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SPEAKERS

Beverly Kingston, Jenn Tostlebe, Jose Sanchez

Jenn Tostlebe 00:14
Hi everyone. Welcome back. My name is Jenn Tostlebe

Jose Sanchez 00:18
And I'm Jose Sanchez

Jenn Tostlebe 00:20
and we are the host of the Criminology Academy podcast where we are criminally academic. In today's episode, we're speaking with Beverly Kingston on school violence and responses to school violence.

Jose Sanchez 00:33
Beverly Kingston is director and senior research associate at the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence at the University of Colorado Boulder. Her research focuses on addressing the root causes of violence by creating the conditions that support healthy human development throughout the life course. She has led several multimillion dollar school and community initiatives and research studies that focus on implementing a comprehensive public health approach to violence prevention. Dr. Kingston has published articles on using comprehensive public health models to address youth violence, school safety, neighborhood social factors, and health and the built environment. Thank you so much for joining us, Beverly.

Jenn Tostlebe 01:16
So, to give an overview today we're going to talk broadly about school violence, and school shootings. And then we'll get into a paper on the challenges and potential solutions for addressing a comprehensive approach to school safety. And lastly, we'll wrap up with two different school violence responses and their implications.

Jose Sanchez 01:39

We like to open these up with, you know, broader questions. So we kind of want to start laying the foundation or the lay of the land for the topics that we're going to discuss today. And so, almost a year ago, we did an episode on school violence with Jill Turanovic. However, for that episode, we focused mainly on the correlates of offending and victimization within schools. So for this episode, we want to focus more on actually responding to school violence. And, unfortunately, it seems like shootings at schools have been mainstays in the news, especially recently, when we're recording this episode, on April 6th, 2023, we've had two recent shootings, the most, I think, high profile one was the Covenant shooting in Nashville, that resulted in six deaths with a few of them being students. But we also had a shooting a little bit before that in Denver at East High School. Fortunately, I don't believe anyone died in that shooting, there were just a couple of injuries. So thinking about that out as we're putting the outline for this episode together. So trying to remember what's the, like, how far back can I remember, like school shootings, and like the first one that really comes to mind is Columbine High School, again, here in Colorado, which was in 1999. So are school shootings, a relatively new phenomenon, or were they actually happening before Columbine? You know, kind of what's been the prevalence of school shootings over time?

Beverly Kingston 03:15
Yeah. Well, you know, I was looking back, and there is some data that there were school shootings in the 1800s. And, you know, there were and throughout the 1900s, but something about the Columbine shooting sort of shifted the way we talk about school shootings, the way we the media covers it. I think you're absolutely right, that there's something about that shooting, though. It was like, there's the before Columbine, and then the after Columbine, and what we're seeing today, definitely, since Columbine, is an increase in prevalence in school shootings and school violence. You know, as you all know, probably from you know, having studied this a little bit before listen to different researchers talk about it. The data on mass violence and school shootings, the way things are measured, are not consistent. And so when I was thinking about you know, and whenever I start to try to look at how do I talk about prevalence here, I look at a lot of, you know, I tend to look at a few different datasets and look at what are they showing and all the datasets that I looked at, I looked at like the Washington Post. They've been tracking school shootings since Columbine. Now. I think since Columbine, I've looked at Jill's database, I think was one of theirs Department of Ed database, and they all show increases. One of the databases, it's called the K through 12 school shooting database. We calculated the percent change. This is a little bit of, slightly geeky statistic, but not too over the top but since 1999, to now there's a 3,122% increase, according to that K through 12 School database. So the numbers we're talking about, there are 22 incidents in 1999, to 303 in 2022. So, you know, that's the kind of numbers and then the, you know, the thing we also have to think about, even though we because we do know, even though there's more, they're still relatively rare. So that's important to keep it in my in mind. But we also know that these shootings are touching the lives of so many people. The way the Washington Post was tracking things, what they're looking at, is like the number of kids students that are touched by the shootings like so what they did is they looked at the populations of those schools that had the shooting, and they're like, get around 350,000 kids, you know, touched in that way. And then there's all the rest of us that are none of us are very far removed from these issues. So I think that's a little bit about the kind of where things are now.

Jenn Tostlebe 06:10

Yeah, that's a massive increase since 1999. You know, I wanted, I was glad that Jose brought up this question to ask you, because I was really curious if the numbers had changed, and I figured that they had or if it was just that the media was, you know, talking about it more often. So just hearing that percentage change? Yeah, it's clearly that there's been a difference.

Beverly Kingston 06:36
I did want to say that this database that I'm citing, the one that I use to that increase it is looking at, he writes that it includes all shootings at school, when schools when a gun is brandished, fired, or a bullet hit school property for any reason, regardless of the number of victims, time of day, or the day of week. It includes gang shootings, domestic violence, shootings at sports games, and after hours, events, suicides, fights that escalate. So it's the whole gamut there. And so that's where, you know, again, you're going to see different numbers, depending on the way the researcher cuts the data. So I really have to say that because I've been in so many conversations about this. And it's a complex, that alone could be someone's career.

