

NARPA Statement on the response to the Parkland, Florida tragedy

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The National Association for Rights Protection and Advocacy shares the grief of the families and individuals affected by the tragedy in Parkland, Florida. Demands to “harden schools” and arm teachers ignore the real cause of such deadly violence, which is easy access to weapons of war.

When tragedies occur, it is human nature to seek meaning in an attempt to avoid such tragedies in the future. Attempts to make the Parkland massacre about “mental illness” are misguided and distracting talking points designed to create the false appearance of predictability. But a psychiatric diagnosis is not a reliable predictor for gun violence¹: “To the extent that research has identified risk factors, demographic variables such as age, gender and socioeconomic status are more reliable predictors of violence than mental illness. The main risk factors for violence still remain being young, male, single, or of lower socio-economic status.” Any responses to this tragedy that ignore the real causes of such violence will instead demonize people who have a psychiatric diagnosis, without actually lessening the level of risk. Again, the main factor and causal agent in this tragedy is easy access to weapons of war.

We place responsibility for the murders in Parkland squarely on the shooter himself, and on the easy access to deadly weapons. The “mental health system” cannot be tasked with impossible predictions of future behavior and levels of social control that are neither possible nor desirable². Neither should schools become prisons, or “hardened,” as has been proposed. Even if all potential mass shooters could somehow be identified and subjected to psychiatric treatment, “there is no known cure for angry young men who harbor violent fantasies.”³

Generalizations about people diagnosed with mental illness are not helpful in the aftermath of gun violence. And finally, NARPA stands with the young people of Parkland who demand better answers for safe schools.

¹ See Wrong Focus: Mental Health in the Gun Safety Debate, by Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law: <http://www.bazelon.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/.../4.17.13.pdf>.

² See <https://newrepublic.com/article/147104/mental-health-scapegoat>. People with mental illness are more likely to commit suicide than to harm others, and they are 16 times more likely to be killed by police.

³ See New York Times, “The Mental Health System Can’t Stop Mass Shooters,” Amy Barnhorst, February 20, 2018