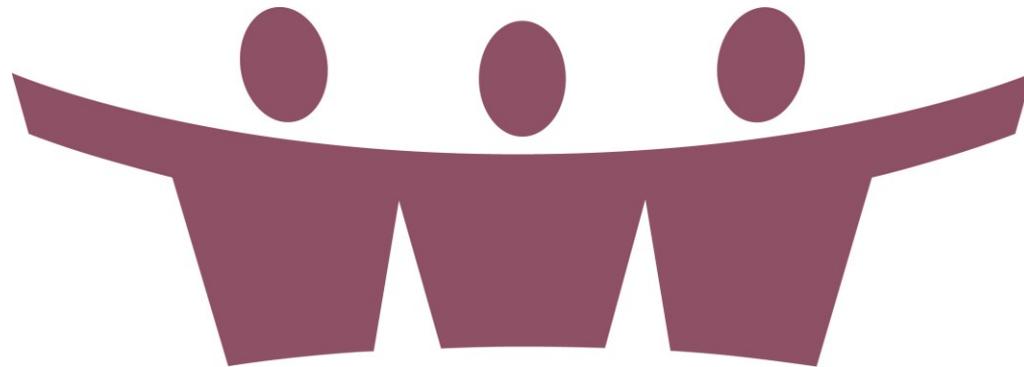


Alliance Rampage Winnenden Foundation Against Violence in Schools



Aktionsbündnis Amoklauf Winnenden Stiftung gegen Gewalt an Schulen

Young people as victims of crime:

Especially in the context of school
shootings

Role of news media

Media coverage surrounding the school shooting in Winnenden, Germany in 2009

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© Winnenden

Winnenden is a small town in southwest Germany, it has a population of less than 28,000.

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On 11 March 2009, Winnenden made international headlines following a school shooting at the Albertville-Realschule, one of Winnenden's two secondary schools.

The school shooting began, when the 17-year-old perpetrator walked into the Albertville secondary school in Winnenden at approximately 9.30 am and began shooting with a 9mm Beretta semi-automatic pistol, which he had taken from his parents' bedroom, where it had been kept unsecured in a closet.

The shooter opened fire in two classrooms, killing 10 pupils - all aged 14 and 15 - and three women teachers. He also injured nine persons.

The shooter then fled through a park, shooting dead a 56-year-old gardener of a nearby psychiatric hospital on his way, then he hijacked a Volkswagen minivan and forced the driver to take him to the town of Wendlingen 40 kilometers away.

Police located him and there was a final shootout in which he killed two people in a car dealership and seriously wounded two police officers before he committed suicide.

In Winnenden occurred the worst school shooting in Germany since the Erfurt school massacre in 2002 in which a former student killed 16 people before turning the gun on himself.

Of course the Winnenden school shooting received extensive media coverage, within a few hours it drew hordes of journalists.

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Broadcasting vehicles two hours after the Winnenden school shooting, when I arrived at the school.

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Camera operators in front of a mortuary van after the Winnenden school shooting on 11.03.2009.

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Antenna-topped broadcasting vehicles of the international news media in Winnenden on 11.03.2009.

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7 days after the Winnenden school shooting: Members of the media standing on a pickup, photographing during a funeral over a cemetery wall, showing lack of respect for the school shooting victims and their relatives.

