School Shooters: The Myth of the Stable Home

Compiled by Peter Langman, Ph.D.

One misconception regarding school shooters is that they typically come from stable, intact, middle- to upper-middle-class families, e.g., from “good homes.” Though this is true of some perpetrators, it is not true of many of them. This document presents information on the families of some school shooters in the United States. This is far from being a complete list, including only those for whom there is information regarding their childhoods, though even this is sometimes minimal. They are listed in chronological order.

The concept of “stable, intact, middle-class families” is difficult to define. For my purposes, “stable” and “intact” refer to how functional the families were, regardless of whether or not the parents’ marriage (if they had one) was legally intact. For example, Evan Ramsey’s father spent ten years in prison. During this time Ramsey’s mother became alcoholic and lived with a series of violent men. Even if the marriage were still legally intact during the father’s imprisonment (which it appears to have been), Ramsey did not grow up in an intact or a stable family.

Indicators of broken homes, instability, or dysfunction include parental absence, separation, divorce, infidelity, parental alcoholism or drug addiction, criminal behavior, domestic violence, and child abuse. Economic status is often hard to determine but some details are provided.

In some cases, all that is known is that the parents divorced (or separated). Despite the lack of details, it should be kept in mind that divorce or separation are often preceded by years of discord and may be the result of infidelity, domestic violence, or addiction. In addition, the process of divorcing when children are involved can be highly charged and tumultuous for all parties.

Out of this sample of 56 school shooters, only 10 (18%) grew up in a stable home with both biological parents. In other words, 82% of the sample either grew up in dysfunctional families or without their parents together (for at least part of their lives).

Though the focus here is on shooters in the United States, following this listing are shooters from other countries who came from broken homes or unstable families.

1 U.S. SCHOOL Shooters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charles Whitman</td>
<td>Father beat his wife</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Father beat his children</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mother left father when Whitman was adult</td>
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<tr>
<td>Edward Allaway</td>
<td>Father alcoholic factory worker</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brenda Spencer</td>
<td>Parents divorced</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Home dirty, furniture torn, trash lying around</td>
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<tr>
<td>Van Hull</td>
<td>Broken home, lived with grandmother until age 9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kristofer Hans</td>
<td>Broken home; parents lived in different states</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Father beat him with belt</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lived in fear of having to live with his father again</td>
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<tr>
<td>Floyd Warmsley</td>
<td>Apparent broken home; lived with father</td>
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<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Laurie Dann</td>
<td>[Marriage intact; no known dysfunction]</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
James Wilson  
Four generations of mental illness, violence, and drug abuse  
Father beat him with belt, hit him in head with a can, hit him with shoes  
Father threatened to shoot him  
Mother reportedly beat him  
Grandparents reportedly beat him  
When he had psychological problems, family didn’t take him to professionals, but gave him relatives’ medications (pain killers, sedatives, anti-psychotics, anti-depressants)

Nicholas Elliot  
Broken home; lived with grandmother

Patrick Purdy  
Mother married and divorced three times  
Parents separated after father threatened to shoot mother  
Mother was alcoholic  
Mother neglected and abused him  
He was removed from home temporarily due to neglect  
At 13, mother kicked him out; lived on streets of Los Angeles; prostituted to survive  
Later on, mother was homeless

Wayne Lo  
Father beat him  
Father admitted to using riding crop in the beatings  
Wayne reportedly hated his parents for how they treated him

Eric Houston  
Mother physically abused by multiple relatives  
Aunt molested by Houston’s grandfather  
Uncle killed three people in a fight  
Father was violent alcoholic who cheated on his wife, fought with her, and abandoned the family  
Mother was suicidal  
Father re-entered Houston’s life, was still alcoholic and used hard drugs

Scott Pennington  
Father had severe alcoholism and drug abuse; reportedly suffered mental impairment from substances  
Father beat wife  
Father abused Pennington  
Very poor: no telephone, toilet, or running water

Toby Sincino  
Parents separated/estranged  
Lived with father in trailer

Jamie Rouse  
Father was severe alcoholic and drug addict  
Spent night in jail four times  
Fired from many jobs for drinking  
Substance abuse nearly bankrupted family  
Father beat kids with belt and paddle  
Father punched holes in walls  
Father blasted six pet cats with shotgun and flung carcasses into tree

