

Three suicides in two weeks linked to US mass shootings

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Last week saw the tragic deaths of two high school students who survived the 2018 Parkland massacre in Florida followed by that of one of the parents of a girl who was killed in the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in Connecticut. All three died in apparent suicides.

The first was 19-year-old Sydney Aiello, who was a senior at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School last year at the time of the Parkland mass shooting. A day after her funeral, which took place on Friday, a current sophomore, 16-year-old Calvin Desir, also took his life.

While it is difficult to say exactly why these two young people took their own lives, many of the parents are speaking out, saying that their children struggle with “survivor’s guilt.” Les Gordon, a family therapist who works with the students in Parkland, says that “they wonder why they’re alive and their friend is not. I’ve had kids tell me that they should have been able to do something to stop the shooting.”

This past Monday morning, 49-year-old Jeremy Richman, the father of 6-year-old Avielle, who was killed at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut in 2012, was found dead not far from his office in a third apparent suicide.

A few months after their daughter’s death seven years ago, Richman and his wife, Jennifer Hensel, co-founded the Avielle Foundation to support neuroscience research that draws together biochemical and behavioral sciences. Richman’s dream was “a paradigm shift in the way society views the health of the brain.” He told NPR in 2017, “just like resources were poured into landing a man on the moon and exploring outer space, we need to invest in exploring our own inner space.”

Richman remained a public figure until his death this week and spoke out to news media following many

subsequent mass shootings. He said that at first, “We would just bawl. It would hit us so hard.” As the years went on and shootings kept happening, however, he said that their anger grew. “I feel like we’re letting it happen. There are things that could be done that aren’t being done.”

These tragic deaths show just how far-reaching the psychological trauma can spread, damaging thousands of people over many years. For every person who is killed, there are circles of family, friends and neighbors, not to mention teachers and administrators and other community members, who bear the scars of such acts for the rest of their lives.

The community in Parkland, like many similar communities, has established health and wellness centers for survivors and the community at large. However, more than a year later, in the case of Parkland, therapists are saying that only a fraction of those affected by the shootings have sought counseling.

The tragic deaths over the past week highlight the fact that nothing has been done to address the underlying causes of mass violence in the US, or to provide adequate assistance to those impacted.

After every school shooting, the response within the political establishment follows a definite pattern. One faction of the ruling class calls for gun control, while the other insists on arming teachers or making guns more freely available.

No one says anything about the relentless violence perpetrated by the state and the social and political dysfunction in the United States that produces with such regularity individuals who commit mass murder.

Moreover, among the factors that may have produced the rash of suicides over the past two weeks is the impact of the New Zealand massacre on the consciousness of survivors of past mass shootings. In

contrast to Parkland and Sandy Hook, the shooter in New Zealand was motivated by definite fascist politics, which are encouraged and promoted by the ruling class.



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