

Crisis and Communication Research Project

The first comparative research report of communication in the Jokela and Kauhajoki School shootings has been published at the Helsinki University's Department of Communication Research Centre (CRC) publication series. *Crisis and Communication* – research project is a two-year project of the recently largest Finnish crises: the tsunami, the Jokela and Kauhajoki School shootings and of the Nokia town water crisis. The project director is Salli Hakala, a Helsinki University lecturer and Master of Social Sciences, who is also responsible of writing this report. University lecturer and Ph.D. Johanna Sumiala, together with Master of Social Sciences Minttu Tikka, act as the researchers in the part discussing the school shootings and the media.

The research report has been published in the Internet in the following address (in Finnish):

<http://www.valt.helsinki.fi/blogs/crc/tutkimus.htm>

Salli Hakala

SCHOOL SHOOTINGS IN THE NETWORK SOCIETY

An Analysis of the Communication in the Jokela and Kauhajoki Crises

Publisher: The University of Helsinki, Communication Research Centre CRC

Salli Hakala and Johanna Sumiala:

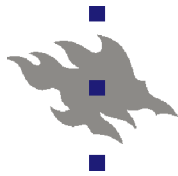
**School Shootings were an Attack into the Symbolic Core, – the School - ,
of the Welfare Society**

Introduction

Mass murder in a Finnish school was not supposed to be possible. It was not listed as one of the threats in the new crisis management model in Finland, created after the tsunami – not before the Jokela incident. The crisis reveals more of the operation modes and cultures of organizations, private people and media, than any other situation. Therefore crises need also to be researched.

Facts about the Finnish School shooting crises:

Jokela is a town in the municipality of Tuusula, Finland. On November 7, 2007 at Jokela High School the gunman, 18-year-old student of the school, Pekka-Eric Auvinen entered the school armed with a semi-automatic pistol. He killed eight people and wounded twelve others before shooting himself in the head. The shooter died later that evening at the Helsinki hospital. This was the second school shooting tragedy in Finland. The first school shooting was in 1989, in Rauma Western Finland. Two people were killed at Raumanmeri Junior High School.



Only less than a year later, on September 23, 2008, Matti Juhani Saari, 22-year-old student killed ten people and wounded several others with a semi-automatic pistol before shooting himself. The gunman died a few hours later in Tampere University Hospital.

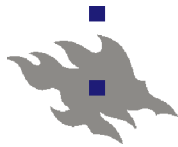
The project analyzed the organization, flow of information and communication in the Jokela and Kauhajoki crises. Special focus was given to the analysis of the primary actors in the crises, the shooters, the media, and the official society. The Jokela and Kauhajoki empirical research is based on the interviews of the primary actors of the crises, the documented data, as well as a vast media and network data analysis.

Interference of the Regional Government disconnected the Fast Information Flow of the Local Police

The municipal manager is, according to the law, responsible for the organization of the crisis at his/her own area. In the Jokela case, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health's emergency administration operated differently than the crisis management model, or the municipal law, implies. The municipal administration of Tuusula was practically ignored in both the crisis centre organization and in the recruitment of the crisis aftercare specialists. This new mode of action created difficulties in both the crisis centre management, as well as in the aftercare.

In the municipality of Tuusula, immediately, within 15-minutes of the shooting, a crisis organization was started in line with the response plan, which decided on the immediate practical actions to be taken. The municipal manager called up the response management team, and headed for Jokela. After a hasty meeting, the manager of educational affairs, the director of education and the chief physician, immediately left for Jokela, where the five municipal social workers, on-call for social services, had already arrived. The municipal response management was paralyzed during the first day of the crisis for two reasons: firstly the police could not be contacted by the municipality administration; nor could the required information of the municipality operation be received from the police. Secondly, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, unexpectedly, appointed the chief of psycho-social services from the neighboring area to manage the large crisis centre, of which he had no experience of. The problem became blocked by the information blackout and the authority questions between the crisis centre and the rest of the community crisis management.

