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Sealed depositions may be end of Columbine study

By Jeff Kass, Rocky Mountain News
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Professor Del Elliott said Tuesday he doubts he will undertake a study into the causes behind the Columbine High School shootings now that depositions of the killers' parents have been sealed.

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In the meantime, the nationally recognized expert on violence prevention said he expects the ruling will translate into more lives lost.

"We've not had a chance to learn much about what was going on in the lives of (killers) Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold that precipitated this event," he said.

"Unfortunately, it's going to be repeated," he added, "and maybe then we'll learn more about the circumstances which lead young people to commit these kinds of horrendous acts."

On Monday, U.S. District Court Judge Lewis Babcock ruled the depositions would be held under seal by the National Archives and Records Administration for 20 years. A federal magistrate originally ordered the depositions to be destroyed.

Elliott, director of the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence at the University of Colorado, is mentioned in Babcock's 12-page ruling. Babcock notes that Elliott has "impressive credentials" and that the current Colorado attorney general and a Columbine survivor involved in one lawsuit have asked that Elliott review the depositions.

"I am mindful that there is a legitimate public interest in these materials so that similar tragedies may hopefully be prevented in the future," Babcock wrote. "I conclude, however, that the balance of interests still strikes in favor of maintaining strict confidentiality."

The depositions of Wayne and Katherine Harris, and Tom and Sue Klebold, were part of two Columbine lawsuits that have been settled and dismissed. The deposition of Judy Brown, whose family knew the killers, also was taken.

Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold killed 13 others before taking their own lives April 20, 1999.

In 2004, then-Colorado attorney general and now U.S. Sen. Ken Salazar finalized an agreement to have Elliott work on the study. Elliott on Tuesday characterized it as a report that would be in the form of a "rigorous, scientific, credible" study.

While this is not the first major setback for the study, it may be the knockout blow.

Elliott said he had several talks with the Klebolds and HARRISES about being interviewed. But the parents declined.

Elliott said he was not ready to completely close the door on undertaking his study Tuesday. But he also said, "At this point, I think it's over."

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