Jenn Tostlebe 07:26
yeah, that just makes me think of, you know, right after some of the more recent shootings have happened. I've seen a lot of social media posts of like, there's been this many shootings in 2023. And all of them are very large numbers, but they all differ. And so I think that just kind of goes back to your point, right, of how the researcher or the person reporting is defining the shooting? Yeah. All right. So clearly, we've been dealing with this tragic issue for a while now, even since the 1800s. And it's been pointed out that clearly is getting more frequent. So we are wondering, what are some of the general actions that school administrators, government actors and policymakers are taking in response to these acts of extreme violence? And are they effective?

Beverly Kingston 08:19
Yes, so there's a huge range of responses that people take and, you know, the things that I think we hear the most about are what we'll, we'll kind of label technical fixes or crisis response solutions. You know, you'll hear things about metal detectors. Having more security in schools, you'll hear things about arming teachers, Crisis Response protocols, what else? A bulletproof backpacks. Less often, you'll hear things like what we do, which is focusing on a comprehensive approach to school safety, addressing more the root causes of violence. What else? You know, I think, the a lot of times policymakers, depending what side they're on, you know, the approach is a bit different. On the Democratic side, there's a lot of push around gun policy, and that all the solutions are related to gun policy. And, you know, all the different pieces can matter to this puzzle of solving gun violence. But when you said, are they effective, there are things that are effective, and mostly those are not, you know, are not fully getting implemented to the level that we'd like to see them get implemented. After the Sandy Hook massacre, the federal government implemented something called the Comprehensive School Safety Initiative. And it was a significant amount of funding that was focused on a comprehensive approach to school safety. Was really grounded in the research, and that initiative stayed in existence during like the Obama era, then it turned into something called the Stop, Stop School Violence Act, I think was the next one. And there lots of good work has been done under stop school violence as well, a little bit of loss around some of the comprehensive approach. But still, some of that's been funded. And, you know, now, I'm not sure what it's going to turn into, like, from the federal

level under the Biden administration, but we are seeing under the Biden administration, some really interesting initiatives around addressing community violence that haven't really been coming forward in the way that they have. So we'll see kind of different people put their spin on it, but we stay what we try to do as a center and is stay focused on what does work and what we do know from the research is effective.

Jenn Tostlebe 10:57
So just a quick little follow up with that. So there's clearly all of these pieces, right. And I'm wondering if when you take each little piece, they all have their own effective, you know, components, and really you see the most progress being made when you do them in a comprehensive way.

Beverly Kingston 11:18
Yeah, that's what we argue. And okay, what we say is in, just like you're saying, so we want to look at some of those physical safety, target hardening approaches, we want to include crisis response, we want to include, you know, true prevention and intervention. And using the very best programs, practices, policies, and all of those areas, accessibility to firearms is an issue. So we want to look at safe storage practices. But in every area of all of those, we always want to make sure we're using the most effective practices. And when we don't know if they're effective, we want to, of course, evaluate them. And unfortunately, what gets funded often is not evaluated. And it's kind of the bright, shiny object. And there's a lot of what I've coined the term, I don't know if other people use it, but I call it evidence based confusion, because there's a lot of confusion in the world about what is it mean to be evidence based, and we train a lot on an evidence based continuum. So we can explain, you know, the different levels of evidence. And, you know, what we talk about is, ideally, we're scaling things that have the highest level of evidence of effectiveness. But that's not how the world actually works. I thought it would work that way. Like to graduate school, but it doesn't, but we're working on it. I mean, it's getting better. Some things are getting better.

Jose Sanchez 12:51
Yeah, absolutely. I remember, before I started the PhD program, I just kept hearing all these agencies saying we're doing evidence based work, we're doing evidence based work. And now that I'm into this five years, I'm like, Oh, we're using evidence based in a pretty loosey goosey kind of way.

Beverly Kingston 13:10
Yes. You got it.

Jose Sanchez 13:14
So I'm glad that you brought up some of like the governmental resources that have gone, gone into responding to school violence, because after the Covenant shooting, and this has gone pretty viral, so I'm guessing you, you saw this, but Tennessee Congressman Tim Burchett had a couple quotes that I thought were a little perplexing, I guess, would be bill a word where he said, we're not going to fix it. And I don't see any real role that we could do other than mess things up, because of the situation. But just about a month ago, you wrote an op-ed about things that we can do to address school shootings. So we just want to get your thoughts on how you would respond to the claims that are being made by someone like Congressman Burchett.