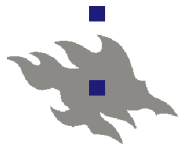
The regional government of Southern Finland assigned the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) to be in charge of the investigation in the events of Jokela, after a fair hour of the beginning of the incident, causing an information blackout in the police operation. Because of this blackout, the official activity suffered for the whole of the first day, as did the victims' relatives, the media reporters and therefore the large audience. The local police of (the region of) Central Uusimaa had, under the circumstances, organized the school rescue and started to evacuate, as well as organized other police



forces to the scene, quickly. The police of Central Uusimaa decided, at an early operative stage of the crisis, to use media as a part of the management of the crisis: the first press release, where it was reported of at least of three victims, was given an hour after the police were informed of the events. The police's contact information number was also given out in the written handout. Additionally, the local police announced already at 12.45 pm that in the "Jokela church (address of: Kouluraitti 11) was to be founded a centre (a crisis centre), via which, amongst other things, was to be distributed information to the school students' parents." In this way, the victims' relatives, as well as the media, knew how to head for the crisis centre. This was not noted by the police, the municipality, or the ministry-organized crisis centre management.

The police's management and information problem was caused by the "anxiety" of the regional government and the transfer of the investigation management to the National Bureau of Investigation, at a stage, where the Helsinki Police's task force, so called Karhu (Bear) Team, had made entrance into the school building. The transfer of investigation responsibility from the Police of Central Uusimaa over to the National Bureau of Investigation also transferred the responsibility of publicity over to the NBI. This slowed down the police information at a critical time, practically by five hours, and caused confusion over the liability relations both to the relatives and to other officials. While the official responsibility over the publicity was still being held by the Police of Central Uusimaa, the NBI was dealing out information and informing of possible victims via telephone to the reporters that made it through the lines. The NBI reported, for the first time, officially, nearly three hours after the information responsibility had been transferred over to it. In the handout, there was no contact information with one could achieve further information. The only operating one, at the time, was the tip-off telephone for the relatives, where one could leave information to the police. The greatest problem during the first six hours was that the other officials could not contact the police, and they could not report nearly anything, because the police was not reporting of the events, nor giving out a number, where the officials could obtain information from. This was due to the police's interpretation that the police operation in hand was only a little more demanding than in "a normal" situation. According to other officials, this was a crisis that touched upon various officials, and that should have required cooperation in crisis management.

Official, especially the National Bureau of Investigation's, understanding of the communication in Jokela, was that firstly there was the police operation to be carried out and then only the public to be informed. This model did not function in Jokela. In Kauhajoki police acted as coordinator for the other officials. The strategy of the Chief Criminal Inspector Urpo Lintala, who ran the communications in Kauhajoki, was to arrange several press conferences, where also the other official actors were present. This was not the case in Jokela, where the National Bureau of Investigation's Tero Haapala centralised the communication management investigation for the general administration, in Vantaa. In Jokela, people had to wait for nearly five hours, before the National Bureau of Investigation set up the first press conference. In a network society, in crises like this one, all information spreads out instantly, globally. If the officials don't take the



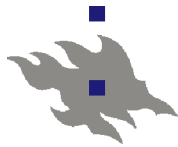
responsibility over the communications and offer information, other actors fulfill the media space in the crisis. Both in Jokela and Kauhajoki cases the shooters received a great amount of public attention with the visual material they had posted about themselves before committing their crimes.

The National Bureau of Investigation's expertise in informing over the investigation and, most of all, their convincing appearance in media brought also credibility to the police operation. In a four month media tracking of the Jokela crisis, Tero Haapala was revealed as the most used official source and – actor by the media, during those four months. The next most used (as an official source), whom the media turned to, was the Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen. In Kauhajoki, the most important official actors and sources, during the ten days following the attack, were the Interior Minister Anne Holmlund, the Chief of Investigation Jari Neulaniemi from the NBI, and the Chief of Police Mikko Paatero. Apart from the investigation's successful communications and the critique aimed at the Interior Minister, this was affected by also the question focused around the police management over the gun licensing.

