Active Shooters: 
Behavior, Conditions, and Situations

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NYPD Active Shooter Recommendations and Analysis for Risk Mitigation

January 2010

- 281 active shooter incidents from 1966 to 2010 (237 in U.S.)
- Significant variations among shooters and attack elements
- 96% male shooters
- Non-school shooters modal age group 35 to 44 years old
- 98% carried out by a single attacker
- Planning tactics range from very little to extensive
- Average number of deaths is 3
- Average number of wounded is 3.6
- Location of attacks:
  - 29% school
  - 23% open commercial
  - 22% “other”
  - 13% office building
  - 13% factory/warehouse
Violence/Shooter Functioning and Drivers

Personal functioning driven by:

**Thinking** — mental process

**Feeling** — emotional process

**Behaving** — actions
    (within life conditions and situations)
Continuum of Life Functioning
Wide Range Exists

Negative
Unproductive
Unsafe
Unhealthy
Disruptive
Threatening to:
- Self
- Others
- Workplace

Positive
Productive
Safe
Stable
Healthy
Resilient

Thinking

Feeling
Behaving
Personal Interactions
Multiple Conditions in Multiple Situations

- Workplace/School
- Community
- Health/Wellness
- Finances
- Social Network, Religion
- Person Shooter/Bomber

Home/Family
Individual Violence Process

NEGATIVE SITUATIONS

INTENSE FEELINGS
Anger, hostility, retaliation, vengeance

IDEAS
“Change is not possible in peaceful way”
“Violence is necessary and justified”

PLANNING
Weeks/Months/Years

VIOLENT BEHAVIOR
Types of Shooters

• Workplace-Related and School Shooters

• Criminal Terrorists

• Ideological Terrorists
Workplace-Related and School Shooters
“Non-Terrorist” Shooters

• Concern is about current and specific problems; i.e., job termination, conflict with someone, financial difficulty, marital problems, etc.

• Other-centered

• Shooter believes the violence will “solve the current problem”

• Persons or company/school assets are specifically targeted
Workplace-Related and School Shooters Planning and Preparatory Acts

• Specific relationship with person(s) at the target site

• Brief planning with limited detail; often only approach plan, weapons, and ammunition

• Variation in type of weapons and expertise
Bill Phillips, 60 y/o
Trigger – E-mail Performance Review
April 20, 2007
Johnson Space Center - Houston, TX
1 killed, 1 hostage, shooter suicide

- Company had no plan to terminate his employment
- Day of e-mail, bought .38 revolver and 20 hollow point bullets
- Quiet loner, job was his life
- 3 hour hostage situation
- Wrote on white board “People call me stupid.”
- Shot self when SWAT arrived
Amy Bishop, 44 y/o
Trigger – Denial of Academic Tenure
February 12, 2010
University of Alabama - Huntsville, AL
3 killed, 3 wounded, shooter arrested

• History of disproportional and occasionally violent reactions
• Killed brother in 1986
• Investigated for bomb threat
• Arrested for assault in IHOP
• Could swing between rage for slights and empathy for students
• Lost battle for job tenure
• “Always about to explode!”
Amy Bishop

Workplace
- Demanding
- Conflict with Peers and Managers
- Unsuccessful Meeting Goal of Tenure
- Work not at Par

Home/Family
- Support of Husband
- Killing of Brother

Community
- Conflicts with Children / Youth
- Investigated for Bomb Threat
- Case Re-Opened on Killing of Brother

Health/Wellness
- Anger
- Hostility
- Frustration
- Resentment
- No resilience
- Mood swings
- Volatility

Social Network, Religion

Finances
- Conflict with Social Contacts
Omar Thornton, 34 y/o
Trigger – Job Termination for Stealing and Sense of Racial Prejudice at Work
August 3, 2010
Hartford Distributors - Manchester, CT
8 killed, 2 injured, shooter suicide