Beverly Kingston 14:06

Yeah, it's really unfortunate that political leaders are quoting things that aren't based on scientific evidence, and that that is getting a lot of traction, because here he is in a position where he could be learning about some of those things that we could be doing and promoting those and really being kind of a cutting edge leader and saying, Hey, let's figure those out. And let's take action because the truth is, there's so much we can be doing, you know, you all might know about the you know, the Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development programs. And basically, just for the purposes of the show Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development is a registry of evidence based programs with very high levels of evidence. So The most rigorous programs and just based on the Blueprints of you know, Blueprints and the programs that could work on preventing violence and intervening with those that are already exhibiting violence behaviors, we estimate, we could reduce violence by 30%. And that's based on those effect sizes from the Blueprint programs if we were to scale those and really put them into place. So just from that strategy right there, that would be like one kind of big lever that we could act on, we could take action. So there's absolutely, it's just not true that there's nothing we can do. And then certainly, in the article that I wrote with Dr. Sarah Goodrum, you know, we talked about three approaches. And you know, I can share those with you and a little bit, but we also want to follow it up with several other articles, because you can only fit, you know, so much in one of those articles. But we could see like a series of articles that talk about like, breaking down in chunks, all the things that we could do. Some things cost money, you know, no doubt, definitely things are going to cost, you know, required some like investment in education. But there's some, you know, things that every single person could do. So it's just not true, that there's nothing we can do. And many of the things that we recommend, this is what I do love about our work. It's like they cross or they're not political. You know, we work with Democrats, Republicans, all across the gamut, because we do ground the work in evidence. And we find generally that both parties really, really care about this issue of school safety, and want to take action. So we've worked really closely with Heidi Ganahl, she's a CU regent, she ran for governor, we've also worked, you know, worked with Ken Salazar, like lots of different elected officials, district attorneys, all kinds of different policymakers who really want to know what can we be doing. And we advise cities and like right now, in fact, you know, we talked earlier about the shooting in Denver, and we've been having conversations with people at the district in Denver, about some, you know, some of the work that we do in school safety, and they're very interested in learning more, and we're, you know, working in partnership to learn what actions they can take. And we do find so many policymakers across parties who want to make a difference and take action. So I stay forever hopeful, even though it's been a long road.

Jenn Tostlebe 17:39

Yeah. That's great.

Jose Sanchez 17:41

Yeah. So you mentioned the three approaches that you wrote about in the op ed. So we would actually like to ask you about those. And you know what, those three approaches that you wrote about to deal with school shootings are.

Beverly Kingston 17:54

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Yeah, I'm happy to go through those. And I also want to let you know that I just did a, I guess it was like a video recording with this, Katie Couric producer, and so she got hold of our article, and she did like a five minute segments on that. So I wonder if that's something that you also maybe could link to that, you know, she she actually it was really nice, because they got the conversation piece. And then she just she did a little bit of production on the piece. So that it's, I didn't interview with Katie, maybe one day, but it was just me on the video, but she, you know, edited it and did a really nice piece like illustrating the three points. But basically what they are, is, let me just say a little bit, give you a little background. So what we see in over and over again, in these in school texts in mass shootings, is the attacker exhibited warning signs that other people saw. So sometimes they, you know, they were it was like, visible concerning behaviors, they told someone what they were going to do those kinds of things. So we want to make sure that we teach students, adults, community members, everybody to be able to identify, and how to best communicate about those warning signs. You know, like, for example, in the the Arapahoe school shooting, which happened here in Colorado in 2013. There were we identified 27 missed opportunities to intervene. And in Parkland shooting, there were 60, at least 69 missed opportunities, but you can do this for any of the shootings. And it's not necessarily to say like, everyone is, like every I mean, it's definitely a many failures lead to this. But it's complex, why those things happen. And so one of the strategies there are to train people about those warning signs. And then the second recommendation is to promote what we call anonymous reporting systems. And basically what those are are systems where someone who sees those concerning behaviors can report those anonymously, 24/7. They're available around the clock, we have Safe to Tell in Colorado, their systems like that in many different states. And sometimes they're local, sometimes their state level, but they're not everywhere. And not everywhere, it's using some of the best practices with those systems. So we recommend that a system like that is every is everywhere, that people make that anonymous report, even if they're unsure, like, should I or should night like we don't, it's too hard to figure that out as an individual. So we always recommend that. And then the third area is that we, this is a big area in school safety research. And it's called behavioral threat assessment and threat management. So we recommend that schools conduct in most schools have this, conduct these threat assessment and threat management processes. And so that what happens is once people share their concerns, we have a system in place for those concerns to get addressed. And, you know, there's lots of recommendations around best practices around behavioral threat assessment and management, there's been some great research by Dewey Cornell's probably is the researcher that has done the very most in these areas. And I do want to say in each of these, in terms of with threat assessment, and threat management, and anonymous reporting, we also need to really make sure that we're taking care to make sure that the results of that are about getting help for the person. We're trying to avoid punitive processes that end up doing way more harm than good. But really looking at how do we get people that help that they need at the earliest points possible? The other thing while it's called behavioral threat assessment and management is that the threat might be like, what this does is it initially helps to see does this person just did they just make a threat? Or do they actually pose a threat? So it helps to discern that, but people's behavior changes over time, as I'm sure you both know, like, things can happen that lead to a crisis. And you've got to there's got to be things in place to monitor if something like that is happening, so that that person can get even more supports. And so how do we build, the kind of, this is the kind of the question and behavioral threat assessment is about this? How do we build these effective systems so that people can get the supports that they need. And I'm gonna go on a little tangent from this research, because of the backgrounds you both have, in your research and just talk to