Jokela Crisis Centre was organized by The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health on the Principle of “Ad Hoc”

The most problematic situation in the beginning of the Jokela crisis, concerning the victims and the relatives, was due to the crisis centre's management, as the relatives could not receive information on-site over the events taking place, or of the possible victims or the upcoming day. The crisis centre practically formed an information vacuum on the 7th of November, 2007. In the crisis centre, it was not possible to follow (through the Internet or the television), how the media was covering the event. In practice, the Tuusula municipal workers were running at times, over to the other side of the street to the Perttu's Elementary School, in order to follow the media news broadcasts and the Internet. On the other hand, there was also psychological information vacuum. The situation was paradoxical. There were students at the crisis centre, who had seen deceased victims on-site and who could indentify the victims' relatives who were waiting for their children on the other side of the church hall. However, no one, – not the police, the psychologists of the Finnish Red Cross, nor the pastor at the police force or any other church and psychiatric helpers couldn't do anything about it – It seemed that no one could overcome the psychological gap of knowing and not-knowing at the same time in the church hall.

On the first day of the crisis, after the police gave away the management over to a person appointed by the Ministry of Social Services and Health, at 2.30pm, the responsibility over the management and organization of the crisis centre was being held by the Chief of the Vantaa city Psycho-Social Services. In Jokela, the so-called ‘Vantaa crisis centre-model’ was tried out, which is preparing at the time as a nationally functioning model dealing with special situations, as a so-called ‘nationwide mobile response team’. The most important problems at the crisis centre were linked with the flow of information, the organization and the crisis management, due to this principle of ‘ad-hoc’. The meetings



were not being headed by anyone, nor were there any memos written initially. The meetings resembled therapeutic sessions and hearings. The number of people attending varied, especially on the first day, when there were tens of people present at the same time. This was a very ineffective way of running the crisis centre. The model of victim support centre (Tuje model in Finnish) suggests that the meetings should have had representatives present, only from the most important groups, one of each, whereby the meetings would have formulated into meetings leading and delegating the crisis. In Jokela, they turned into chaotic therapeutic sessions and the essential people in charge could not gather information. And they were not able to decide on common actions, concerning the following day and the situation in general. At times, nearly all of the aid personnel were present at the meetings, whereby the victims and their relatives in the church hall, were left almost alone. The response management of the Tuusula municipality, was left separated, both in the management of the crisis centre and in recruiting the crisis aftercare experts.

Local Authority turned into Crisis Leaders

Both crises made it clear that the best knowledge about the crisis management was on the local level, both in the municipal crisis management and in the local police. The both institutions knew how to start action, what to do, who to inform and who to ask for more help. In the municipality of Tuusula, the Municipal manager Hannu Joensivu started, right away, after 15-minutes of the shooting, an organization according to the response plan. This plan dealt with the immediate practical matters. Public Information Officer Tuula Panula, was the one in Tuusula municipality to up date the situation on the municipality's web page. She started in the beginning of the crisis, maintained contacts to different officials and helped the municipal administration in international communications. But municipal manager crisis management paralyzed for two reasons. Firstly he could not connect to the police who were in charge in first hours. Secondly none from Ministry of Social Affairs and Health called him in order to inform the new model of crises management and the new manager of crises centre in Jokela. In Kauhajoki, the Town manager Antti Rantakokko and the Principal of the Institute, Tapio Varmola, started up an operation, as instructed by the response plan, immediately. In both of the municipalities, the crisis management role was taken over by municipal managers. One can also learn from these models of crisis management.