- 2 Ruger SR9s
- 10 minute suicide call to mother; plus 911 call
- Girlfriend told police: “It was vengeance for racism.”
Criminal Terrorists
No Major Ideological Issue

- **Hostile reaction** to some frustration, loss, or damage to ego
- **Self-centered**
- Desire for **vengeance** “justifies violence”
- Seeks **psychological reward** through terrorism
- **Thrilled** by power of firearms, bombs, killing, and chaos
Criminal Terrorists (Cont.)
No Major Ideological Issue

• Use soft and opportunistic targets—malls, theaters, retail stores, office buildings, health clubs, etc.

• Lack discipline and training of the ideological terrorist, but more expert weapons use

• Lack of specific goals results in mass murder and often suicide or death by law enforcement
Criminal Terrorists
Planning and Preparatory Acts

- Extra ammunition carried
- Shooter often exhibits cold, calm, and expressionless appearance
- **Mental rehearsals and practice firing prepare shooter**
- Avoidance and escape plans almost non-existent
Sulejman Talovic, 18 y/o
Trigger – Anti-ethnic, Possible Jihad
February 12, 2007
Trolley Square Mall - Salt Lake City, UT
5 killed, 4 injured, shooter killed by police

- Began shooting in parking lot; then entered mall
- Random shooting
- Emotionless expression
- Shotgun and .38 revolver used
- Backpack full of ammo
- “During the shooting, his expression stayed totally calm. He did not seem upset.”
Trolley Square Shooting

- Sulejman Talovic—a Bosnian immigrant
- Lived with mother, father, and 3 sisters
- Mall was “the only place he went [as a child];” often alone, ate lunch in car; one fight in mall over video game
- Motive not clear to family or police; he stated in 2001 or 2002 he was going to “shoot white people like Serbs.”
- FBI report indicated he told girlfriend “Tomorrow will be the happiest day of my life.” Possible martyrdom?
Robert A. Hawkins, 19 y/o
Trigger – Depression, Job Termination, Loss of Girlfriend
Dec. 5, 2007
Westroads Mall Shooting - Omaha, NE
8 killed, 4 injured, shooter suicide

- Estranged from parents—lived with friends and their mother
- Medication and therapy for depression by age 6
- At age 14, threatened to kill stepmother with axe
- Criminal record, felony drug charges, and homicidal threats
- AKM semi-automatic rifle used in shooting
- One hour prior to shooting, mother gave police his suicide note:
  - “I just want to take a few pieces of S*** with me…just think, I’m gonna be F***** famou...
Ideological Terrorists

- Use violent acts intended to create population fear (terror)
- Perpetrated for an ideological goal, as opposed to a lone attack, for a specific contemporary issue
- They deliberately target or disregard the safety of non-combatants
- Cause-oriented
Ideological Terrorists (Cont.)

• Narrowly focused
• Highly motivated & Dedicated to a cause
• Acts based on or driven by political, economic, social, geographic, or religious elements
• Do not believe change can occur in a peaceful way; therefore “violence is justified”
• Includes radical environmentalists, racists, separatists, political groups, and violent jihadists
Psychology of Terrorists

• Profiling an average shooter is no more possible than profiling an average office person

• Personality traits vary widely as do those in non-terrorists

• Numerous studies indicate no significant presence of psychopathology
Summary of Risk Factors for Potential Terrorists

- Often younger male
- Serious personal issue—social, cultural, national, and/or religious
- Blames large oppressive “system” or circumstances
- Obsessive about “victimization”
- Sees terror or suicide as supreme sacrifice, revenge, manipulation, and possibly salvation
- Some believe that problems are solvable through violent jihad
Ideological Terrorists
Planning and Preparatory Acts