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you about one of the things that we're doing that we're piloting, we're working with Dr. Pyrooz on this, it's a, let me back up, what happened was we tried to promote Safe to Tell in communities like Montbello, or Park Hill in Denver, and what we learned was that the students did not feel Safe to Tell what's safe for them, safe to tell, is responded to. There's a through law enforcement. And so it also is responded to through schools. But that scenario, I think, was impeding reports in communities of color. So what we learned is that young people in those communities did want to have a way, they did know about concerns, and they did want to find out a way to read they don't like to using the than the word report. So I'm going to change my language, what we called it initially, this system was a community, anonymous reporting system, basically community based anonymous reporting system, so we could teach the warning signs in the community, and then there would be a safe place to report and the idea was that it would be 24/7 answer by 24/7 answering point, and then it would go to community, it will go to community. So we're working with the community organization in Denver, Struggle of Love Foundation, which you might you may be familiar with, they're going to be the answering point. And then we're calling it connecting resources to community or something like that, instead of this not about like reporting, but I just wanted to kind of sit I know, that's a little bit of a tangent from the schoolwork. But that I think that there's something about these warning signs, and other people seeing and the process of engaging the community and the collective and being part of the solution. You know, as both of you are sociologists, you know, it's around like activating collective efficacy and informal social controls that are positive, you know, that will help create the kind of culture and communities that we really want. You get will get people, young people the help that they need, so they don't end up going on to a life of crime.

Jenn Tostlebe 24:50
Yeah, I think it's really great that you brought that up. I was actually going to ask you because with my dissertation research, the whole idea of labeling and harm, and all of these aspects came up. And so I know if I saw a warning sign, I would be probably hesitant to report it, even if it could have, you know, a potential positive outcome in the long run, just because of the, you know, like you said, the individual isn't great at discerning if this is actually a problem, or if it was just something someone said. So I think it's really awesome that you are going on this project to figure out how to best, A. word these things, but also how to best implement it in practice. So that way, you can help people.

Beverly Kingston 25:39
We have another project, too, that Dr. Sarah Goodrum is leading. And we're working with some media people to figure out how to message these warning signs. And, you know, nobody knows the answer to this. And so we're piloting things. And you know, that some of the, you know, our funded projects are around these topics.

Jose Sanchez 25:59
Yeah, that's great. And yeah, like, Jenn mentioned that, that's something that I've run into with my work, too, when some people may be hesitant to refer someone to a gang program, just and maybe some hesitancy around the word gang, just overall. So you definitely have some issues that we kind of need to figure out how to work around. But okay, so I think we can start moving towards one of, the article that you shared with us that we want to discuss today. So it was co authored by our guests, Beverly Kingston, and several of her colleagues. And the paper is titled, "Building schools readiness to

implement a comprehensive approach to school safety." And it was published in 2018. In Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review. And in this paper, Beverly and her colleagues, were looking to bridge the gap between research and practice by defining key components of a comprehensive approach to school safety, and to show how schools can assess whether they're ready to implement a comprehensive approach. And do this they use data from the Safe Communities Safe Schools Project, specifically, the readiness assessment data from 46 schools to highlight challenges that may come up and potential solutions to those challenges. Would you say that's like a fair summary of the article?

Beverly Kingston 27:24
I want to get that summary from you? Well stated.

Jenn Tostlebe 27:29
I'll Jose. Alright, so our first question for you about the papers really just about the motivation? Like what drew you into writing this paper?

Beverly Kingston 27:40
Yeah. Well, I have been free enough for my whole career, I guess, I've been talking about this comprehensive approach. And so when I say a comprehensive approach, we talk about that a comprehensive public health approach, you know, you can apply it for School Safety, you can apply it to all different forms of violence. And so I just, first of all, I realized that not everybody's talking about the same thing when we're talking about it. And I wanted to get down on paper, what we were talking about when we were talking about it. So like, that was one motivation. And we also, we had at that time, we had, you know, when I was talking about that Comprehensive School Safety Initiative funding, we received an amazing $6.2 million grant to do a randomized trial of our Safe Communities Safe Schools model. And we wanted to also, you know, start to publish on that and explain what the model is, is an example of a comprehensive approach. So there was also some motivation in getting that written up and just down at, you know, all of it all down on paper. And I think, you know, I would say that's probably enough in terms of just sort of the background motivation.

Jose Sanchez 29:01
And you just mentioned how you want it to sort of get on paper, what it is that you mean by comprehensive approach. So what do you mean, when you say, a comprehensive approach?

