

Predicting Mass-School-Shootings: Relevance of the FBI's 'Threat Assessment Perspective' Two Decades Later

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Abstract : The 1990s in America ended with a mass-school-shooting (at least four killed by gunfire excluding the perpetrator(s)) at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. Post-event, many demanded that government and civilian experts develop a 'profile' of the potential school shooter in order to identify and preempt likely future acts of violence. This grounded theory research study seeks to explore the validity of the original hypotheses proposed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in 2000, as it relates to the commonality of disclosure by perpetrators of mass-school-shootings, by evaluating fourteen mass-school-shooting events between 2000 and 2019 at locations around the United States. Methods: The strategy of inquiry seeks to investigate case files, public records, witness accounts, and available psychological profiles of the shooter. The research methodology is inclusive of one-on-one interviews with members of the FBI's Critical Incident Response Group seeking perspective on commonalities between individuals; specifically, disclosure of intent pre-event. Results: The research determined that school shooters do not 'unfailingly' notify others of their plans. However, in nine of the fourteen mass-school-shooting events analyzed, the perpetrator did inform the third party of their intent pre-event in some form of written, oral, or electronic communication. In the remaining five instances, the so-called 'red-flag' indicators of the potential for an event to occur were profound, and unto themselves, might be interpreted as notification to others of an imminent deadly threat. Conclusion: Data indicates that conclusions drawn in the FBI's threat assessment perspective published in 2000 are relevant and current. There is evidence that despite potential 'red-flag' indicators which may or may not include a variety of other characteristics, perpetrators of mass-school-shooting events are likely to share their intentions with others through some form of direct or indirect communication. More significantly, implications of this research might suggest that society is often informed of potential danger pre-event but lacks any equitable means by which to disseminate, prevent, intervene, or otherwise act in a meaningful way considering said revelation.

Keywords : columbine, FBI profiling, guns, mass shooting, mental health, school violence

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