their attacks, stockpiling weapons and making detailed plans.
   * In both cases, interventions could have happened, but were missed.
3. Opportunities for Intervention:  
   In both shootings, mental health support was lacking, and warning signs were ignored. The study calls for better mental health services and more training for school staff to recognize these warning behaviors.
4. Gun Access and Policy:  
   The study notes that while both shooters obtained firearms, gun laws in Brazil are stricter than in the U.S. However, illegal access to firearms in Brazil remains a problem. The authors argue that easier access to guns in the U.S. plays a major role in the higher frequency of school shootings.

Implications for Prevention:  
The authors recommend:

* Improving mental health services in schools.
* Better training for school staff to spot early warning signs.
* Stricter gun control laws, especially in the U.S.
* Conducting more cross-cultural studies to identify universal patterns and interventions.

Conclusion:  
The comparison of the Parkland and Realengo shootings shows that school shootings follow similar patterns, regardless of cultural differences. Both perpetrators exhibited warning signs that were not addressed. The study emphasizes early intervention, better mental health support, and stronger gun regulations as essential to preventing future tragedies. While mass shootings are often viewed as an American issue, the behaviors leading up to them are not unique to the U.S.

# Paper 3: Using Open-source Data to Better Understand and Respond to American School Shootings: Introducing and Exploring the American School Shooting Study (TASSS)

**Problem Investigated:** The paper talks about the lack of detailed data on school shootings across the U.S. To fix this, it introduces the American School Shooting Study (TASSS), which collects open-source data to study school shootings from 1990 to 2016. The goal is to fill gaps in past research by documenting details about both the incidents and the shooters. It looks at trends, shooter profiles, and the reasons behind these shootings to help policymakers make better decisions.

**Methods and Approach:**

* **Creating the TASSS Database:** Researchers compiled data on 652 school shootings between 1990 and 2016. These included 473 intentional shootings, 102 suicides or attempts, 73 accidental shootings, and 4 legally justified shootings. TASSS only includes shootings that meet specific criteria (e.g., happened on K-12 school grounds, involved a gun). The data was pulled from 40 different public sources, such as news outlets and official reports.
* **Open-source Data Collection:** They used over 60 web engines to find data, verifying each point carefully. They tracked 354 known shooters involved in intentional shootings, documenting more than 30,000 records.
* **Data Reliability Check:** The researchers gave each piece of data a credibility score to ensure it was reliable, focusing on sources like court records and government documents. Over a third of the records were highly reliable.

**Key Patterns and Findings:**

1. **Trends Over Time and Region:** There were about 24 school shootings per year on average, with no clear increase or decrease over time. The South had the highest number (43%), while the Northeast had the lowest (12%).
2. **Shooter Characteristics:** Most shooters were teenagers (19 or younger), with 97.63% being male. Of these teen shooters, 58% were Black, and 26% had psychological issues. Adults (20 and older) made up 28% of shooters, and were more likely to cause fatalities. Among adult shooters, 34% were White, and 45% were Black.
3. **Incident Details:** 74% of shootings were non-fatal and usually targeted specific individuals rather than being mass shootings. Most shootings happened outside the school building, like in parking lots. Mass shootings were rare, with only 11 incidents in the entire period studied.
4. **Non-School Motivations:** Many shootings were motivated by things unrelated to the school, such as gang disputes. Less than 30% of shootings were done by current students during school hours.

**Implications for Policymaking:**

* **Different Approaches for Different Shootings:** The study suggests that not all school shootings are the same and need different solutions. For example, suicides should be tackled with mental health support, while intentional shootings need different preventive measures.
* **Improving School Safety:** The authors recommend community-based solutions to address the reasons behind many shootings, such as gang violence, by partnering schools with local law enforcement.
* **Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS):** The study highlights MTSS as a way to identify at-risk students early and provide them with needed support, especially for those showing behavioral or mental health problems.

**Conclusion:** The TASSS study provides important insights into school shootings, showing that most are non-fatal, happen outside school hours, and often involve non-students. Understanding the motivations behind these shootings can help create more targeted policies to prevent future violence both in and outside schools. The paper also sets a benchmark for using open-source data to research school shootings, paving the way for future studies and policy improvements.