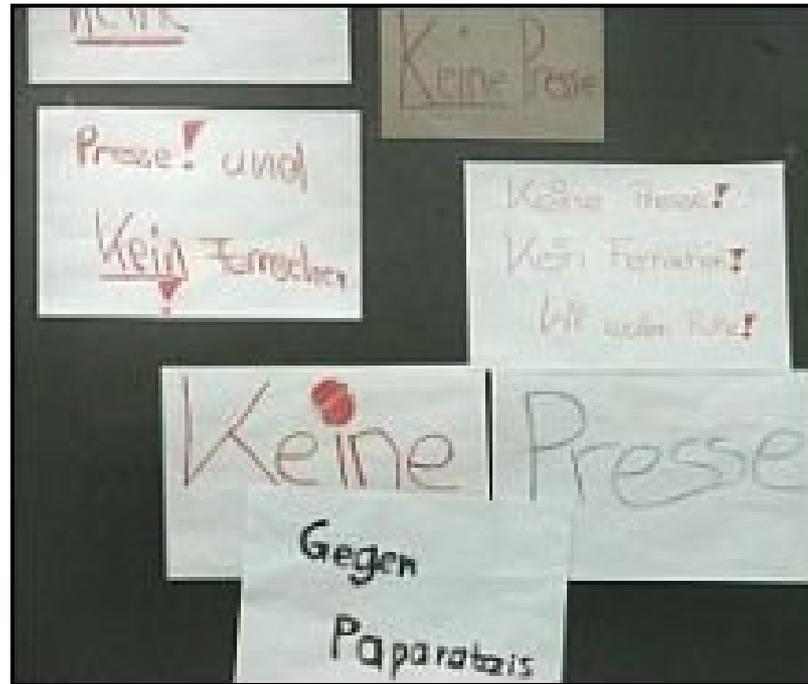
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“Let us mourn in peace”. Pupils in Winnenden try to keep news media away for keeping their grief private.

STIFTUNG GEGEN GEWALT AN SCHULEN



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„No press, no TV, against Paparazzi“ write pupils in Winnenden on a school window, wanting the media to stay away.

- After Winnenden, survivors of the school shooting even told stories about intrusion into their privacy and harassment by members of the media
- Inaccurate stories were also a problem after the Winnenden shooting, a surviving girl was pronounced dead by a boulevard newspaper

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Winnenden shooting victim interview: A school girl is interviewed, her best friend died in her arms shortly before in the classroom. The reporter is asking: "*How are you feeling now?*" Reporters should avoid asking such banal questions.

What are the needs of traumatized young people still in shock or in the context of long-term impact of trauma?

Respect:

Traumatized young crime victims are shocked, appalled and stunned, but they are not out of their mind. They want to be taken seriously and not to be treated like babies.

Time:

The victims need time to find the right words for describing the events.

Empathy:

Young crime victims need interviewers with a real interest for the person to whom they talk, not only craving for sensation and seeking for cruel details.

The Role of news media reporting on crime:

Informing the general public, who has the right to know what happened.

On the other hand, it should be ensured that reporters avoid glorification of the perpetrator:

- which would mean further harm of the victims
- could involve the danger of inspiring potential perpetrators for copycat crimes

Adequate portrayal of victims by the media:

Victims are humans with a biography which should not be reduced to the point of victimization.

The Role of news media immediately after the incident and with regard to long-term consequences

Secondary victimization

Problems concerning the publication of interviews taken immediately after the incident:

- The victim is confronted with his/her own vulnerability
- In case of traumatic events the own perception is often wrong

- Interviews which were taken immediately after the crime rarely provide factually correct statements
- It could mean harm for victims, if they are later confronted with their own wrong perception. The victims might think, they couldn't trust in themselves

What are the characteristic factors of an interview with a young victim?

Special responsibility

- Young people are particularly exposed to the judgement of others, it is therefore important not showing them in compromising situations

- To rely on prior to the interview agreed signals to stop when the victims are afraid of losing control of their emotions is not sufficient. Victims often don't recognize the limits of what they can bear

Are there any rules for journalists who report on young crime victims?

- The interviewer's intention should be clearly and sincerely communicated prior to the interview
- Interviewers should be very well informed before starting
- Interviewers should be interested in factual information not in emotions

'No-Goes' for journalists reporting on young people as victims of crime:

- No attempts to provoke emotional reactions of victims (e.g. tears)
- No questions concerning the proper sequence of events of the crime
- No intrusion into the privacy of victims
- No interviews immediately after the incident

News media can cause harm to victims by being insensitive in searching for information, but they also:

- can provide a voice for victims, to protect them from being nothing else than a "victim"
- can help to change this society in which being a victim is often treated like a contagious disease

I would like to close here, thank you for your kind attention.

Any Questions?

Speaker:

Mrs. Gisela Mayer (Foundation's Board of Directors)

Alliance Rampage Winnenden - Foundation Against Violence in Schools

