https://doi.org/10.54012/jcell.v4i001.393

# Mass Shooting in Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School as Seen in "Parkland: Inside Building 12" Documentary Film

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#### Received:

November 17, 2024

#### Revised:

December 17, 2024

#### Accepted:

December 27, 2024

## Published:

December 29, 2024

## **ABSTRACT**

This research is entitled "Mass Shooting in Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School as Seen in "Parkland: Inside Building 12" Documentary Film." Mass shooting in America, especially in schools is widespread. The issue of gun law and gun ownership in America has become a matter of great concern. Individuals who have reached the age of 18 can easily purchase firearms from a retail without any prerequisites. The research was conducted to describe the motive of the perpetrator doing the shooting and the impact of the shooting on the victims of the Parkland shooting. The research method applied in this research was descriptive qualitative taking the main data the documentary film, videos on YouTube, and interviews from the internet. The behaviourism theory by John Broadus Watson and the Labelling Theory by Howard Saul Becker were applied, as well as the Trauma Concept by Judith Lewis Herman. The finding showed that the perpetrator, Nikolas Cruz has struggled to socialise with her friends from early life, got humiliated and felt rejected by his surroundings. These symptoms led him to trauma and strange behavior. These symptoms caused him to carry out the school shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. On the other hand, the victims of the Parkland Shooting suffered trauma as can be seen from their reactions and what they told the director of the documentary film. The parents' victims were also traumatized.

Keywords: Behavior; School; Shooting; Trauma

## **INTRODUCTION**

Gun ownership in the United States is based on the Second Amendment to the United States Constitution, which reads: "A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed." (Laura Temme, 2022). This law may have a possible effect on the occurrence of mass shootings in America. The United States has the highest rate of homicide by firearm among the world's most developed countries (Masters, 2022). Every state in America has different regulations regarding gun laws, but data from "State gun laws, gun ownership, and mass shootings in the US: cross-sectional time series" shows a result that mass shooting frequency in the U.S. is related to the permissiveness or restrictiveness of state gun regulations, where states with more permissive gun laws and higher gun ownership have more mass shootings than in restrictive states (Reeping, et al., 2019).

Mass shootings have now become significant issues that frequently occur in America, particularly at school. This accident attracts attention from people around the world, not just politicians and parents, but also musicians. For the past years, teenagers between the ages of 14 to 19 have been the perpetrators of several shootings. The recent shooting happened in Robb Elementary School in Uvalde where an 18year-old gunman identified as Salvador Ramos killed 19 students and two teachers on May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022 (The New York Times, 2022). Another example of this tragedy is the Mukilteo shooting in 2016, a 19-year-old student shot three students including his exgirlfriend and injured one student (Green, 2016). Furthermore, a 15-year-old student at Marshall County High School injured fourteen students while killing two others. The shooter received a life sentence in prison in 2020 after he was officially 18 years old (Collins, 2022). Another example of a school shooting in America is the Sandy Hook Elementary school shooting, a mass shooting that occurred on December 14th, 2012 in Newtown, Connecticut, where 27 people were killed and two were injured. The perpetrator, Adam Lanza (20), killed his mother in their house before committing the massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School.

Mass shootings in America occur for a variety of factors. The perpetrator often gets bullied at school, which makes them mentally and physically ill, and some people with mental illness commit violent crimes (Metzl & Macleish, 2015). This is one of the causes of students committing school crimes and gun violence in school. Because of mass shooting, victims have suffered trauma and many parents are reluctant to send their kids to school.

The Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School mass shooting is a tragedy that the researcher examined This shooting became one of the deadliest shootings at a high school in the United States. The incident happened when an expelled student, Nikolas Cruz entered Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, Parkland, Florida and killed 17 people and injured 17 others on February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2018 (History, 2018). Because of this tragedy, a documentary film was made by Charlie Minn, portraying what happened inside the school. This film also pictures the situations that the students have been through.

The basis of choosing this topic for this study is because the researcher is concerned about how the perpetrator and victims feel about the shootings and the shootings that always happen in America every year (Policy, 2022). In this research, the researcher applied interdisciplinary approaches: psychology and sociology. The psychology elaborated the life side of the victims, the victim's parents, and the perpetrator. The sociological approach was applied to examine aspects as an impact of the mass shootings as seen in the documentary film.