Beverly Kingston 29:14
I know okay, well, I mean, I'll start with sort of talking about it really broad, and then I'll talk about it a little bit more focused on school safety. So in a more broad way, when I talk about it, I'm thinking about an approach that's developmental. So it's thinking about the life course perspective, it's thinking about from, you know, before kids are born all the way throughout the life course, it's ecological. So that means it's across different levels. So at the individual, peer, school community, societal levels, and lately I've been thinking about the social media is almost like another social context. I don't know if you all I don't know if that's been studied, but I'm sure it has or starting to be but I keep thinking that that Like, whenever I start to list the, you know, these are the Bronfenbrenner ecological context, he didn't have social media when he was creating those. And that is such a place where we go, you know, it's like, so I've been thinking about that as well. And then here's some of the other pieces, a

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comprehensive approach addresses the risk and protective factors that lead to violence. So when we're talking about our model, which I'll get into in a little bit, is that we really try to look at what are those key malleable risk and protective factors, some things are more malleable than others. But it's really as important to even look at some of the things that we think might not be as malleable, like some of the structural issues, and thankfully, more attention is being focused on those as well right now. But in terms of a comprehensive approach for School Safety, we also want to make sure that it they're focused on creating a positive school climate that a comprehensive approach is going to assess school climate, so it's going to look at the overall school, but it's also going to look at the individual kids within and have like screening and assessment processes, a public health approach, and this comprehensive approach and schools both has, the use ideally, like some sort of Multi Tiered System of Supports, that's what they call it in schools. And basically, what that means is you want to have programs that are for all kids, you know, for those that are at risk, and for those that are struggling, we also want to see that a comprehensive approach that includes systems planning and integration. So it's thinking about working across complex systems, and, you know, some of the different elements that, you know, when we're doing this, it's data driven. You know, it's yeah, I guess it's we use like a strategic planning process as well, which I'll get into a little bit when I describe the model.

Jenn Tostlebe 31:49
Definitely comprehensive. So that's good.

Beverly Kingston 31:52
And that's just like the beginning.

Jenn Tostlebe 31:54
Oh, I'm sure yeah. All right. So you're using data from the Safe Community Safe Schools project. So can you tell us a little bit about what this project is?

Beverly Kingston 32:04
Yeah. So Safe Community Safe Schools was actually first developed after Columbine, I worked on the first version of it when I was in graduate school. So that was cool. I was a graduate student, and I worked as a research assistant at the center. And, you know, when we were developing Safe Community Safe Schools and Safe Community Safe Schools is being implemented a lot in Colorado, we have some national work. And then we also have a project where we're replicating it in Indonesia, and two locations in Indonesia, which is a really cool project and really neat, but basically what it is, it's a comprehensive, there's that word, again, actionable, and then individualized approach to school safety and violence prevention, it focuses on those key malleable risk and protective factors are things that schools can actually change, and it support schools to understand and effectively implement evidence based programs, practices, practices, and strategies that are matched to their needs. So it's, well we use the evidence, we also tailor to what the school's issues are. And a couple other things that we use a real broad definition of school safety that, you know, includes physical, emotional, and you know, this then social safety, and encourages both practices that are prevention, and intervention and addresses. Not only school safety, but also some of the outcomes we also were looking at were pro-social behaviors, and mental and behavioral health needs. And a little bit more about the model. When I

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talk about it, you know, in presentations and stuff all we often say it's the marathon, it is not a sprint, it is not a quick fix. It's a systems change. So it's a long haul.

Jenn Tostlebe 33:58
Alright, so I think that about covers the first aim of the paper. And so the second one was to address assessing schools readiness to implement a program like Safe Communities Safe Schools. And so what are the steps that schools can take to actually do this to assess their readiness for program implementation?

Beverly Kingston 34:21
Yeah, so let me just give a little context for that two schools, one researcher called schools, busy kitchens, and schools are so busy, and they're tasked with doing so much. And they're very under resourced. They're, you know, overwhelmed. And that was all stuff that we saw all the time before COVID. And now after COVID, the challenges are even more so than we've been trying to, you know, like, I've been doing this work for like 25 years, and we've been working with schools and trying to figure out like, how do we help build their capacity to do do a comprehensive approach, you know, to school safety, like, how do we do that. And so what we found was this issue of readiness is like kind of a way to, I don't know, crack that nut. So when we talking about readiness, we use readiness that the researchers that defined it this way are Abe Wandersman and Jonathan Scaccia, and they define readiness based on three different dimensions. So the first is motivation. So if you're not motivated to do something, if the schools aren't motivated, they're not going to do it. So we've got to assess motivation. But they could be super motivated. And I'm thinking about a school that we worked with that was really motivated to put into a program into place. But then there's two other C's that represent two types of capacity. The first is just general organizational capacity. So this means like, is a school resource? Do they have time? Do they have strong leadership? What's their culture and climate like all those pieces? And then the second is the innovation specific capacity? Like, do they have a champion for this initiative? Do they have, you know, people who are ready, you know, ready to get trained? Do they have some of the skills needed to implement whatever you're talking about. And so what we found like it that the school that I've got, in my mind, they had the motivation, but they did not have, they were so low on capacity, they had all new administration, they were putting out behavior fires everywhere, they wanted to do this innovation, but they didn't even have time to attend the trainings. Like we couldn't even schedule the meetings to do the intervention, we had all the funding for it, we had everything. And we could never get it off the ground. And so that's where after that I was like, what's going on? And so that's where readiness is so important. And there's different tools that schools can use to assess readiness. I mean, even if you're just asking questions around those three areas, that's really important. And there's different dimensions under each of those areas. So we've got tools that we work with in our safe community safe schools models that, you know, schools can reach out to us, we'll share them widely, but we don't put them just on the internet, because we really want to work in partnership with the schools and just give some guidance along with those tools. But just even having I think that some of that general information can be helpful.