- Determine maximum ROI (terror/message per event vs. total cost/effort of the act) i.e., ROI on cargo plane bombs = $4,200 AQAP cost vs. billions of dollars for new Western shipping security measures
- Target selection
- Surveillance & Intelligence gathering
- Fund raising
- Weapons purchased or stolen
- Bomb manufacturing
James Von Brunn, 88 y/o
Ideology – White Supremacist and Anti-Semite
June 10, 2009
Holocaust Memorial Museum - Washington, DC
1 killed, shooter arrested

- Guard killed while trying to assist Von Brunn into door
- Signed with Navy in 1942, reason given as “patriotic”
- Honorable discharge in 1956
- Arrested outside Federal Reserve Board meeting with shotgun, revolver, knife (1981)—upset about interest rates and economic turmoil—served 6.5 years in prison
- Ex-wife claims “his hatred ate him like cancer”
- Shooter died in prison hospital January 5, 2010
Seung-Hui Cho, 23 y/o
Ideology – Warfare for Oppressed and Poor
April 16, 2007
Virginia Tech - Blacksburg, VA
32 killed, 23 wounded, shooter suicide
Seung-Hui Cho

- Loss of Father
- Born in Seoul
- Quiet, sullen, brooding, empty face
- Immigrated at age 8 to bring confidence
- Both parents worked in VA

- Selective Mutism
- Depression
- Severe Social Anxiety
- Suicidal
- Frightened of world
- Hatred of wealthy
- Paranoid
- MH Treatment

Disturbing writings
- Gruesome poems, stories, and plays
- Ignored conversation attempts
- Class laughed at him
- Known as “the Question Mark” Kid
- Bullied

Person/Shooter

Workplace

Community

Home/Family

Health/Wellness

Finances

Social Network, Religion

- “Evil plan is doing good”
- Fantasy as savior of oppressed, poor, and rejected in society
- Likened self as Jesus Christ
- Antagonistic toward religion

- Iolated
- Stalking
- Harassing
- Manifesto to NBC between first and second shooting

- Born in Seoul
- Quiet, sullen, brooding, empty face
- Immigrated at age 8 to bring confidence
- Both parents worked in VA
Jared Lee Loughner – 22 y/o
Ideology – Anti-Government/Conspiracy
January 8, 2011
6 killed, 14 wounded, shooter arrested

• “Normal kid” until junior in high school
• Fired from job for “personality change”
• Mentally distorted with alcohol and drugs
• Cycled between normal teen activities and nihilistic views, the occult, conspiracy theories, “government mind control and brainwash by controlling grammar”
• Became obsessed with Rep. Giffords’ answer to his question “What is government if words have no meaning?”
Jared Lee Loughner
Rep. Gabrielle Giffords Shooter

Pre-Disturbed Normal State
3 years prior to shooting
Roughly 2007

Strange Thinking State
1-2 years prior to shooting
2008 - 2010

Delusional State
Post-Shooting Mug Shot
January, 2011
Jared Lee Loughner

**Person/Shooter**
- High school drop out, 2006
- Removed for YouTube message
- Mental health clearance required
- Classroom disruptions
- Isolated
- Fired from Quiznos
- Fired from dog walking job
- 5 College Police incidents in 2010
- Arrested twice
- Friends until HS girlfriend broke off
- Seen as atheist and nihilist
- Anti-government
- Comments about terrorism and baby killing
- Severe anger reactions
- Alcohol & Drug abuse
- Hallucinogen use
- Paranoid thinking
- Obsessed with lucid dreaming
- Personality change
- Conspiracy thinking

**Home/Family**
- Lived with parents
- Only child

**Workplace**
- Classroom disruptions
- Fired from Quiznos
- Fired from dog walking job
- 5 College Police incidents in 2010
- Arrested twice

**Community**
- Isolated
- Fired from Quiznos
- Fired from dog walking job
- 5 College Police incidents in 2010
- Arrested twice

**Health/Wellness**
- Severe anger reactions
- Alcohol & Drug abuse
- Hallucinogen use
- Paranoid thinking
- Obsessed with lucid dreaming
- Personality change
- Conspiracy thinking