#### **METHOD**

American studies multi-disciplinary approach was applied in this research. It was intended to analyse both the possible benefits and drawbacks and disadvantages of interdisciplinarity (Jacobs, 2013). It is critical to obtaining a solid result because it provides several contributions to the author by indicating what type of data the author

should collect. The method was also used to organize the study data design of the research in a methodical manner.

The author's paper uses a qualitative research method to obtain the result, by collecting data from the field and generating the meaning of the data because qualitative research is highly inductive (Creswell, 2002). This method is used to discover new knowledge that can explain more about the information and improve understanding of the description of the research. In this work, the author also used some methods to carry out the research, which includes the source data, method and technique of data collection, and method of data analysis.

The primary data refers to data that has been observed, experienced, or recorded close to the event and is the most accurate (Walliman, 2011). In this paper, the author used a documentary film by Charlie Minn called "Parkland: Inside Building 12" as primary data. This documentary film is used as the main source of data and mental evidence for the research.

Secondary data according to Walliman, (2011) are written sources that interpret or record original data and are less reliable. Secondary data used by the author were videos from YouTube that relate to the accident. As part of the analysis and to support the findings of this paper, additional songs, journals, magazines, newspapers, and websites related to the shootings were also be used.

In collecting the data, the author applied note taking technique where the researcher observed the crucial details and gathers as much information as possible from the film as well as other sources that are relevant to the topic.

In analysing the data, qualitative method was applied, which means that the analysis was in the form of words rather than numbers. The subjective elements of the researcher's opinion in the form interpretation and conclusion were unavoidable.

#### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the findings and discussion were analysed as the answer of the objectives of the research, that is the motives of the perpetrator in doing the mass shooting and its impacts to the victims. The analysis was conducted under the American studies multidisciplinary approach as mentioned above.

## The Motives of the Perpetrator to Do the Shooting

Nikolas Jacob Cruz, born in Margate, Florida, September 24<sup>th</sup> 1998 is a former student and also a perpetrator of the Parkland High School Shooting that occurred on February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2018 that killed 17 people. He was convicted and subsequently sentenced to life imprisonment as a consequence of the accident.

Several videos were shown in the court before he carried out the shooting, depicting his state and said:



Figure 1. Retrieved From (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A\_zGdEZ6HJk)

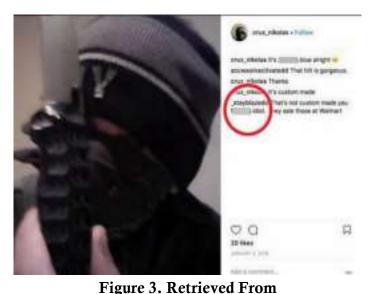
"I am nothing, I am no one. My life is nothing and meaningless. I live alone life, live in seclusion and solitude. I hate everyone and everything." "I had enough of being told what to do and when to do. I had enough of being tell me that I'm an idiot and a d\*mb ass".

Based on the statement above, the author found that the perpetrator getting some mistreatment from his environment like worthlessness, loneliness, anxiety, feelings of rejection, hatred, and avoidance. According to the Herman's Trauma Concept, the existence of these symptoms which are Hyperarousal, Intrusion, and Constriction shows that the perpetrator was traumatized by his surroundings. From Watson's behaviourism theory, these symptoms were also the outcome of the response that Nikolas Cruz got from society.

On his social media pages, he often posts some disturbing items, posing with some knives and guns. Even on his social media, he gets cyberbullied by people in the comments who say mean things to him. In the comment section from picture 2 and 3, Cruz shows that he got insulted from the people by saying "red head sicko", "You're f\*\*\*ed", "f\*\*\*ing idiot." From a letter that a Broward County jail deputy, Jean Marque-Puche found in his cells, the hateful letter with the "666" sign, expressing regret for the shooting, and appearing to accuse himself of carrying out the shooting by someone who humiliated him on Instagram (Milian, 2022).



