

KAUHAJOKI SHOOTING

There is no translation available, please select a different language. Julkaistu v. 40/08 Are the two shooting incidents in Finnish schools – the second less than a year after the first – proof that Finns are violent, lonely creatures of the deep forest? Or has lightning struck twice in the same spot? In short, was Tuesday's shooting of nine students and a teacher at the Kauhajoki vocational education centre evidence of a system error? Or – and I intend no disrespect to the families involved in the tragedy – was it possibly "just one of those things"? On average, by any standard indicator, Finland forms a near-perfect place to live. Systemic corruption is non-existent, and people are content with and conform to a well-rooted system of law and order. There is social order in the country, and the school system produces impressive academic achievements. But it should also be said that Finland's celebrated school system concentrates more on achievement than togetherness, where togetherness means encouraging a sense of belonging. In other words, the average success of a given age group counts for more than looking after dropouts, or indeed after students who excel. Finding direction Many male school-leavers and students have difficulty finding a sense of identity or direction. Even in vocational schools, the curricula are often excessively ambitious for male teenagers, who at that age are more focused on dreams of girls hopelessly beyond their reach. Girls at this age tend towards realism, and as a rule go out with older boys, and rarely drop out. By contrast, within a couple of years a certain proportion of the young men are lost, sometimes for the rest of their lives, case files for the police and social services. There are no families, as in the Mediterranean, where three generations live under the same roof and children grow up surrounded by close relatives. Nowadays even nuclear families are rare. And gender equality means there are usually two breadwinners in a family. The family home is empty for most of the day. The effect of all this is to transfer responsibility for raising children properly to the schools. But modern pedagogical methods do not include any effective means of disciplining young people, and the result of outsourcing parenthood in this way is often bullying, fragmented groups among pupils. A few come to live in a kind of self-imposed vacuum. Room for improvement For such introverts, the internet has replaced friends. The two school gunmen in Finland were keen websurfers, living in their own sick world in the electronic company of other, similarly alienated people. They know that the media will always provide them with their "15 minutes of fame". Or even a kind of immortality, if they decide to put into action an idea that would be unthinkable outside their group. The hunting tradition had nothing to do with either of these terrible cases. Both hunting and compulsory military service bring young men together in a very positive and constructive way, and such togetherness is the best kind of social glue. There is no sense at all in blaming the mirror if we don't like what we see in it. No, not everything is perfect in our affluent, egalitarian, and meritocratic welfare state. But we have the resources and the knowledge to make improvements in the way we bring up our children. The time has come to get serious about implementing the well-worn slogans about "connecting people". People should be connected with each other, and with the societies in which they live. Lasse Lehtinen