

The Influence of School Shooting on Victim as Seen in American Movie "The Fallout" 2022

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ABSTRACT

America is known as a country that emphasises freedom for its people. However, America has the highest crime rate in the world. Mass shootings are among the crimes that pose a major concern. This study aims to present the impacts of school shootings on victims, as well as the role of families and counselors in assisting the healing process of PTSD victims as depicted in the movie *The Fallout* (2022). The study employs a qualitative approach, utilizing primary data such as scenes, dialogues, and body language from the movie. The data collection method involves understanding the movie and sorting the data based on the study's objective. To analyze the main data, this research used two main theories, namely the PTSD theory by Freud (1917) and Symbolic Interactionism by Blumer (1986), and strengthened it by using additional data from scientific journals. This research concludes that victims of PTSD resulting from school shootings encounter various psychological symptoms, including alterations in their characteristics, avoidance of the tragedy, and the occurrence of nightmares. Through the process, family and counselors act as parties who can provide action and create a safe space for PTSD victims to heal.

Keywords: *PTSD, School Shooting, American Studies, Symbolic Interactionism*

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INTRODUCTION

Since the start of American independence in 1776, millions of people have dreamed of living happily in America. Happiness is defined as the freedom for everyone to choose how they live, a definition that extends into stereotypes within society. Many popular mass media, including magazines and newspapers, often propagate this stereotype to the entertainment industry, which people worldwide then embrace, ultimately forming a widely recognized concept known as the 'American Dream.' The American Dream extends beyond tangible possessions such as money, houses, cars, or any other material form. Some believe that getting a decent education, being able to support their families, or living to do what makes them happy until death come are all part of the American Dream. (Bruno, 2019)

The spread of these stereotypes has succeeded in shaping America's image as a country with minimal shortcomings in every aspect. People hold the belief that America is a perfect country, offering flawless dreams in every aspect of life. In fact, according to data summarized by the Statista Research Department on October 20, 2023, there were 1,313,200 criminal cases reported to American courts in 2021, covering

murder, robbery, and rape. Criminal cases, such as murder, significantly influence a community's capacity to access education, the economy, housing ownership, and health mobility. As of April 2023, the number of fatalities was 16 victims and 28 people injured in shooting cases in Alabama and Louisville. According to the news, the worst mass shooting in America took place in 2017, specifically in Las Vegas, resulting in a total of 604 victims, with 58 of them declared dead (Follman et al., 2023). The increase in mass shooting cases in the United States raises serious and significant concerns among the public.

Several experts conducted research on mass shooting crime in America due to widespread societal concerns, suggesting the need for new regulations and social change. The study's results shed light on several significant reasons why perpetrators carry out mass shootings. One of them is to become famous and draw public attention. In a society where technology and modern markets, such as social media, continue to dominate, many Americans aspire to become famous or celebrities. Social media offers a platform where users can compete to garner high attention or engagement for their posts. This ideology significantly impacts the state of American society. Many individuals resort to irrational or bizarre actions in an attempt to garner attention, one of which involves the murder of innocent individuals (Lankford & Silver, 2020). In 2017, another study examined the effectiveness of school safety systems in preventing school shootings as a means of safeguarding students. In the study, the researcher posits that additional protective measures exist beyond mere alterations in government laws or regulations. The researcher presents data from several school shooting cases and asserts a lack of communication, including reports from during, before, and after school shootings (Jonson, 2017).

The U.S. president has expressed his dissatisfaction, insecurity, and unhappiness with the current situation in his speeches (Al Fajri et al., 2022). In a variety of ways, the U.S. government and schools are trying to find the best way to deal with victims of school shootings. One strategy involves assigning student counsellors to each school, whose primary responsibility is to identify and comprehend the changes and development of the victims. The counsellor's responsibilities include identifying potential students with mental health disorders, providing consistent support in collaboration with mental health bureaus, and engaging in open discussions with parents who possess knowledge and understanding about mental health and gun crime (Paolini, 2015). However, the attached journal identifies numerous shortcomings in school counselling services. As a counsellor, data collection is crucial to determining the success rates in treating a patient. However, there is a lack of effectiveness in American school counselors' ability to use these data, which then affects student achievement (Anita & Carol, 2015).