Figure 2. retrieved from (https://www.dailystar.co.uk/news/world news/florida-shooting-nikolas-cruz-instagram-16849265)



(https://www.dailystar.co.uk/news/world-news/florida-shooting-nikolas-cruz instagram-16849265)

On the figure 2, Cruz wrote the caption says "Pistol fun ass  $f^{**}k$ " and shows his obsession behavior over guns. Beside of his obsession over guns, the author finds that he is also obsessed with race and violence through a private Instagram group chat. CNN reported that there are six people in the private group chat including Cruz and there are hundreds of racist & hateful messages, racist memes and racist Instagram videos posted in the group. Cruz stated in the private group chat that he hated Jews, ni\*\*ers, and immigrants. Cruz also badmouthing his birth mother by saying "My real mom was a Jew. I'm glad I never met her." At one point, he wrote in the conversation, "I

think I am going to kill people." He claimed he was joking after a fellow member told him not to say things like that (Murphy, 2018).

From another video, Broward Sheriff's Office Homicide, Detective John Curcio interrogated Cruz and found out that he was struggled, hearing voices in his head for about 15 years after his father died. The voices in his head tell him to do bad things such as "kill, burn, destroy." Cruz also says to the detective that the voices will goes away after he taking drugs like prescription tranquilizer Xanax and Marijuana. He felt depressed and attempted to murder himself with taking ibuprofen after his mother's death on November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017, three months before the shooting.



**Figure 4. Retrieved From** (https://youtu.be/oNtaFVAS69g?si=njayBTcFvCQukNJ6)

While he was by himself in the interrogation room, he also told himself that: "I want to die. At the end, you are nothing but worthless, dude. You deserve to die." The statement from the public defender for Nikolas Cruz and Cruz's sister also shows that Cruz suffers from childhood difficulties from his early stage of life. Both the public defender, Melisa McNeil and Cruz's sister, Danielle Woodard said in Cruz's death penalty trial that it was because of his birth mother, Brenda Woodard who was an alcohol and drug addict. Cruz's sister said that she was still taking drugs and drinking alcohol while she was pregnant with Cruz. Her obsession over drugs and alcohol led him to his strange behavior. Cruz began to exhibit some bizarre behavior on his early interaction with other children at the age of three. He was seeing a psychiatrist and diagnosed with antisocial personality disorders, attended multiple school including Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, had in-home service but still struggle with his behavioral issues and academic issues. Anti-social personality disorders are one of the factors that lead to criminal behavior (Hegger, 2015). Melisa McNeill, Nikolas Cruz's attorney said the defendant still demonstrates disturbing obsessions with "video games, guns, exercise, bowel movements, vegan diets, and, most recently, demons and Satan" insisting that his behavior is a result of his birth mother's disorderly and criminal lifestyle and that he requires institutional care.



**Figure 5. (Cruz's sister, Brenda Woodard) Retrieved From** (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=npLrPiYyZP0&t=470s)

On another interview with Robert Denney, a Missouri neuropsychologist, Cruz said:

"Why I chose Valentine's Day? Because I thought no one would love me, I didn't like Valentine's Day and I wanted to ruin it for everyone."

When Denney asked to Cruz what he means "for everyone," Cruz replied "for the school." Cruz also admitted to Denney during this testimony that he had tortured animals as a young boy. He would shoot, burn, torture, skin, play, and even consume the animals (Spencer, 2022).

Drawing from the symptoms and reactions that the author observed during the elaboration above, the author concludes that Nikolas Cruz was not only influenced by his mother who was addicted to drugs but he was also rejected by his society which led him through trauma and strange behaviors, because as Watson explains in the previous chapter that it is possible to shape behavior by regulating the stimuli. The outcome of the stimuli-response and conditioning that Nikolas Cruz faced brought him traumatized and resulted in him carrying out the horrific massacre.

## The Impact of the Shootings on The Victims as Seen in "Parkland: Inside Building 12" Documentary Film

In the interview with Charlie Minn, the documentary film director, a total of 39 individuals were interviewed regarding the shooting incident at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. These individuals comprised students, teachers, and parents of the victims. It appeared to be a typical day like any other at the beginning before the shooting. Without the knowledge of teachers and students, they diligently carry out their duties until the school day ends at 2:40 PM, completely unaware of the unfortunate incident that awaits them.