Barry Loukaitis  
Parents’ marriage fell apart  
Father had affair  
Mother told Loukaitis she planned to tie up husband and his girlfriend and kill herself in front of them

Frederick Davidson  
Grandmother committed to state mental hospital  
Father had psychological problems (details unknown)  
Parents divorced when Davidson was a child
Jillian Robbins
Parents divorced
Mother married second husband
Mother divorced second husband
Mother married second husband a second time
Mother divorced second husband a second time
Father remarried

Evan Ramsey
Father in prison for ten years for armed rampage and taking hostages
Older brother arrested for armed robbery, theft, firearms charges, and assault
Mother severe alcoholic
Mother had series of violent boyfriends
Mother had boyfriend with long list of arrests, including firearms and sexual assault (was registered sex offender)
Mother arrested for drunk driving and public drunkenness
Ramsey placed in ten foster homes over two years
Abused and molested in foster home
Very poor: social worker found family in unheated apartment with outside temperature of 22 degrees below zero

Luke Woodham
Parents divorced
Woodham devastated by father’s departure from his life
Woodham claimed father emotionally abused him and physically abused his mother but no details are known

Michael Carneal
[MARRIAGE INTACT; NO KNOWN DYSFUNCTION]

Andrew Golden
[MARRIAGE INTACT; NO KNOWN DYSFUNCTION]

Mitchell Johnson
Parents had stormy marriage that ended in divorce
Father smoked marijuana
Father fired for stealing from company
Father had explosive temper, punched holes in walls
Father beat him: punched him in the face, threw him against walls
Mother remarried; moved far away from ex-husband
Johnson visited father in summers; hated and feared him

Andrew Wurst
[MARRIAGE INTACT; NO KNOWN DYSFUNCTION]

Kip Kinkel
[MARRIAGE INTACT; NO KNOWN DYSFUNCTION]

Eric Harris
[MARRIAGE INTACT; NO KNOWN DYSFUNCTION]

Dylan Klebold
[MARRIAGE INTACT; NO KNOWN DYSFUNCTION]

T.J. Solomon
Parents divorced
Contact with father ceased at age 4
Reported loss of father as worst thing that ever happened to him
Mother said father abandoned her
Father said mother left him for his best friend
Father institutionalized for suicide risk

Seth Trickey
[MARRIAGE INTACT; NO KNOWN DYSFUNCTION]
Nathaniel Brazill  
Parents never married  
Mother had multiple abusive relationships with men  
Stepfather beat mother, threatened her with a knife; she got PFA against him  
Stepfather assaulted Brazill  
After four years of abuse, mother got divorce  
Mother married again  
17 domestic incident reports in six years before Brazill’s shooting  
Grandfather and uncle were alcoholic  
Mother got drunk to the point of vomiting

Andy Williams  
Parents divorced, lived in different parts of the country

Jason Hoffman  
Parents never married  
Father was alcoholic, charged with public drunkenness and malicious mischief  
Father arrested for abusing Hoffman as toddler  
Father assaulted mother

Robert Flores  
Flores seemed to indicate childhood abuse; he wrote that his father wasn’t “especially”  
physically and emotionally abusive, which seems to imply that he was to some extent  
Flores wrote he had “marginal” parents at best  
Lower socioeconomic status

James Sheets  
Father absent throughout his life

John McLaughlin  
Parents’ marriage rocky; separated for six months  
McLaughlin lived in fear of recurring and/or permanent separation

Jeffrey Weise  
Parents never married  
Father drank  
Father killed himself in armed standoff with police  
Mother alcoholic and physically abusive  
Mother jailed for driving while intoxicated  
Mother jailed for assault  
Mother suffered brain damage in car accident  
After mother’s accident, stepfather took his two children and left Weise  
Lived variously with mother, father, relatives, and foster families

Kenneth Bartley  
Parents divorced  
Mother reportedly broke off contact  
Father struggled with alcoholism

Alvaro Castillo  
Mother and seven of nine siblings suffered from “severe mental illness”  
Father beat mother in front of the children  
Father did not believe in physicians or medicine, thought cold water cured everything;  
when sick, the children had to take cold showers  
At age 5, father told him childhood was over and he could no longer have friends  
Mother wanted to leave, but father threatened to kill her if she did