Therefore, the researcher's goal in evaluating the impact of school shootings on victims is to anticipate a shift in public awareness and a more effective approach to assisting victims. In this study, the researcher presents previously unpublished data or studies on the effects of school shootings on victims' well-being. Researchers focus on the impact on victims because, according to the data, survivors of mass shootings have suffered many mental disorders that require a short and long-term recovery time. Some of the mental disorders experienced by victims are major depression, PTSD, and generalised anxiety disorder (Lowe & Galea, 2017).

This study's contribution is threefold. First, the theory of post-traumatic stress disorder by Sigmund Freud (1917). Second, Blumer's theory of symbolic interactionism (1986). Thirdly, previous research has employed a linear study approach, which has

strengthened the researcher's perspective. Those three contributions are arranged into the analysis of the main data that occurred from the mental evidence of the research, "The Fallout" (2022). HBO released *The Fallout* in 2022. Jenna Ortega, in this movie, focuses on how the school shooting becomes the most painful tragedy in her life. *The Fallout* effectively portrays the school-shooting process in great detail and realism. The portrayal of the victim's condition after the incident also carries a psychological impact, illustrating the various ways in which the victim attempts to recover. The *Fallout* movie depicts the symptoms of PTSD in a fine, detailed manner.

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder by Sigmund Freud (1917)

According to Freud, a psychic condition that does not function properly will determine the disorders that occur in a person's psyche, especially anxiety disorders. When a traumatic event acts as a stressor, it prolongs the impact of trauma. These traumatic events have psychological effects such as (1) depression and (2) excessive anxiety in different periods of time for each person. Other effects such as (3) intrusive imaginary in which PTSD patients experience nightmare-like sleep disturbances that provide a picture of the traumatic event, (4) psychological hyperactivity, (5) active re-living as if the event were occurring, this effect makes patients feel as if they are still experiencing the traumatic event and the occurrence of refusal attempts to deny the occurrence of the event (Wilson, 1994).

In this theory, Freud explained that PTSD patients use their ego as a weapon of self-protection against threats that could hurt them. Trauma also causes sufferers to experience problems with their ability to control themselves because of stressors that create the possibility of long-term post-traumatic stress disorder (Wilson, 1994).

Blumer's Symbolic Interactionism (1986)

Mead and Mind (1934) stated that in symbolic interactionism there are 3 main concepts, namely mind and self, society, and environment. The mind acts as the most controlling tool for humans in facing any situation that requires problem solving. However, in this scenario, the self assumes a role as a carrier of patterns, influencing the consistency and stability of the action. Different types of self emerge based on the experiences and activities of each individual. A complete stranger may hesitate to save a child from a murderer, whereas a child's mother will instinctively shield her offspring in any situation. The theory (Husin et al., 2021) explains that the mother, having lived with her biological bloodline for over a year, has forged an unending bond.

Each human being changes himself and society through the mind, then takes action according to the role. This is also one of the stages that occur in Symbolic Interactionism, in which society interaction acts as an influence for humans to reflect on which place they belong to in terms of changing any social processes or phenomena. Through interaction, humans will be able to see others as a form of communication process and produce impacts on their communication opponents. The effects of social interaction also require a well-crafted environment. We divide the environment into two categories: the physical environment and the contextual environment. A physical environment is a type of environment that can influence and find expression in others. The seven concepts of the contextual environment include political, socio-cultural, technological, legal, economic, and ethical influences (Husin et al., 2021).

School Shootings

Mass shootings, also known as mass murders or mass killings, are defined as the occurrence of a large number of killings (three or more) at a place and time at the same moment using firearms as equipment (Booty et al., 2019). Mass shootings or mass murders can take place in a variety of locations, including workplaces, restaurants, houses of worship, and public spaces like schools, causing anxiety and vulnerability within the community (Krouse & Richardson, 2016). The four elements of crime – harmful, intentional, unwanted, and nonessential – form the basis of mass shootings and/or school shootings (Hamby, 2017).