When the first shots occurred at 02:21 PM, most of the students and teachers had a similar reaction, thinking that it was just a practice session because the teachers had been warned that there would be Code Red (threat on campus) Drill, until the regrettable incident of three students getting shot in the hallway on the second floor, in front of room 1215. It was Gina Montalto, Luke Hoyer and Martin Duque. They were the first three victims who got shot. Amanda Lee,



Figure 6. Amanda Lee, a student survivor of the Parkland Shooting

a survivor of room 1213 said to the director that she was scared when heard the gunman shots in the hallway. After the shooting, she felt guilty to Maddy Wilford because she thought that Maddy took a bullet for her, and if it's not because of Maddy, she wouldn't be here anymore. She felt lucky enough to be alive but carried all the guilt she felt to her friends who couldn't make it. She said in the interview "I definitely heard the bullets shot Maddy. I heard like her slump against the podium and to have her be like one foot away from me and 26 just have a small gap between possibly me and the bullet and Maddy and the bullet is just insane and I still carry a guilt with me to this day" on minute 19:32.



Figure 7. Madalyn Snyder, a student survivor of the Parkland Shooting

Madalyn Snyder, a student of the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor said it was a horrible disaster and she would never forget how she was slipped to her friends' blood. Also, she still in shock when she interviewed. Madalyn told the director in minute 48:25:

"Police were telling us not to look and to look away, but I mean how could you not look at something so terrible like how could you divert your eyes from your friends who are laying on the floor next to you? Like as you're slipping in their own blood? Like I could never forget that"

Jesse Vandereems, a survivor of 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, thought it was a computer cart when he and his friend heard the shot because the sound of the shots was muffled. After they knew it wasn't a drill and the shooter came into the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, he was just feeling hopeless and thought he would die that day.



Figure 8. Jesse Vandereems, a student survivor of the Parkland Shooting

Lea Serrano, a survivor of the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor looks depressed, her voice cracking and almost crying during the interview with the director. She didn't believe the shooting happened in Parkland because Florida considered to be one of the safest states in the United State.



Figure 9. Lea Serrano, a student survivor of the Parkland Shooting

Kelsey Friend, a survivor of the  $3^{rd}$  floor felt guilty to her favourite teacher, Scott Beigel. She said on minute 30:06 - 30:20:



Figure 10. Kelsey Friend, a student survivor of the Parkland Shooting

"Mr. Beigel held the door open for students to run in. He didn't make it out, but I was the last person to run inside the classroom. So, if it wasn't for him, having the door open, I probably wouldn't be here right now"

On the interview with CNN Broadcaster, Anderson Cooper, she told him that it was the worst experience in the world. The shot that killed Mr. Beigel still haunts

Friend. Trembling and glancing over her shoulder, she struggled to catch her breath. A sense of unease lingered, leaving her feeling far from secure. She was lucky to be alive also felt guilty for her favourite teacher.



Figure 11. Maddy Wilford, a student survivor of the Parkland Shooting

Maddy Wilford, a student who survived the shooting and the most critically wounded survivor of the attack, deemed herself a miracle as she underwent multiple surgeries and spent a week in the hospital.



Figure 12. Ivanna Paitan, a student survivor of the Parkland Shooting

When the shooting happened, she just hopes it wasn't real because she wasn't ready to die yet. Mark Strassmann interviewed Maddy on CBS that she didn't feel motivated to do anything. She experienced fear and trauma following the shooting incident, and even after a year, she continues to have vivid flashbacks. Ivana Paitan, a survivor of room 1213 also a friend of Maddy, felt guilty to her because if Maddy wasn't there, the bullet would have hit her. She couldn't help her, and feel regret that couldn't do anything. She also said this on the interview with the director:

Director: "How do you live with that every day?"

Ivana: "Honestly, I don't know. I'm just grateful that she's alive"

After the shooting, she traumatized and she couldn't concentrate in school, sit still, and even be mentally there in school. she had gone to therapy to heal her trauma and had become more hypervigilant after the shooting.



Figure 13. Hayley Betancourt, a student survivor of the Parkland Shooting

Hayley Betancourt, a student of the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor heard someone yelling for help, but she couldn't help him because she thought it was the shooter luring people to go out. But it was Anthony Borges, another survivor student who got shot five times. As she recounted the story to the director, her eyes welled up with tears, indicating that she was still gripped by fear by just remembered the tragedy. When the director asked to Betancourt on minute 44:04 "does that haunt you? Do you hear those, that voice?" she answered "yeah." A video played on the documentary film in minute 41:00 shows Anthony Borges is desperately calling for assistance.



