

The Role of Social Acknowledgement after Mass Public Shootings



Mass public shootings have widespread and long-lasting impacts on those who survive them. Findings from a survey of survivors from across the US revealed that one of the most important facets of their journey to recovery and resiliency is social acknowledgement, which reflects an unconditional acceptance and understanding of their experiences by others.

Survivors who receive more social acknowledgement after the tragedy are more likely to experience positive posttraumatic change.

They can experience changes that either are positive (posttraumatic growth) or negative (posttraumatic depreciation). While receiving more social acknowledgement can promote growth, not receiving it or having that acknowledgement be negative can lead to setbacks for the survivor.

Social acknowledgement helps to offset the negative effects of the shooting.

Survivors can experience numerous adverse impacts, such as hyperarousal, intrusions, and avoidance. Receiving social acknowledgement can help to counteract these negative effects, thereby reducing the shooting's impact on them.

Social acknowledgement also can impact whether the shooting becomes central to the survivor's identity.

Mass shootings may become central to a survivor's identity, such that they can see the event as something that defines who they are and changes their worldview. Receiving social acknowledgement can help the survivor reframe the shooting instead as something that happened to them.

Importantly, these findings do not vary based on what community the survivor experienced the shooting in, how they were impacted (e.g., family of someone killed, physically injured, present but not injured), or based on sociodemographic characteristics. In other words, social acknowledgement is something that benefits all survivors of mass public shootings.



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