This action is considered an act of terrorism because the perpetrator of the mass shooting carried out this action with the aim of posing a threat to public safety and not for reasons of personal interest in seeking financial gain for the perpetrator. Mass shooting is defined as an action based on motivation with the aim of intimidating the public, government, or certain ideologies (Hunter et al., 2021).

METHOD

This research, an American Studies study, requires the researcher to analyze a case using two or more theories. Thus, this research uses two theories, which are psychological theory and sociological theory. The psychological theory is the theory of PTSD, or post-traumatic stress disorder, by Freud (1917), and the sociological theory is interactionalism, presented by Blumer (1937). Given that the research relies on the use of narrative techniques, qualitative methods are the chosen methodology.

1. Data and Source Data

Data are an important component of analyzing a study. To support the analysis process in this study, the researcher utilized both primary and secondary data.

a. Primary Data

The *Fallout* (2022) movie serves as the primary source of mental evidence. The data took the form of scenes, dialogues, and body language of characters discussing the impact of school shootings on victims and how social interaction aids in their healing process.

b. Secondary Data

We gathered secondary data from scientific journals, articles, printed official government websites, and any official news websites to bolster the analysis.

2. Data Collection Methods and Techniques

The process and technique of data retrieval of primary data were conducted by first watching *The Fallout* film, understanding the content and topic of the story, and sorting out the scenes into different topics. The sorted scenes were attached with the analysis discussion and detailed minutes, which were analysed using the two main theories and secondary data in the form of journals or other sources. However, the researcher collected secondary data by reviewing the journal, observing the background of the study's content, the methodology and theory, as well as the results of the topics, and using this information to assist in the analysis of primary data.

3. Analyzing Data: Method and Technique

The analysing primary data obtained through the movie *The Fallout*, the researcher used two main theories as references. The researcher has chosen scenes in the film that demonstrate all of the study's objectives. We analyzed scenes that distinctly illustrate the patterns or characteristics of PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), drawing from Freud's theory, and the ways in which victims interact with their parents and counsellors to aid in their recovery from traumatic tragedies, as per

Blumer's Symbolic Interactionism theory. Researchers used qualitative methods to analyze primary data from journals that discuss these two topics, structuring the data into a distinct and descriptive narrative.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. The Effect of School Shooting on the Victim in the American Movie "The Fallout" (2022)

1.1 Characteristics Changing

The brain enters, processes, and refers to every experience or event in a person's life as a memory. Depending on the type of experience, each memory has different properties and influences. Traumatic experiences scientifically cause chemical reactions in the brain and neurohormonal flow, which then develop into PTSD symptoms. As a result, low corticosteroid levels make it difficult for PTSD patients to manage their memories. Thus, it causes sufferers to become more emotionally vulnerable when dealing with new forms of stressors. (Rusyda et al., 2021) The horrific experience undoubtedly negatively affects her ability to survive. However, after the school shooting occurred, Vada suddenly turned into a quiet type of person and always refused to interact with the people around her. These memories act as stressors, causing Vada, who was originally a regular, smart, and cheerful child, to become more emotional and less able to handle situations that stress and/or frustrate her.

1.2 Avoiding Related- Things to the Tragedy

In PTSD theory, there is a bio-informational theory raised by Foa and Kozak (1986), which states that someone who experiences a traumatic event experiences excessive worry and feels threatened. We refer to this fear as fear memory, which encompasses feelings like psychological and verbal perceptions of danger and threats, as well as reactions to trauma-related events that transpire during a tragedy. In addition to capturing trauma-related objects, fear memory also instills in victims a sense of fear towards anything that resembles trauma-related traits, shapes, and sounds. (Hetzl-Riggin & Meads, 2016)

After the traumatic incident, Vada developed a deep-seated fear of everything related to school and shootings. Vada consequently started to steer clear of all school-related activities. According to Freud's PTSD theory, the term 'avoiding' refers to strategies like avoidant-coping, which are unconscious actions carried out by individuals with PTSD, triggered by overwhelming fear. The traumatic experience of the school shooting deeply impacted Vada's subconscious memory, leading to an overwhelming fear of trauma-related events that she was unable to control (Foa & Kozak, 1986).

