February 16, 2021

PRESS RELEASE

EMBARGOED UNTIL 11 a.m. Tuesday, February 16, 2021

CONTACT: Jillian Peterson (jpeterson68@hamline.edu) (651-434-9427)

Study Finds Armed Officers Increase Mortality in School Mass Shootings

Saint Paul, Minn. -- More people die in school mass shootings where an armed officer is present according to a study published by Minnesota researchers in the peer-reviewed journal, JAMA Open Network on February 16, 2021.

The study, led by Hamline University professor Dr. Jillian Peterson, examined every case since 1980 where one or more people was intentionally shot in a school building during the school day, or where someone came to school heavily armed with the intent of firing indiscriminately.

Of these 133 shootings, an armed professional such as a School Resource Officer was on scene 23% of the time, and in these instances the rate of death was nearly three times higher when they were present. An armed officer on scene was second only to use of an assault rifle in predicting an increase in the number of shooting casualties.

"This study adds data to the current debate about the efficacy of armed police officers in schools, something that got a lot of attention after the tragedy at Parkland three years ago," Dr. Peterson said.

The findings demonstrate that the presence of an armed officer did not deter shootings in 23% of the cases studied. Prior research suggests that many school shooters are actively suicidal, intending to die in the act, so an armed officer may be an incentive rather than a deterrent to shootings. The majority of shooters who target schools are students of the school, calling into question the effectiveness of hardened security such as armed officers and active shooter drills.

Dr. James Densley, a professor at Metropolitan State University and co-author on the study, explained, "Even weapons intended to protect are liable to endanger."

The full article can be accessed here on February 16. More information about the study can be found at www.theviolenceproject.org.

###