The Kauhajoki City's and the Kauhajoki Service Industrial Institute's ('Sedu') crisis organization management acted mainly according to the rehearsed crisis model and the crisis management was very successful. At the beginning of the school shootings, all of the central actors, both in the city administration, the institute and also in the State Government, were, by coincidence, assembled on that Tuesday morning, hence the organization at various levels was fast and effective. Moreover, in Kauhajoki, people had after Jokela rehearsed a school shooting scenario in different organizations and organizational levels. The most noticeable change, in comparison with Jokela, was the organization of the press conference for the media. The police organized the briefing much sooner. The press conferences were located at the city hall, where journalists had



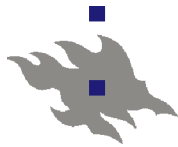
their base. In the case of Jokela, neither the police, nor the manager of the crisis centre, the municipality of Tuusula, the church, or any other actor held a single press conference for the media on the first day. Thus, there were tens of journalists and photographers waiting in vain to hear facts and news about the Jokela crisis. Even one press conference could have helped the situation, had it been organized by the officials at the Jokela community centre. This would have been a great help for a number of officials, the media and most of all, the family and relatives of the victims and the school personnel. Joint press conferences, with various actors and officials present, have a great symbolic power to create the feeling of collectivity and the sense of togetherness in a difficult and challenging situation. In Jokela, the police acted to isolate itself from the rest of the society in order to solve the crisis and only then was it willing to inform of its actions and results.

In Kauhajoki, the Southern Pohjanmaa (Ostrobothnia) Police Department took over the management of the events, as did the Central Uusimaa (New Land) Police Department in Jokela. The Kauhajoki Police Department named a single police officer to organize public communications. The first press conference, held by the police, took place an hour after the start of the events. During the first day, the local police organized altogether four press conferences at the city hall, where reporters' questions were answered by the Mayor, the Chief of Rescue and the vicar, in addition to the local police, whereby all of the primary actors were present on the same occasion. This was a successful communication model in terms of disseminating information and establishing the sense of collectivity. The National Bureau of Investigation appeared in the media, only, when its' investigators had time to make their way from Vaasa and Vantaa into Kauhajoki. In the Kauhajoki case, the problem was that press releases were not sent out to media, nor were they delivered via the Internet. The responsibility over this fact was, besides for the local policeman Urpo Lintala, in the investigatory administration of the National Bureau of Investigation, on the Chief of Police Inspector Jari Neulaniemi and his aid from Vantaa, the NBI's Police Sergeant Tuula Kyrén.

In all of the recent crises, the greatest problems of the information flow have been insufficient technical systems, in addition to human shortcomings and management trouble. It was not possible to steer clear of trouble in crisis communication, because the blocking-up of the telephone centers, the strain on the cell phone-, and the 'Virve'-networks and the collapsing of the web pages, prevented the connection between various officials, and hindered also the flow of information and the contact with the victims and the relatives. This (kind of trouble) results to human anxiety and produces mistakes, for the leaders, as well as for media.

School Shootings as a Media Catastrophe

The school shootings were a catastrophe for the Finnish society in many levels. The rampage shooting disasters were able to destroy the prevailing moral order of the organized society - at least for a moment..



In the modern society the media plays a key role in reporting the catastrophe. In Jokela and Kauhajoki cases the media started to organize the chaos by modifying an unexpected event into catastrophic news. The everyday media flow was cut off. The ready-made program charts and daily schedules were pushed aside. Separate crisis editorial teams were formed and the editorial resources were increased and re-arranged. In other words, the media started to construct the catastrophe news, by separating the event from the regular news flow, and by choosing the primary actors and viewpoints (of the hero, the enemy and the victim), and structuring the event into various narratives, of which it then repeated. In this way, the media constructed an unexpected piece of news, into a *media catastrophe*.