1.3 Having Nightmare

Trauma occurs, trapping a person in memory and significantly disrupting their tranquility. These unwitting memories produce re-experiences such as flashbacks and nightmares, which Freud referred to as compulsive repetition. The nightmare comprises numerous flashbacks, each carrying a variety of emotions triggered by the traumatic event. Some of these emotions are fear, sadness, anger, and helplessness. According to Freud, the process of having nightmares and flashbacks occurs unconsciously. But on the other hand, Freud argued that the nightmare experience is a form of self-defence to fight and adapt to the traumatic event itself (Wang et al., 2019).

Vada experienced a range of emotions, including intense fear due to the shooting, sadness over losing her closest people, anger towards the shooter, and a

sense of helplessness due to her lack of enthusiasm to continue living her life. Vada's emotions escalated to such an extent that she succumbed to the subconscious impact of nightmares, as evidenced by her awakening with a panting breath and a pounding sweat.

1.4 Avoiding any social interactions and self-isolating

Unconsciously, people resort to social isolation as a form of self-defense, believing that by avoiding or not communicating with others, they can lessen their feelings of threat and distrust, which stem from the aftermath of a traumatic event. Social isolation can also be a manifestation of loneliness in patients with PTSD. Their helplessness and inability to manage emotions, communication, and interaction with others make them prefer to isolate themselves and stay away from every social interaction that exists, both with family and close friends (Vlachos et al., 2020).

Vada refused to have or create small interactions with her family, such as brief chats or meeting face-to-face, as shown when her sister invited Vada to go out for a walk and buy coffee. Vada took this action due to her fear of reliving the school shooting and its associated memories if she interacted with others.

1.5 Self-Destructive

Victims of traumatic events often engage in self-harm behavior as a form of depression. Vada soaked in a bath for a long enough time to cause her to shiver. Usually, when a human feels a shivering reaction or something similar, they will immediately look for something to warm their body, but not with Vada. Vada deliberately sat in the bathtub without doing something to protect herself. We refer to this as self-destructive or self-harm action.

Someone who engages in self-destructive behavior does so with the intention of harming themselves. Self-destructive occurs when a person experiences pain due to physical or mental illness. Traumatic experiences are one of the contributing factors to self-destructive behavior (Farnsworth & Cydney Prtiz, 2023). Some studies and observers assess self-destructive or reckless behaviors as a form or way for PTSD sufferers to release emotions, and as a 'solution' to help counteract the influence of other PTSD symptoms (Armour et al., 2020).

1.6 Showing symptoms of depression and anxiety

Vada often indulged in daydreaming, staring blankly at the house's ceiling, before falling asleep in a dark room with puffy eyelids. This personality exhibited symptoms of depression, including a persistent sadness and a sense of emptiness. This is due to stressors that grow as a result of traumatic events. Stressors are strongly associated with PTSD and Major Depressive Disorder (MDD), which act as triggers for the risk of psychological diseases such as trauma and depression (Smoller, 2016). Stressors can cause a person to feel a tremendous burden in every social relationship they encounter. Damage and an individual's inability to manage emotional regulation can also trigger these symptoms of depression. Emotional regulation is the ability to deal with problems, such as traumatic events. The success of emotion regulation can be measured by several aspects, including acceptance, problem-solving, and critical thinking (Chang et al., 2018). Therefore, damage to the ability to regulate emotions can lead to consequences such as depressive symptoms, as the inability to do so creates more stress.

Vada had difficulty accepting the terrible things that happen to her. Vada also struggled to find solutions to every problem or post-traumatic event that came her way. As a result, rumination, a process of emotion regulation strategies, emerged and gave Vada various forms of depressive symptoms.

1.7 Denial

If we analyse how Vada refused to communicate with her family, as well as hiding her weak side from the therapist, it shows that Vada was trying to hide the fact that she was not okay due to the mass shooting incident. Trauma can have numerous negative and adverse effects on those who survive it. There are several other reasons for this, in addition to the appearance of stressors as triggers. The scene demonstrated how Vada, a person suffering from PTSD symptoms, asserted her ability to control her emotions, a claim that contrasted with the reality observed in other scenarios. World psychiatrists have developed the PTSD theory by Freud, which mentions this symptom: PTSD can cause survivors to experience feelings of shame.

