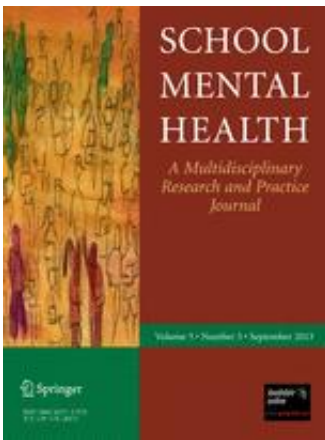


Teachers on the front line following attack in Boston

January 8 2015



Results of a survey to be published in *School Mental Health* suggest that while teachers are well-tuned to student psychological distress following a crisis, support varies considerably. The study, led by researchers in the School of Education at Boston University and involving 72 schools, details the complex supportive role of teachers, and the importance of working with them to improve school response plans.

On 15 April 2013, two bombs killed three people and injured around 264 more near the finish line of the Boston Marathon. During a four-day manhunt for two suspects, residents of Watertown and surrounding areas were requested to "shelter-in-place." Public transportation, schools,

universities and businesses were closed. One suspect was killed during a gunfire exchange early in the morning of 19 April. The second suspect was apprehended in a backyard in Watertown that evening.

While the majority of 147 [teachers](#) surveyed provided some classroom-based support for students, almost half indicated their school had no clear policy for responding to the crisis and half received no training to help them. The most common intervention - reassuring students of their safety - was implemented by only three-quarters of teachers.

"There are few activities that families or students could expect to certainly occur in schools following this type of crisis," says lead author Professor Jennifer Green. "Mass crisis events, such as terrorist attacks, can have a significant impact on the [mental health](#) of children in affected communities, but mental health needs are often left unaddressed," she says.

For the current study, primary and secondary school teachers were surveyed for their perception of eight trauma reactions to the bombings and the manhunt. When at least one student was exposed to the manhunt, all trauma responses were observed except students expressing thoughts of hurting themselves. Teachers felt least confident responding to this behavior and most confident responding to a student crying.

Most teachers reported discussing the events and answering student questions. However, only a few teachers adjusted academic activities such as offering additional opportunities to review course material, or providing extensions on assignments, and only one third mentioned available counselling services. Teachers who indicated that at least one student was exposed to the manhunt were more likely to provide some classroom-based supports for students, but supports were unrelated to student marathon attack exposure.

"Our results have implications for understanding perceptions of teachers and their potential role as first-responders optimally positioned to detect mental health concerns and provide support to [students](#)," says Professor Green.

More information: Green J et al (2015). School and classroom-based support for children following the 2013 Boston Marathon attack and manhunt. *School Mental Health*; [DOI: 10.1007/s12310-014-9140-x](https://doi.org/10.1007/s12310-014-9140-x)

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