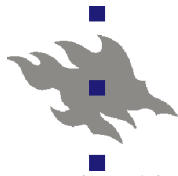
A crisis shocks, because it has the ability to hit the core symbols of the society. The Kauhajoki and Jokela massacres can be considered attacks, not only towards individual people, but also towards the symbolic core of the welfare society, its sacred centre. With their actions, the school shooters destroyed lives of many people, and in a symbolic level, they revealed the vulnerability of the Finnish school system, a corner stone of the welfare society. These catastrophes demonstrated the weakness of the school system. In their research, we argue that the shooting of the Principal in Jokela and the shooting of a teacher in Kauhajoki, can be interpreted as a message that it is possible to kill the authority. The attack into one's own class room in Kauhajoki made it clear that, not even the most familiar social network, is safe.

When analyzing a media catastrophe, one must ask, to whom the media gives a voice to, who it represents as an active agent, whose pictures are put on the story, and whose actions are being followed? An analysis into the printed media over the Jokela and Kauhajoki school shootings shows that the shooters rose as the absolute primary actors. A thorough analysis of the Jokela media material reveals that the shooter was the most important source, as well as the actor, for media material. In the Kauhajoki school shootings, the media repeated the Jokela material and hoisted the shooter on the parading place of the national media.

Researchers Salli Hakala and Johanna Sumiala claim: “The School Shootings destroyed the Finnish Information Society’s Utopia of Success”

In addition to the myth of the welfare society, the school shootings also destroyed another mythic narrative, the utopia of success in the fantasy of the information society, argued the researchers, Hakala and Sumiala. The Kauhajoki and Jokela School shootings indicate that the technology in a Finnish society, can also be used against the society itself as a means of destruction instead of construction.

According to Johanna Sumiala, the shooters YouTube-videos manifest a willingness and ability to destroy oneself, one's peers and one's authority. The actions of the men at school turn out as a kind of superman fantasies. The school shootings open up a frightening scenario of the future of the society, where the young man, instead of a symbol of hope, becomes the symbol of threat. The media plays an important role in



nurturing this type of social imaginary with endless circulation of violent images of the disasters. This is how the shooters end up turning themselves – with the aid of the media – into immortal beings, at least in the virtual reality. In the contemporary network society, a local or a national crisis, like the school shooting, transforms itself in a flash, thanks to the Internet and other media, into a global phenomenon.

The media catastrophe provokes us to also ponder the meaning of symbolic leadership. “The Symbolic leadership - or the lack of it, became visible, in a ruthless way, in the online-communication, in both of the crises”, points out the researcher Salli Hakala.

“The Prime Minister, the Interior Minister and the Minister of Education, read out their speeches of condolence from a paper, in a televised press conference. If the minister doesn’t look at the audience he is addressing in his talk, the feeling of presence does not communicate itself. And yet, the symbolic leadership is constructed in the presence in a time of national emergency”, says Salli Hakala. The same was true with the President. The President of the Republic, in neither of the crisis, rose to be a symbolic leader, of what could be expected, of the presidential institution in such situation”, Hakala claims from the basis of a media-analysis.

School Shooting Messages circulate around the Internet

In the research, the school shootings were analyzed, also from the viewpoints of the Internet communications. The view of communication, characteristic to the network society, can be described as the model of dissemination. Dissemination refers to message distribution on the Internet. Dissemination is, so to speak, not a sender-orientated or a community-orientated type of communication. Instead the attention is focused into the distribution processes and the ‘soil’ where the message is being “planted” into.

It the endless dissemination and circulation of the texts and images on the Internet that characterizes the school shootings, as the Finnish media catastrophes. It is difficult to point out a clear starting or an end point, for the events. The gunmen started to distribute and to circulate their messages, long before the acts of shooting. The messages, which had once been removed from the Internet, reappear there, over and over again. Regardless of the fact that, the network servers have abolished both the Jokela and the Kauhajoki killers’ Internet profiles and websites, are their traces still made possible to follow. The active network community and the social media users had enough time to load and to save the killers Internet material, before it was removed from the sites. The images from the shooters ‘IRC’-Gallery profiles and from the YouTube account, as the videos and photographs, are still circulating on the Internet. The material is repeatedly being commented on, modified and remade on various occasions. If in the television-dominated era the crisis had a beginning, middle and an end, in the network society the media catastrophes are rather characterized by an endless circulation. The recycling of messages on the Internet, in other words, the circulation, seems to be the mode of communication



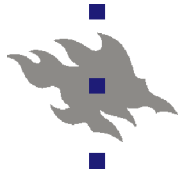
best characterizing the Jokela and Kauhajoki School shootings, argues the media researcher, Johanna Sumiala.