Jenn Tostlebe 37:27
Yeah, absolutely.

Jose Sanchez 37:29

So like a quick follow up to this question. So like the program that I've been working with over the last five years or so they do a lot of work, getting referrals from schools, and I've mentioned a couple of times on the podcast that my wife is a school psychologist. So I kind of get some insights into some of the challenges that can may come up with like school administrations. And would you say that there's a distinction between like a school being motivated for program implementation versus being desperate for program implementation, where when I was, you know, kind of shadowing, outreach workers we'd hear, I would sometimes hear administrators say like, we want to do something, anything, and we needed to have that done yesterday, versus sometimes my wife will say, like, we're having sort of like these meetings over things that we might be able to do. And it just seems a little more focused, as opposed to, I don't even care what it is like, we just need to do something.

Beverly Kingston 38:32

Yes, that is the best question. And I want to say basically, one of the key things about the Safe Communities Safe Schools like what it is, it's kind of like an overarching strategic planning approach that helps schools slow down a little bit when they're in that place of desperation. And, you know, the same will say about Safe Communities Safe Schools, it's many other you can use similar things in communities like there's Communities That Care that uses this very similar planning approach. So it is really important that when there is that desperation, and there is I mean, I think we're seeing it right now with some of the levels of violence that are going on, like, what can we do right now, and, but it really is important that there is some slowing down, looking at the data, looking at the priorities, looking at what will fit within that context. What's actionable, slowing down and gearing up. One of the things also in Safe Community Safe Schools, you may know you probably do know about implementation science, I'm sure you do with studying fidelity and know what you're going to do in your dissertation. But, you know, we've tried to bring those implementation science practices into our work. We also bring some things like mindfulness and some of the like interesting I think they're really interesting and they're, they're not what we typically like learn in sociology training, but you may be some for with some of these things like, there's some systems change approaches, like, there's one called Theory You there's things like where your will try to slow down. And maybe we are, you know, we try to, at least in almost all of our school meetings, at least have a minute of mindfulness. Before we get started, we do a check in with the team, when we do it, like a feasibility meeting with schools that we're going to potentially work with, we often ask the questions, like, what are you most excited about, but what also is keeping you up at night. So we just like try to slow down and really connect, build relationships. So we're not just going too fast to solution, but also that we're really listening. If there's something that you can do quickly, you know, do it, you know, like that. But I think you can get like, things can really blow up. And you can really lose hope when things try to get implemented, and then they fail. So we try to avoid that. And I say that, again, after so much experience of that happening so many times in my career, you know?

Jenn Tostlebe 41:11

Sure. Yeah.

Jose Sanchez 41:13

So we want to start to get into the results of your analysis. So again, you're looking at the readiness assessment data that you collected from 46 schools. And you were looking at sort of differences between year one and year two, can you tell us what were your key findings when you were looking at these year to year changes?

Beverly Kingston 41:33
Yes. So basically, we looked at 46, you know, these 46 schools? Well, and we were looking at them only when they were in the this readiness was only for the treatment schools. And we studied those three dimensions. So we looked at the motivation, general capacity, and that innovation specific capacity. And we did the survey with the members of the school team. So we were looking at, you know, what changed from year one to year two, with the school teams. And I mean, what we saw, we saw six out of 21 of the scales increased significantly. And the most significant changes were in that innovation specific capacity area, which really makes sense since well, you know, since that was tied directly to the implementation of the Safe Community Safe Schools model, and our significant increases were seen in knowledge and skills, innovation, specific leadership. So that means that the people there was really leadership around trying to implement Safe Communities Safe Schools, and that there was also a supportive climate for the innovation. And I think some of the things I was just talking about, you know, some of those processes helped to build that readiness and that supportive climate, rather than just trying to jump in and just, here's what research says you should do. Just go do it. You know, it's like, there's just a lot of time setting that stage, and that's part of the Safe Community Safe Schools model.

Jenn Tostlebe 43:09
I think that's a great approach to because if you're, you know, one person is just kind of spearheading it and rushing into it if that person leaves then you're just kind of, like it kind of fizzles out. Right. And so I think that's probably a good approach in that regards to which I'm sure happens all the time. So yeah,

Beverly Kingston 43:30
yeah. Yes, yes, that is right on. And that was one of the things that we saw, you know, some of the issues were, you know, that affected, like our implementation findings. I think it's like four out of the 20, sorry, [inaudible] seeing the data very well. And just many of our schools had some staff turnover, like their counselors change, the principal changed, and right when they were trying to implement a Blueprints program. And so that was really challenging during that time, but you know, what we focus as part of the model on having a multidisciplinary team at the school to work on this so that it doesn't, it isn't just one person, it really does need to be out team.