Figure 14. Anthony Borgess, a student survivor who yelling out for help

Kyle Laman, one of the student survivors of the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor who was got shot on his ankle, succeeded got out thanks to his "adrenaline and high hopes." After the shooting incident, he told the director that he is no longer capable of thinking clearly and logically. He told the director on minute 1:52:30 that "It's so hard to think properly and straight again. And every time I think by myself, I'm having those flashback and I'm seeing this figure of death." Anna Claire Martins, a student survivor from room 1215 was filled with regret and felling guilty for Martin Duque, Luke Hoyer, and Gina Montalto as she failed to open the classroom door quickly enough for them. She was sits at the back of the room, as she was about to open the door, she heard the gunshot. She told to the director on minute 1:45:13 – 1:45:26 that:

"I still think about if I open the door, if they were still here. It's something that really gets to me because they were two of my close friends and I think if I got to the door fast enough, they would still be here." Scott Beigel's mother, father, and uncle was in shock after they heard their beloved son was one of the victims who was didn't make it. Linda

Schulman, the mother, expressed her disappointment towards the hospital's law enforcement personnel who informed her that Scott had not survived and she would not be able to see him right away. His father couldn't believe his son wasn't with them anymore. Alyssa Alhadeff's mother during the interview expressed her disappointment and anger towards the school security for not taking necessary actions to prevent the perpetrator from entering the building.

In the interview, she mentioned that he was a total failure and a coward. "Your sole job is to engage the threat, and you froze" said Alyssa's mother to the director in minute 1:25:44. Meadow Pollack's father, Andrew Pollack gave a speech at the White House, called the gunman "animal" and said, "we live with some animal could walk into our school and shoot our children." He was

disappointed and angry with the country because they failed to protect their own children. Alex Schachter's father, Max Schachter disappointed with the security of the school and said it shouldn't happen.

Judith Lewis Herman describes how a person can be traumatized by experiencing emotionally harmful events. The victims of the Parkland Shooting endured the harrowing experience of a mass shooting within their school, resulting in a state of profound trauma. Amanda Lee, a student survivor of room 1213 felt guilty after her friend, Maddy Wilford got shot near her. Ivana Paitan, a student survivor of room 1213 also felt guilty to Maddy Wilford, because Maddy was so close to her and thought the bullet was about to hit her. She then feels guilty to Maddy after she thought she took a bullet for her. She also became hypervigilance after the shooting and had gone to therapy to heal her trauma.

Guilt can result in anxiety, which is the initial sign of Hyperarousal as the author explained based on Herman's Trauma concept in the preceding chapter, so both Amanda and Ivana have the symptoms of trauma of Hyperarousal after the shooting.

Lea Serrano, a student survivor couldn't control her emotions during the interview with Director Minn. She looked depressed and almost cried during the interview. Based on the description above she was experiencing emotional flooding which is one of the Intrusion symptoms. Kelsey Friend, a student survivor of the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor felt guilty for her teacher, Scott Beigel. She also undergoes anxiety, hypervigilance, flashbacks, and emotional flooding. These are the symptoms of Hyperarousal and Intrusion. Maddy Wilford as she describes above by the author, looked depressed and still have those flashbacks after a year. After the shooting, she also experienced fear and felt guilty for all the victims who did not survive. These symptoms were Hyperarousal and Intrusion. Hayley Betancourt was haunted by Anthony Borges' voice as he was yelling out for help. She almost cried and felt guilty for not helping him. As she shows emotional flooding by just telling what she had been through to director Minn, the author indicates her having Hyperarousal and Intrusion trauma.

Kyle Laman, a student survivor who have Intrusion trauma as he still has those flashback, nightmares, and hard to think properly and straight again after the shooting. Anna Claire Martins felt guilty and blamed herself for not opening the door fast

enough for her friends. These self-blame and guilty feelings led to anxiety which are the symptoms of Hyperarousal trauma. The loss of their child has caused Alyssa's mother, Lori Alhadeff and Meadow's father, Andrew Pollack to disappointment to school security and they experienced intense anger, which is a manifestation of Hyperarousal, the first type of trauma that Herman describes. From the interview with the director of the film, there are no victims who shows the indication of Constriction, the last stage of trauma.