“When the news has reached its peak and the extensive uproar in the mainstream media has vanished, the Finnish school shootings, as media catastrophes, still continue their lives on the Internet. This is not innocent communication. The continuous recycling and repetition also offer and maintain cultural patterns of the school shootings, easy to copy-cat”, claims Sumiala.

An Ongoing Research: Crises and Communication – a Comparative Study of the Crises

Crises and Communication – research project is a two-year comparative study of the recently largest Finnish crises: the tsunami, the Jokela and Kauhajoki School shootings and of the Nokia town water crisis. The project analyses what the differing crises reveal of the society and its organizations, such as the media, the authority and the ordinary citizen.

Crises and Communication – research project is directed by the University lecturer Salli Hakala. In the research project, various crises are being researched in an international comparison, from the viewpoints of media agency, the Internet and crisis management in a network society. The research group is formed by Master of Social Sciences Salli Hakala, Master of Social Sciences Heidi Lavento, Ph.D. Johanna Sumiala and Master of Social Sciences Minttu Tikka. The study published, at the time of writing, is the project’s second research report **Salli Hakala: School Shootings in the Network Society. An Analysis of the Communication in the Jokela and Kauhajoki Crisis. (Communication Research Centre CRC, the University of Helsinki)**. The project published a research on the Nokia town water crisis, in November, 2008. **Hannele Seeck, Heidi Lavento & Salli Hakala: Crisis Management and Communication. A Case Study of the Nokia Town Water Crisis.** (Published in the ‘Acta’-series of the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities, number 206.) *Crises and Communication* – project is being funded by the Helsingin Sanomat Foundation. Whilst the research into the Jokela School shootings was ongoing, a similar shooting incident took place in Kauhajoki. Because of this, the Helsingin Sanomat Foundation granted additional funding to the Communication Research Centre CRC for the project *School Shootings in the Network Society*. The project has also published among other things, the *Work and the Human Being* – theme number on the crises (The Finnish Institute of Occupational Health), edited by Hannele Seeck, in April 2009. The theme number ‘Crises in the Network Society’ was being published in May, in the scientific journal: *Media & Communication. A Journal of Cultural and Social Research*, edited by Salli Hakala.



Autumn of 2009: An International Conference on Violence in the Network Society

The research group holds an international conference titled ' *Violence and Network Society* ' on the 6th and 7th of November, 2009 at the University of Helsinki. The key note speakers of the conference are, Professor Douglas Kellner, Professor Barbie Zelizer and Professor Stewart R. Clegg. The chair of the conference is University lecturer, Ph.D. Johanna Sumiala.

Additional information on the research project and on the conference is to be found at:
<http://blogs.helsinki.fi/crisisandcommunication/>

Additional Information on the Research of School Shootings:

University Lecturer, Master of Social Sciences, Salli Hakala
salli.hakala@helsinki.fi, tel. 09-191 23770 or 0500 438091

University Lecturer, Ph.D. Johanna Sumiala
Johanna.sumiala@helsinki.fi, tel.09-191 24632 or 040 777 4543

Crisis and Communication Research Project

Department of Communication/

Communication Research Centre CRC

Faculty of Social Sciences

P.O. Box 54 (Unioninkatu 37), FIN-00014 University of Helsinki

Telephone +358 9 191 24759, fax +358 9 191 24849

<http://blogs.helsinki.fi/crisisandcommunication/>