

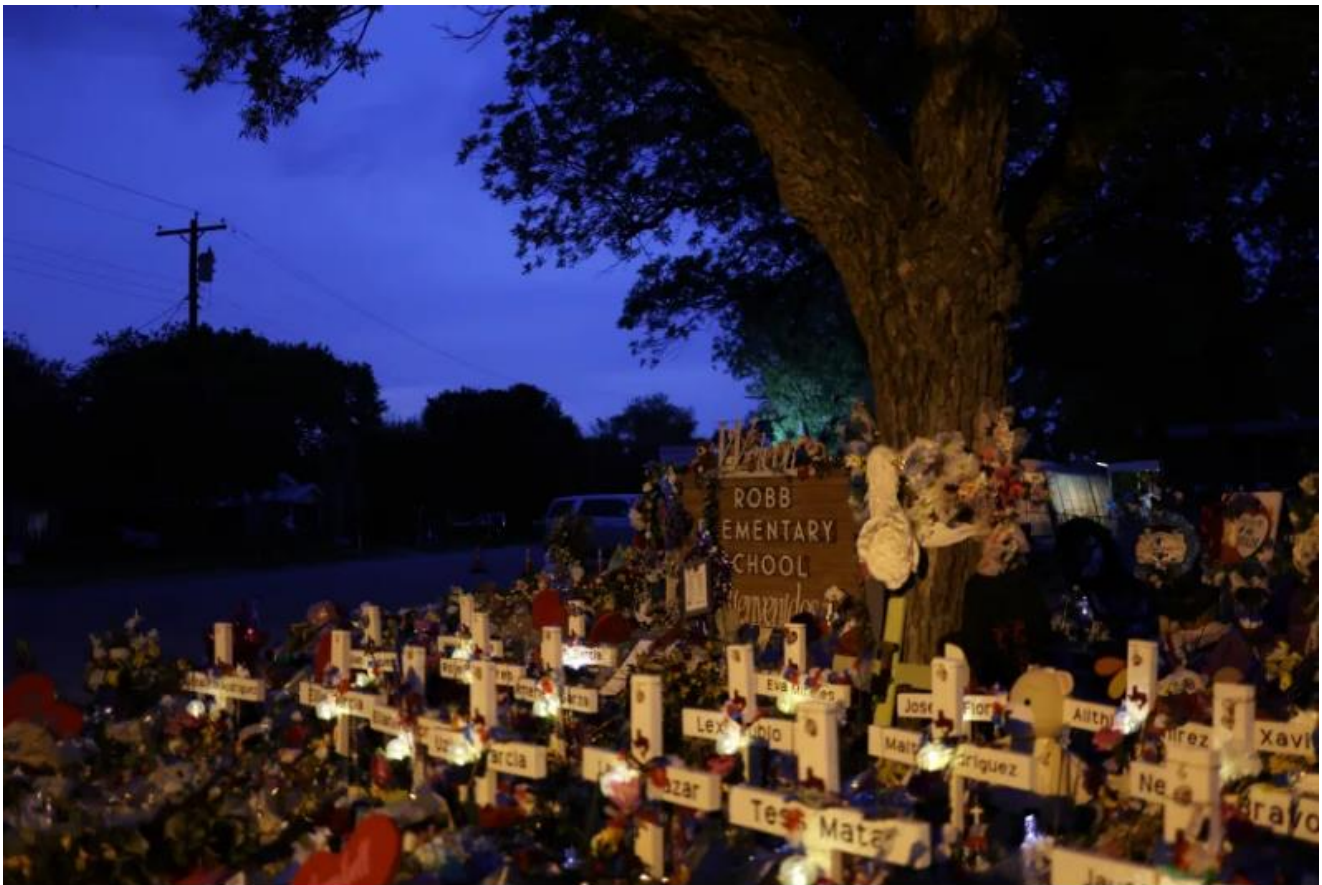
OTHER VIEWS COMMENTARY

Don't blame fatherlessness for mass shootings

There needs to be more research on mass shooters before any link to fatherlessness can be established. What we do know is that fatherlessness is something that increases the odds of criminal behavior overall.

By Jeffery M. Leving | Jun 9, 2022, 10:49am CDT

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Wooden crosses are placed at a memorial dedicated to the victims of the mass shooting at Robb Elementary School on June 3, 2022 in Uvalde, Texas. | Getty

After recent mass shootings in Buffalo, Uvalde, and Tulsa, some lawmakers are blaming “fatherlessness” and the “breakdown of the family.”

While they are correct that fatherlessness often leads to bad things and is the most reliable predictor of crime in America, when it comes to mass shootings, we still need more evidence to support the theory.

On May 25, a day after an 18-year-old gunman entered an elementary school and killed 19 children and two educators at an elementary school in Uvalde, Utah Sen. Mike Lee, a Republican, questioned whether fatherlessness contributed.

“Every time one of these tragedies occurs, I think we, for far too long, fail to look back at the root causes of rampage violence,” Lee said at a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing. “Why is our culture suddenly producing so many young men who want to murder innocent people? It raises questions like, could fatherlessness, the breakdown of families, isolation from civil society or the glorification of violence be contributing factors?”

To be clear, Lee is not the first person to ask about a link between fatherlessness and mass shootings. In 2019, after another spate of mass shootings, a narrative that made the rounds said 26 of the 27 most deadly mass shooters in the U.S. came from fatherless homes. However, according to [Snopes](#), that statistic is both outdated and incorrect.

Snopes is an independent fact-checking outlet that has traced the origin of the 26 of 27 statistic back to a 2015 [article](#) in the Federalist — which did *not* state that “26 out of the 27 deadliest mass shooters came from fatherless homes.” Instead, the article claimed that by looking at a CNN article, seven of the deadliest mass shootings were perpetrated by males under the age of 30, and out of that seven, only one was raised by his biological father:

Snopes examined the original CNN list the Federalist article cited, and attempted to find out if any of the other listed shooters was raised by a father. Snopes noted that information was not readily available from previous studies or databases, and newspaper records didn’t always provide specific information about familial relations. Snopes also said that it was unclear if the “fatherless” household claim would include stepfathers, adoptive fathers, or divorced parents. Because the Federalist article originally pointed to males under 30, it’s also unclear if this “fatherless” examination should include mass shooters over the age of 30.

Snopes then searched contemporaneous news reports to see if any of the shooters originally listed in CNN’s “27 Deadliest Mass Shootings in U.S. History” article grew up in households with a father and found that several of them did.

So, it is clear to me that there needs to be more research on mass shooters before any link between fatherlessness can be established. What we do know is that fatherlessness is something that increases the odds of criminal behavior overall.

The Fatherhood Educational Institute has shared statistics showing that 72% of all teenage murderers grew up without fathers; 60% of rapists were raised in fatherless homes; 70% of kids now incarcerated in juvenile corrections facilities grew up in a single-parent environment. Additionally, a growing body of evidence shows a high correlation between fatherlessness and violence among young men, especially violence against women.

There is no question that mass shootings are a major problem in this country, with 251 so far this year — more than one per day — according to the [Gun Violence Archive](#). Those numbers show that we need to address and solve this problem immediately.

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