

AVERTING GUN VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS

ETHICAL RESPONSES TO SERIOUS BUT "NON-IMMINENT" RISKS

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1

ALLAN BARSKY 2

CONTEXT

- ▶ 2018 - 97 shooting incidents in schools, 56 deaths
- ▶ Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School, Florida
- ▶ Hiring additional school SWs
- ▶ Debate: mental health response vs. criminal justice and secured campus responses



2

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Upon completion of this session, participants will be able to:

- identify conflicting obligations when social workers are addressing non-imminent risks of gun violence.
- critically analyze options for managing conflicts between ethical and legal duties (including confidentiality, safety, maintaining boundaries, and freedom of speech).
- engage clients, colleagues, and others in conflict resolution processes to resolve ethical conflicts arising from non-imminent risks of gun violence.

OBJECTIVES

3

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RESEARCH (JOHNSON & BARSKY)

- Qualitative, grounded research design
- 11 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with social workers who worked with school-aged children and families in Broward and Palm Beach Counties
- **Demographics of Sample:**
 - 8 currently worked for school system.
 - 3 worked in private practice, 1 also worked in hospital.
 - 9 participants had clinical licensure, with a range of 1 to 20 years of clinical experience; 1 in process of obtaining licensure, 1 unlicensed but over 10 years of post-MSW experience.

4

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THEMES

5

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NASW (US) C.O.E. STANDARD 1.07(C) CONFIDENTIALITY

▶ Social workers should protect the confidentiality of all information obtained in the course of professional service, except for compelling professional reasons. The general expectation that social workers will keep information confidential does not apply when disclosure is necessary to prevent serious, foreseeable, and imminent harm to a client or others. In all instances, social workers should disclose the least amount of confidential information necessary to achieve the desired purpose; only information that is directly relevant to the purpose for which the disclosure is made should be revealed.

6

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ETHICAL ISSUES

- If "serious, imminent, and foreseeable" risk, then duty to report, protect, warn, or... ?
- If the risk is serious, but not imminent, then... ?
- At what point are a student's right to privacy, confidentiality, freedom of expression, and self-determination superseded by safety issues?
- Does it matter whether the intended victim is identifiable?
- How can SW help teachers and administrators understand how their ethical obligations are different?



7

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FRAMEWORK TO ANALYZE ETHICAL ISSUES

1. Articulate the ethical issue raised by the situation.
2. Identify people and systems affected by the situation (including decision-makers).
3. Reflect on personal and professional values and beliefs.
4. Consider culture, values, and beliefs of clients and families.
5. Analyze relevant ethical and legal obligations (including school regulations).
6. Brainstorm and analyze options (using risk assessment tools to consider when safety takes precedence over confidentiality, civil rights/freedoms, boundaries, etc.).
7. Apply conflict resolution skills to develop appropriate responses with client, family, administration, colleagues, and others, as appropriate

8

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SITUATION 1: SNAPCHAT RISKS

- ▶ XYZ High School is concerned that students who commit gun violence often post "ominous messages" on Snapchat or other social media prior to acting.
- ▶ The school asks Lanaysha, the school social worker, to develop a plan to monitor students on Snapchat and respond to risks in a timely and effective manner.



9

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Reporting: Principal, Police, Parents
Suspension/Expulsion/Alternatives
Protocols for Specific Risks/Crisis
Social Media
Harassment
Possession of Weapons
Nondiscrimination
Documenting

10

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SITUATION 2: KNIFE IN LOCKER



- ▶ The school's vice principle, Ms. Phipps, receives a tip that an African American student, Sefu (17), has a knife in his locker.
- ▶ Ms. Phipps asks Sefu to open his locker and they find a knife.
- ▶ The school suspends Sefu for 3 weeks. The schools asks Ms. Willow, the school social worker, to devise a plan to ensure that Sefu does not pose any risks upon his return to school.
- ▶ Sefu and his parents think the school is over-reacting and do not want to cooperate with Ms. Willow.

11

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SITUATION 3: LONER



- ▶ Charlene (15) is new to the school, as her family just moved to Birmingham from Houston.
- ▶ Teachers are concerned that she is a "loner" - she sits alone, she avoids working with other students, and she may have an autism spectrum disorder.
- ▶ Upon meeting with the school social worker, Mr. Barkley, Charlene discloses dreams about a big gun fight at school library. Charlene has no plans to commit violence and says she does not know why she is having these dreams.
- ▶ Mr. Barkley's supervisor wants him to meet with Charlene's parents and find out whether they have guns at home. Mr. Barkley is a strong proponent of the 2nd Amendment.

12

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SITUATION 4: MENTOR

- ▶ Manny (13) comes from a family affected by alcohol and drug use.
- ▶ Ms. Ramirez (SW) sees herself as a mentor and confidante to Manny.
- ▶ To help keep Manny out of trouble, Ms. Ramirez, advocates to get Manny into special after-school programs. She does not disclose that Manny has impulse control issues.
- ▶ Manny has a history of suicide attempts, but Ms. Ramirez assesses that he is not currently at risk of suicide.




13

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SITUATION 5: RADICALIZED

- ▶ A student, Sasha, informs the school social worker, Ms. Ing, that one of her classmates, Adeel, has been posting “disturbing” messages on Instagram - being a martyr, supporting ISIS, and jihad against America
- ▶ Ms. Ing meets with Adeel, to engage and assess risks
- ▶ Adeel denies being radicalized or sympathetic to ISIS

Hadith: "Whoever asks Allah for martyrdom sincerely, Allah'll cause him to reach the states of martyr even if he dies in his bed"




14

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SITUATION 6: POLICE

- ▶ Ms. Bellows (SW) observes a fight in the school parking lot between Juan (15) and Alex (14)
- ▶ She wonders whether to call school security or campus police, or to de-escalate the situation herself
- ▶ She does not know whether they have weapons




15

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16

ALLAN BARSKY 17

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17

ALLAN BARSKY 18

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18