

‘This Is the Price We Pay to Live in This Kind of Society’

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Seeing news of mass shooting after mass shooting can produce both a stress response and a cynical sense that nothing will change.

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The sites of mass shootings have become instantly recognizable markers of tragedy in the geography of recent American history: There’s Columbine, Parkland, Aurora, the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Sandy Hook, and Virginia Tech, among many others. And now there’s the Tops market in Buffalo, and Uvalde.

Each of these events has its own particulars—and many shootings, like [the \(at least\) 14 over Memorial Day weekend](#), get scant individual attention—but together they form a gutting pattern. Every successive update, every push notification and TV news alert, feels entirely preventable yet sadly inevitable. Being exposed to news of shooting after shooting, with no apparent sign that anything will change, can produce a pair of dispiriting psychological outcomes: Each additional event seems to come with a more intense stress response, while at the same time leaving people feeling even more helpless about the prospect of ending this grim cycle.

A horrific news event is a tragedy for those it directly affects, but simply reading and watching coverage of it is associated with an uptick in symptoms of acute stress, such as intrusive thoughts about the event and avoiding reminders of it. For instance, [one study published in 2014](#) found that the more coverage people saw of the Boston Marathon bombings, the more such symptoms they experienced. Dana Rose Garfin, an adjunct professor of nursing and public health at UC Irvine and a co-author of the study, told me that some news consumers exhibited more symptoms than even those who were present at the Boston Marathon or knew someone who was, suggesting the power of being exposed repeatedly to the news.

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