Nikolas Cruz committed a deviant act by perpetrating the mass murder at Stoneman Douglas Highschool, where he was identified as a mass shooter, criminal, killer, and more all over the news and media. This is the primary deviance, the first stage to becoming master status. The secondary deviance as the author describes in the previous chapter is the social reaction, isolation and alienation, and negative labelling as Becker said after the first primary deviance might have encouraged further deviance. In the movie, social reaction is evident as certain parents display their emotions either to the director or in front of the public. On the picture 19 and 20 are the examples of the social reactions from the parents' victims. Other examples of social reaction from Parkland Shooting are when Students from Marjory Stoneman Douglas Highschool, Sawyer Garrity and Andrea Peña make a song called "Shine." The song was dedicated to all those lost, injured, and affected by the tragic shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. XXXTENTACION, a musician that grew up less than 20 miles from Parkland. He spoke on his social media, sends his condolences to all the victims and make a song called "HOPE", dedicated to the shooting's victims and survivors. In his

post on SoundCloud, he addressed a note:

"Follow your dreams, and know that even though you have lost, you have guardian angels watching over you, day in and day out, the last thing they want is for their lives to be lost in vain [sic], make them proud! Live full, healthy, genius lives! #you are not alone." (XXXTENTACION, 2018)

The trial, arrest, and subsequent imprisonment of Nikolas Crus solidified his deviant reputation within the criminal justice system. Cruz gets labelled as a "mass shooter", a "school shooter", an "animal" and a "threat to society" contributing to a negative public perception and self-perception. These intense societal reactions mentioned above have contributed to Cruz's isolation and alienation. He was seeing punching himself right before the interrogation with detective John Curcio and said "kill me, just f\*\*\*ng kill me." His sense of belonging and identity were affected by the negative label and disapproval from society. When Broward County jail deputy, Jean Marque-Puche found a letter that included his regret for carrying out the shooting was one of the outcomes of the negative label that society labelled him. Following the negative labelling and stigmatization that society labelled him, his initial act of violence led to his ongoing deviant career as he faced criminal charges and imprisonment. As the author elaborates in the previous chapter, once someone has been successfully labelled as criminal or deviant, the label attached may become the dominant label, or 'master status', which is seen as more important than all the other

aspects of the person. Based on all of the aspects mentioned above, Nikolas Cruz has become the master status of the Parkland Shooting.

## CONCLUSION

This section encompasses the findings derived from the analysis conducted on the motive of the perpetrator involved in the Parkland Shooting, the repercussions faced by the victims of the incident, and the suggestions proposed by the author upon the completion of this study. In this study, the author has examined the discourse presented in the preceding section by considering the objectives of the study. The author found several conclusions from the problems of the study. First, Nikolas Cruz, the perpetrator of Parkland Shooting was traumatized because of the stimuli that the community gave to him. The stimuli-response that Nikolas Cruz got from his community are the symptoms of the trauma concept by Herman that led him to his behaviour. Nikolas Cruz was identified as having all three categories of trauma which is anxiety, one of the symptoms of Hyperarousal. He also has "the voice to do bad things" in his head which is an intrusive thought, one of the symptoms of Intrusion. Lastly, Nikolas Cruz was avoidance, which is one of the symptoms of Constriction. Nikolas Cruz has also been diagnosed with antisocial personality disorder from his early life, which may have contributed to his negative behaviors. The traumatic events that Nikolas Cruz faced from his early life until the school shooting can be seen as the root cause of his behaviours. Second, the victims of the Parkland Shooting have faced trauma even a year after the shooting. Most of the student survivors show feeling guilty and self-blame which led to anxiety, hypervigilance, depression, and intense anger which are the trauma symptoms of Hyperarousal. The symptoms of the trauma of Intrusion are also shown in the documentary film which are emotional flooding, flashbacks, nightmares, and hard to think straight or properly. Intense anger, one of the symptoms of Hyperarousal is also exhibited by the parents of the victims through the interview with the director and speech in public. Parents of the victims and the society labelled Nikolas Cruz as a "Mass Shooter" as the outcome of his action.

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