Psychological research in 2022 revealed that many PTSD survivors feel ashamed of their experiences, either due to changes in their characteristics that may manifest as depression symptoms, or because the traumatic events may create a negative self-image. Thus, as occurs in the majority of PTSD cases, the survivors begin to behave in denial towards the reality of their experiences. As a result of this shame, they decide to refuse psychological and emotional help from others, practice self-isolating, and begin to create a false self-image in order to hide the fact that they are damaged by wellbeing (Downey & Crummy, 2022).

2. The Role of Family and Counselor Through the School Shooting's Victim Recovery as Seen in the American Movie "The Fallout" (2022)

2.1 As the Victim's Bounded Relation

According to Blumer's theory of symbolic interactionism (1986), three main factors influence the creation of valuable social interactions. The first factor is mind and self, followed by self and society, and finally self and environment. The mind and self act as the main wheel through which a person performs specific actions. The mind motivates an individual to take actions towards themselves or others. Through the mind, a person can determine what action they need to take to solve a problem. Self and society have the power to influence a person during social interactions. The interaction between self and society shapes a specific meaning for a given phenomenon. Self and Environment discuss how the environment around humans affects a person's behaviour (Husin et al., 2021).

Therefore, using the theory of symbolic interactionism to analyse Vada's family's contributions during her healing phase reveals a significant influence from biological bonding. According to the theory of mind and self, Vada's mother's behaviour and actions demonstrate the influence of her instincts in her role as a mother. Her mother appears to be very cautious when discussing school and Vada's situation. Vada's mother also persistently inquired about Vada's feelings every day, with the aim of persuading her to seek therapy. Vada's parents began to know what they should not say and do because they knew what Vada felt. Vada's father validated her feelings and followed his instincts and thoughts as a father to create a safe and comfort environment. This action is a valuable form of social interaction that shapes the changes in Vada's characteristics.

Parents' understanding of dealing with their children's problems creates this form of problem-solving action. Problem-solving behavior shapes societal and environmental changes, serving as tools for the healing process for victims of traumatic events (O'Leary, 2012).

2.2 As the External Safe Place Provider

Bounding is one of the most important tools for encouraging the patient to open up and complain freely. A counsellor can foster this bond by providing a safe space, which aligns with the self and environment factor in the theory of symbolic interaction. According to Husin et al. (2021), creating social interaction in a safe and supportive environment can lead to a deeper understanding of an individual.

When Vada appeared nervous and scared, the counsellor applied the method, uttering calming phrases to foster trust and a strong bond between counsellors and PTSD patients. The counsellor in "The Fallout" (2022) did not coerce Vada into revealing everything on the first day of therapy. Instead, the counsellor gave Vada enough time to build trust by providing her with a rebuttal and an opinion about her emotions. Vada began to be honest about her true condition and feelings, accepting that the school shooting tragedy had ruined her life. The actions taken by counsellors for PTSD patients certainly aim to create changes in the way patients think and control their emotions.

CONCLUSION

The research findings, derived from the examination of primary data such as scenes, dialogues, and body language in the film *The Fallout* (2022), and the application of leading theories like Sigmund Freud's PTSD theory (1917), suggest that school shootings and other traumatic events can lead to severe and distressing consequences for victims. These impacts were described in great detail through the role of the character *The Fallout* (2022), that school shootings caused psychological disorders such as characteristics changing, avoidance related to the tragedy, having a nightmare, avoiding any social interactions and self-isolation, the onset of symptoms of depression and anxiety disorder, performing self-destructive behaviour, and being denial about what they feel and experience. These impacts arise due to the stressor effect of school shootings, which causes victims to experience intense and difficult-to-control fear. These adverse effects can impact victims for a significant period. Death will result if the victim does not receive help from loved ones and professionals. We analyzed data from the movie *The Fallout* (2022) using Blumer's (1986) theory of symbolic interactionism, concluding that family and counsellors' assistance positively impacts the healing process of PTSD patients. The roles of parents and counsellors are shaped by the actions taken by both parties, who follow their instincts and create a safe environment and space for people living with PTSD, allowing them to comfortably and freely express their feelings, with the ultimate goal of helping victims heal and find peace from their past trauma.

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