**Social Network, Religion**
- Friends until HS girlfriend broke off
- Seen as atheist and nihilist
- Anti-government
- Comments about terrorism and baby killing

**Finances**
Jared Lee Loughner
Planning

• More than 1 year obsessive thinking about target and her government
• Gathered weapons and ammunition
• Prior night in motel—posted Internet message, bizarre pictures of self, and weapons
• **Evaded father’s attempt to stop him**
• Used taxi for transport to event
• Walked unobstructed into crowd and began shooting
Major Nidal Hasan, 39 y/o
Ideology – Islamic Jihad
November 5, 2009
Fort Hood Military Post - Fort Hood, TX
13 killed, 30 injured, shooter injured and arrested

- Attempts to avoid deployment or leave Army unsuccessful
- Support and guidance obtained through e-mails with Imam
- Practice firing at private range
- Distribution of personal items to neighbor
- No apparent escape plan
- Random shooting on the post
Major Nidal Hasan

Workplace
- Conflict with Religion
- Prejudice
- Pressure
- “No way out”

Community
- Isolated
- Harassed
- Prejudice
- Damage to Car

Home/Family
- Loss of Father
- Living Alone

Health/Wellness
- Depression
- Frustration
- Anger
- Fear
- Anxiety

Social Network, Religion
- Increased Muslim Religious Activities
- Jihad Actions Supported
- Imam Counseling

Person/Shooter

Finances

Anders Behring Breivik, 32 y/o
Ideology – “Begin campaign for Pan-European Coup d’États, deportation of Muslims and execution of militia traitors, by year 2083”
July 22, 2011
Bomb Attack on Labor Party Building - Oslo, Norway
8 killed (of 76 total), many injured, bomber arrested (at later shooting event)

• Bomber’s concerns
  – “Multiculturalism, Marxist-oriented governments, Islamic tyranny...Islamic demographic warfare”
Anders Behring Breivik  
July 22, 2011  
Active Shooter - Post Bomb Attack - Utøya Island, Norway  
68 killed (of 76 total), 60 wounded, shooter arrested

- Shooter’s immediate goals:
  - **Assault the current and future Labor Party Leaders**, considered by the shooter as traitors to “Pure European Culture.” The “actions are atrocious but necessary.”
  - Promote other self-appointed guardians to also act as “judge, jury, and executioner, until threats by cultural genocide are gone.”
Anders Behring Breivik  
Radicalized Homegrown Lone Wolf

• No contact with father since he was 14. About mother: “I do not approve of the super-liberal upbringing…it completely lacked discipline and has contributed to feminize me to a degree”

• Initial reaction to multi-culturalism at age 16. He claims he was beaten up by Pakistani youth in his neighborhood, who had “a total lack of respect for my culture”

• Over 9 years, he became progressively more extreme in his obsessive thinking, his intense emotions, and his planning for the attack to begin to “save” Norway and Western Europe

• Shooter is charged with “destabilizing or destroying basic functions of society…creating serious fear in the population, acts of terrorism…”
Triggers Exist but Persons
“Don’t Just Snap”

• Violent behavior or potential is rarely new for perpetrators

• Usually patterns of negative thinking, feeling, and/or behavior are part of the history

• Triggers intensify the negative elements

• Planning for violent reaction usually takes place over some time

• During this time, signals, flags, and sometimes threats exist but are rarely seen as serious or are not reported
Summary

• Risk of violence from many different types of persons. “Profiles” are not helpful and may be dangerous.

• Knowledge of individual’s **Thinking-Feeling-Behaving** patterns and possible potential reactions to negative events is critical to prevention.

• Mental illness sometimes contributes but is not a major risk driver.

• Effective risk assessment and violence prevention requires “all hands on deck,” i.e., security, office workers, supervisors, HR, family, and friends.
Contact Information

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