Jenn Tostlebe 44:15
Alright, so given everything that we've just talked about, and the research you've been doing for 25 years, I think is what you said. What do you think are some of the implications of your work for research and then also for policy and practice?

Beverly Kingston 44:30
Yeah, well, I mean, one kind of general implication as that, I feel like we're trying really hard to solve or make steps into solving this puzzle of how to bridge research to practice. And so some of the things

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that we learn, when we you know, there's even little tiny pieces of things that we learn can help the fields and just like what the conversation we even had about readiness, what I see more and more is that we should really be assessing readiness before we just throw money at a solution, you know, at something, what are we doing around making sure that there's really good implementation supports? And what we want to do is, let's say the readiness isn't there, then that's where we start, you know, how do we build that capacity? How do we take action there? So it's not saying, Oh, you're not ready, you know, you know, you can't do school safety? No, no, no. It's like, how do you, you know, how do we help support wherever a school is? So I think that that's one area that we can affect policy. I mean, this is not necessarily what people want to hear. But what we can share the things that we know, in terms of school safety really needs more investment of resources in what's effective. schools do not have the resources to do everything that they're trying to do. One of the examples, when we, you know, we did, of course, in our research study, we did a lot of debriefing and listening to schools about what worked and what didn't, what did they like about the model, and they told us that what was really beneficial is we were able to provide an external facilitator to help run their meetings. I mean, we weren't doing the work for them, but we were doing some of it, you know, we were keeping things moving and on track, and then they all could be present and really, again, sit back and be more reflective on the work. And that's not, you know, like we're only grant funded, there's no infrastructure right now to support some of those kinds of positions, you know, there really, there's not what I call an infrastructure for prevention, for school safety, that's focused on what the evidence shows, and we really need to build that infrastructure. So that's what I say over and over again, to policymakers. And I've been saying it for a long time, I've been in this position for over 11 years, and many, many school shootings have occurred, unfortunately, I've talked to the media tons of times, repeat the same things over and over again. And, you know, I'm gonna keep saying them over and over again, and doing that, but I really hope that they gain traction, that what works from research, you know, is what the public then invests in, and all the systems around that. So yeah, so that's, there's some policy implications, I guess, you know, for practice. Again, I think some of the things that we're we learned strategies that work, then we can, you know, get them out. And that's why you know, that dissemination, we can train trainers we can, we don't want to hold on to this. One of the things we did, actually, this did come out of kind of a policy thing in 2019, I spoke to the Colorado legislature about the school safety work. And this was right at the 20 year anniversary of Columbine. And what we were saying to them was, we, there's been a lot of work and, you know, in crisis response, a lot of investment in crisis response, the drills, the law enforcement response to shootings. And okay, that's important. There was a lot to learn in those different areas, there's still a lot to learn in those areas. But the same kinds of efforts have not gone into prevention into building that infrastructure. So in Colorado, we have something, well, it's actually International, but it was developed here first in Colorado, by the I Love U Guys Foundation. It's called the standard response protocol. Well, the founder of the I Love U Guys Foundation, his daughter, Emily Keyes was killed in a school attack. And he and his wife started this foundation. They have like that marketing reign. And so they train all in, like super good practices in crisis response. And they've got it down. It's like scaled, it's being used all over the place. And we said, Can't we do something like that for violence prevention? Can't we get out those kinds of key elements of what we call it was a standardized violence prevention approach. And the legislature did not give us money. But out of that, we wrote a grant. And we wrote it with the National Association of School Resource Officers. And we developed that curriculum. It's called Project Unite. It's about to launch out of the National Association of School Resource Officers. And the thing is what we the idea was like, Sarah Goodrum, and I worked with them

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and a multidisciplinary team of experts to put it all together. But we wanted to see us try to scale these practices. And we thought that, you know, that that dissemination through law enforcement, they're going to train law enforcement, school teams could really spread it. So I guess that would be an example. I love how we're, you know, we're not trying to hold on to this, we're trying to like, figure out what are the ways that we can just get this knowledge out? So that'll be some examples. Yeah, yeah.

Jenn Tostlebe 50:12
That's exciting.

Jose Sanchez 50:14
All right. So we want to spend the last few minutes talking about some maybe the impacts of some of the responses that we see. And you just mentioned, like law enforcement, SROs, or school resource officers. And so we were wondering if having like a stronger, like law enforcement or SRO presence in schools, if that's an effective approach to school safety, or if it has some negative consequences that maybe outweigh any benefits that this approach might have?

