

NEWS TIP

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NC State School Violence Expert Available to Discuss Recent Shootings

Monday's shooting at an Amish schoolhouse in Pennsylvania marks the third school shooting in the United States in the past week. Five girls were shot to death in a Nickel Mines, Pa., classroom on Monday by a 32-year-old assailant, who then killed himself. The incident was similar to a deadly school shooting last Wednesday in Bailey, Colo., in which a man took six high school students hostage before killing one and then himself. Last Friday, a 15-year-old student was charged with shooting a principal to death in Cazenovia, Wis.

A North Carolina State University education professor who specializes in school violence is available to discuss with news media issues related to violent acts at schools.

Dr. Edwin R. Gerler, professor of counselor education in NC State's College of Education, is the editor of the *Journal of School Violence*. Gerler also spent the early part of his career serving as an elementary school counselor in Pennsylvania, where he got to know many Amish children and their parents. He can be reached at edwin_gerler@ncsu.edu.

Gerler says the incident in Pennsylvania raises the possibility of a "copycat" crime, based on other shootings in recent days. Since the shooter was an adult, Gerler says he may have viewed himself as powerless and his life circumstances as hopeless and acted out in a school environment that was simple, peaceful and at his mercy. His victims were young girls who were completely vulnerable to him in this setting.

Gerler adds that adults and children who feel diminished by institutions often find significance through violence. Society must therefore work to help students and adults interact with compassion, challenging each other when appropriate, but supporting each other when necessary. Cultural, ethnic and religious differences should be a source of exploration in schools, rather than barriers to friendship and excuses for violence, Gerler says.

Acts of violence at schools often prompt more questions than easy solutions, Gerler adds. Observers should be reminded that school violence cannot be packaged into neat, conventional thinking about the way perpetrators plan and carry out violent acts at school. Approaches for preventing and dealing with school violence instead demand imagination and creativity.

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