

**Violence and Network Society
School Shootings and Social Violence in Contemporary Public Life Conference**

November 6-7th 2009, Helsinki

Workshop

**SOCIAL VIOLENCE: ORGANIZATIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL
PERSPECTIVES**

Abstract

Authors: Salli Hakala & Maarit Pedak

**Crisis Management, Symbolic Leadership and Ongoing Crisis Communication:
Victim-centred view of School Shooting**

There are many similarities to be found in major accident, a natural disaster or catastrophe and in acts of terrorism. These include: the abruptness of the event, a great sense of insecurity over what has happened and a call for rapid action. The presence of victims always alters the nature of a crisis situation. How does this presence of victims appear in crisis management, crisis communication and in media activity? For what purpose is symbolic leadership needed for, and what is it? We examine and conceptualize the crisis management situation from the viewpoint of the victim present. The most agonizing question is always the situation of the victim: who are being part of the crisis situation, where they are and how they or their relatives and friends can be contacted. The media is also the first to hunt down victims and their relatives. Who can protect, and, should someone protect the victims from the traumatic publicity?

The making of right decisions, at an acute stage of the crisis, necessitates a constant situation awareness activities as well as taking the notion of publicity into consideration, especially in network society. The Finnish school shootings are investigated also from the viewpoint of practical crisis management. Our research demonstrates that for the flow of information, for forming a situation picture and disseminating it and for the media and crisis communications, at least three separate communication facilities are needed. These are: the common *command centre* for the strategic management and ongoing crisis communications, the *support centre* for the victims and their relatives for instant need and information, as well as, *the media centre* for reporters. In all of them the nature and the functions of communication is very different.

In this research, we look at the ways of crisis management in their socio-cultural context. The school shootings were attacks into the symbolic core of the Finnish welfare society ó the school, and not just attacks aimed at single individuals or massacres targeting schools. The meaning of symbolic is being emphasized in these kinds of crises.

In the research article, we claim that the background of the violent, extensive crime seeking for media spectacle holds various factors. These factors need to be taken into consideration when preparing for an acute crisis, both in crisis management, in communications, and in aftercare. The management, leadership and communication in an acute crisis are always more of a dialogic activity than a strategic one.