Beverly Kingston 50:48
That's a super great question. And it's really obviously up in the world right now. And especially in the United States, I would say, in a huge way. And so I'll just summarize the literature, the studies that have been done are, there's some studies, you can show some benefits of SROs. Sometimes, basically, when they say they're hard to present, because the findings are mixed. Sometimes what they're shown there show a correlation with law enforcement in schools, and more young people, you know, more discipline, more out of school, it's, you know, suspensions, those kinds of discipline practices that we don't, the exclusionary practices, that types of discipline practices, we don't want to see, however, they don't account for well trained school resource officers. And so that's not teased out. And that needs to be. So what we will talk about is really making sure that the officers are trained as school resource officers, you know, NASRO is very rigorous about their training, they're very rigorous around, you know, promoting looking at your schools need to look, if they have an SRO, they need to be, then even if they don't, they always need to be looking at their data, to make sure that there aren't disparities in different populations. They need to look at their practices that there aren't exclusionary, they, most often what we hear when SROs are in schools, that they are not responsible for the discipline, but you know, then if it is a legal matter, then they, then they're called in. And I think it's a complex issue. But what we say is, you know, don't throw everything out, get people training, let's learn together, there are times when it is very, very valuable to have someone with that expertise. I mean, you know, Denver, what happen in the Denver shooting, you know, with the teachers were searching a kid, and then he shot, you know, he shot the teachers. So there's some, from the little bit that I know, this is not my necessarily my area of expertise. You want people who have training in searching kids, and can do it safely, as if you are going down that to, you know, if there's a reason to do that practice. So again, another area that I'll just tell you this, I know, we might be going long, but I think this is really important to know. So I'm one of those people that I've like, just see the bright side and everyone and there's always like everyone can be helped and healed. And I don't have what they call a skeptical criminal mindset. I think it's called this. So the Secret Service rug recommendations for when they do threat assessment, it's really important that somebody who has that kind of training in investigation is there to help because in some of the shootings, you're doing, you know, let's say, let's say in some of the threat assessment practices during

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that process, the person may be very manipulative. And so you know, they could trick someone into thinking that they're okay. And sometimes you may need someone with another background to tease through what's going on. And so what we say is like, bring multiple stakeholders to the table, be very careful that you're using, you know, best practices, again, evidence based practices in the disciplinary practices, that you're then looking at the data, that you're constantly checking that law enforcement are well trained. So I know that's kind of a long answer, but it's a very complicated topic.

Jenn Tostlebe 54:38
Yeah. All right. And we just quickly have one last question for you to kind of go back up to the top talking about school shootings. You know, it seems like Active Shooter drills are becoming kind of commonplace across the United States. And I've heard some of them are pretty graphic and like to include very realistic scenarios. And so we were just wondering if you know, what kind of impact these drills have on children? Are they seen as positive? Do they have negative mental consequences, etc?

Beverly Kingston 55:15
Yeah. So, again, this is it depends on the drill, the type and the following best practice guidelines. So fortunately, the National Association of School Psychologists and NASRO, the National Association of School Resource Officers came together and created a set of guidelines on best practices for lockdown drills. And, you know, if those best practices are followed, there's way less likely to create trauma. So that's really, really important. And, you know, the other thing too, is, it's not going to be a one size fits all reaction. So we want to do everything that we can to follow those guidelines to make sure the drills are not traumatic is not a best practice to create dramatic drills, that is not something that is a good thing to do. And again, I Love U Guys Foundation's drills have, there's some studies around them that showed some positive results. So you want to make sure that you're doing all that, but so if a kid's been already, like exposed to violence has been involved, you know, maybe in a shooting at their school, there are already experienced trauma, like all those factors could make the drill a harder thing no matter what on that kid. So just kind of really watching out for using the best practices, watching out for the individualized, unique needs of kids. And that we have to keep checking and researching to look at the implications. I mean, there are some really good reasons to have those drills and the events or even if they happen, and those best practices aren't put in, you know, aren't being used, then that was already traumatic can be even more traumatic. So there's good reason. But we've got to do everything that we can to not do harm.

Jenn Tostlebe 57:11
 Awesome. All right. Well, those are all of the questions that we have for you. Thank you so much for coming on and speaking with us. If anyone wants to reach out to you, you know, you mentioned a few resources and the one video that you mentioned, we're happy to share that and put on our website. But where can people find you if they want to reach out?

Beverly Kingston 57:34
Okay, at our website, the Center for the Study of Prevention of Violence, but I don't have I don't know it by heart, which I should.

Jenn Tostlebe 57:41

Okay. We can look it up and put it on. Yeah. The description,

Beverly Kingston 57:48
I think through this Center for the Study of Prevention of Violence website. I mean, people are also can email me at my email if you want to put that as a contact. Awesome. All right. I'll see

Jenn Tostlebe 57:59
you again. Okay. Hey, thanks for listening.

Jose Sanchez 58:03
Don't forget to leave us a review on Apple podcasts or iTunes. Or let us know what you think of the episode by leaving us a comment on our website, thecriminologyacademy.com.

Jenn Tostlebe 58:13
You can also follow us on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook @thecrimcademy.

Jose Sanchez 58:25
Or email us at thecrimacademy@gmail.com The next next time