Duane Morrison  
While married, mother apparently had affair that produced him  
Parents separated  
Father abused him to the point of terror, beating him with fists and belt buckles  
Father may have molested him (see “Duane Morrison: A Profile” on www.schoolshooters.info)  
Siblings reported that childhood was “hellacious”  
Mother died when he was 15  
He moved in with aunt; she died a few years later
Eric Hainstock  | Household was filthy  
| Mother may have been alcoholic  
| Father was unemployed  
| Father hit him with belt and piece of wood  
| Father charged with felony child abuse (charges later dropped)  
| Woman who dated father had two PFAs against him  
| Both parents reportedly “beat him, kicked him, slapped him, and threw things at him”  
| Father made him hold hot sauce and hot peppers in his mouth  
| Father made him run as punishment for so long that he wet his pants  
| Father worked him like a “slave” and used strange punishments  
| Adoptive mother physically abused him  
| Stepfather physically abused him  
| Stepbrother sexually abused him  
| Showed up at school with split lip, another time with no shirt, and another time “filthy and smelling”  
| Mother gave up parental rights when he was 8 and abandoned him

Seung Hui Cho  | [Marriage intact; no known dysfunction]

Asa Coon  | Parents divorced (or never married); father not involved  
| Mother subject of neglect case with court  
| House and yard filthy  
| Often went to school dirty, unkempt, and poorly clothed  
| Social services investigated home due to scratches, burns, and flea bites  
| Older brothers had many charges: intimidation, burglary, assault, sale of counterfeit drugs, firearms violations, and more  
| In less than two years, police made five visits to the home due to domestic violence, assault, property crime, and a hit-and-run

Steven Kazmierczak  | Parents divorced

Amy Bishop  | [Marriage intact; no known dysfunction]

Bruco Eastwood  | Parents divorced

Robert Butler, Jr.  | Parents never married; lived together on and off for four years, and then separated permanently

T.J. Lane  | Parents never married  
| Mother and father both charged with domestic violence  
| Mother reportedly had drinking problem  
| Mother reportedly punched and bit father  
| Mother jailed for violent behavior  
| Father arrested for fighting with police officer who intervened in domestic dispute  
| Father imprisoned for beating and kidnapping a woman  
| Father held woman’s head under running water and bashed it into wall, leaving a dent  
| Father charged with threatening to kill a woman  
| Father imprisoned for attacking a woman for nine hours in front of three young children  
| Father charged with attempted murder and felonious assault  
| Lane lived variously with parents and both sets of grandparents

Adam Lanza  | Parents divorced  
| Estranged from father and brother

John Zawahri  | Father beat mother  
| Father threatened to kill mother and take the children  
| Mother left father  
| Mother had restraining order  
| Father stalked mother, showing up at her apartment and workplace
Jose Reyes  Father violent toward mother
Reyes witnessed domestic violence
Father had affair
Mother discovered affair and separated
Father moved in with other woman, broke off contact with children
Mother wanted a divorce, but feared for her life
Parents eventually reconciled
Father hit him, once so badly that he was arrested and charged with child abuse

Karl Pierson  Parents divorced

Elliot Rodger  Parents divorced

Aaron Ybarra  Father arrested five times for drunk driving
Father incarcerated after third DUI
Father convicted of failing to obey an officer, driving with a suspended license, and violating ignition interlock on vehicle
Father tried to kill himself: drank a bottle of whiskey and slit his throat with a knife
Father embezzled $400,000 from trust fund for relative

Jared Padgett  Parents separated

Jaylen Fryberg  During Jaylen's early years, father had child with another woman (not Jaylen's mother)
Father committed domestic violence against the other woman; she got a PFA
Father violated PFA against the woman when Jaylen was 13

Myron May  Broken home
Father: crack addict
Moved in with grandmother at age 12

Chris Harper-Mercer  Parents struggled financially
Filed for bankruptcy in 1992
Parents divorced
Father filed for bankruptcy in 2002

2  NON-U.S. SCHOOL SHOOTERS

Marc Lépine  Father led double life: had two children with other woman while married to Marc's mother
Father was bad-tempered and violent
Parents divorced

Thomas Hamilton  Parents divorced
Grandparents adopted Thomas
He was raised to believe his mother was his older sister

Robert Steinhäuser  Parents divorced
Robert lived with his mother

Matti Saari  Parents separated when he was a year old
Parents divorced when he was three

Wellington de Oliveira  Biological mother gave him up for adoption