

From Columbine to Dawson: study on psychological impact of mass shootings

June 29 2009

Less than two percent of the community were diagnosed with post-traumatic stress, and seven percent report post-traumatic stress symptoms, as a result of the shooting at Dawson College on September 13, 2006.

However, over 80 percent of those who received care reported that they were satisfied with the services provided, according to a new study by researchers from the Fernand-Seguin Research Centre of Louis-H. Lafontaine Hospital and the McGill University Health Centre (MUHC), in Montreal, Canada. The preliminary findings of this first-of-its-kind study will be presented at the 31st International Congress on Law and Mental Health in New York on Monday June 29, 2009.

Since the 1999 Columbine tragedy, there have been 60 school shootings - double the rate seen in the previous decade," says Dr. Warren Steiner, head of the McGill University Health Centre's Department of Psychiatry and one of the key figures involved in implementing the emergency psychological intervention plan following the Dawson College shooting. "These school shootings have resulted in 181 deaths," he said.

"Despite the frequency of these incidents, there are very few empirical studies on their psychological effects and no studies have evaluated the effectiveness of psychological interventions," says Dr. Steiner. "It is crucial that we learn from these experiences to better help those affected by such tragedies."

The study, conducted with 949 members of the Dawson community, including students, faculty and staff, found that some students who needed psychological assistance were reluctant to seek help due to the fear of being stigmatized by friends and loved ones.

The research team also found that among male support staff, many were equally averse to seeking professional help. “People were disinclined to seek help because of prejudices related to mental illness, fear of showing weakness or appearing vulnerable to one’s peers or supervisor and the false perception that time would solve everything,” says Alain Lesage, a researcher at the Fernand-Seguin Research Centre of Louis-H. Lafontaine Hospital and a professor of psychiatry at the Université de Montréal.

The researchers also discovered that certain groups, such as cafeteria staff (who are not Dawson College staff), college support staff, some of whom witnessed the shooting, and those who were hospitalized, were overlooked, and the repercussions of their psychological damage were underestimated. In addition, some professors felt powerless and incapable of helping students.

Source: University of Montreal ([news](#) : [web](#))

Citation: From Columbine to Dawson: study on psychological impact of mass shootings (2009, June 29) retrieved 18 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2009-06-columbine-dawson-psychological-impact-mass.html>

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