Contemporary Threat Assessment: A North American Perspective

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Violence defined:

• An intentional act of aggression toward another human being that physically injures, or is likely to physically injure, that human being.
Workplace Homicides by Perpetrator Relationship to Victim, 1997-2010

Frequency was stable over 30 yrs
FBI Active Shooter Study 2014

• “An individual(s) killing or attempting to kill people in a populated area.”
• 11.4 incidents annually (N=160)
• 6.4 2000-2006
• 16.4 2007-2013
• 150% increase
• Consistent with Harvard public health study
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Residences</td>
<td>9847</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street</td>
<td>4455</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parking lot/garage</td>
<td>1209</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outdoors</td>
<td>629</td>
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<tr>
<td>Restaurant/bar</td>
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<tr>
<td>Store/gas station</td>
<td>492</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public building/business</td>
<td>288</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hotel/motel</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School/College</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*FBI NIBRS Reporting System*
“Any given school can expect to experience a homicide about once every 6,000 years.”

- 125,000 schools / 21 deaths per year
- Your school is very safe for your children
Is violence homogeneous?

- No
Two modes of violence

- Targeted or intended violence (predatory)
- Emotional or reactive violence (affective)
  - Substantial scientific research since the mid-twentieth century involving animal and human subjects
  - Behavioral, physiological, neuroimaging, neuropsychological, psychological, and biochemical differences
  - Reliable and valid measurement instruments
Emotional or reactive violence

- Also known as affective or impulsive violence
- The most common violence among people
- A reaction to an imminent threat
- Accompanied by intense anger and/or fear
- Preceded by intense autonomic arousal
- Driven by the emotional centers of the brain
- Purely defensive
- One goal: make the threat go away
- Often preceded by direct verbalized threats
Targeted or intended violence

• Also known as predatory or instrumental
• Tactical planning
• Purposeful, opportunistic
• Emotionless; no autonomic arousal
• Often involves research and preparation
• End point of a pathway to violence
• Directed by the higher cortical areas of the brain
• Purely offensive: no imminent threat
• Many goals: power, dominance, revenge, sex, money, ideology
• Usually no direct threat beforehand
Annie Le, Sept. 8, 2009, Yale University—
affective violence and sexual arousal
Fact Pattern

- 24 yo PhD student in pharmacology
- Disappeared Sept. 8, body found Sept. 13
- Body upside down inside wall with bra pushed up and underwear pulled down
- Blunt force trauma; bloody clothes hidden
- Death by traumatic asphyxiation (strangled)
- Raymond Clark, 26, lab technician, pled guilty, admitted to fact of attempted sexual assault; no motivation information; history of temper, volatility
- Sentenced to 44 years in prison
Johanna Justin-Jinich, May 6, 2009, Middletown, CT—predatory violence and stalking
Fact Pattern

- 21 yo Wesleyan student
- Met Stephen Morgan at NYU during summer, 2007
- Emails and meals on few occasions together
- Began to harass her, saying she was not that attractive and Jewish people are greedy
- Did not attempt to press charges against him
- Kills her with 7 rounds from 9 mm pistol while wearing a wig and eyeglasses as she worked in a CT coffee shop 2 years later
- Eluded police, then surrendered
Fact Pattern

- Wrote in journal the day of attack, “I think it okay to kill Jews, and go on a killing spree at this school…Kill Johanna. She must die.”
- Told father day before he was moving to R.I.
- Cleared out most of belongings in guest bedroom
- Churchgoing family, privileged upbringing, prep school, unblemished stint in US Navy, then adrift
- Found NGRI in 2011, paranoid schizophrenic
• Instrumental aggression
  – Motivated by goals other than emotion
  – Planning/preparation

• Reactive/Hostile aggression
  – Provocation
  – Arousal of hostility
Siegel A, Victoroff J.

Affective murderers performed more poorly than predatory murderers across multiple neurocognitive domains:

- Intelligence
- Memory
- Attention
- Executive functions
Raine et al., Behavioral Sciences and the Law, 16:319-32, 1998

- 41 comparisons, 15 predatory, 9 affective murderers

• “Empirical basis and forensic application of affective and predatory violence”
• Observational measures
• Self report instruments (IPAS)
• Extensive scientific foundation
• Available at www.forensis.org
Static vs. Dynamic Factors

• Static (status) factors do not change over time, and are not affected through intervention or interdiction (criminal history, drug history, weapons history, psychopathy, etc.)

• Dynamic (state) factors do change over time, and can be affected through intervention or interdiction (drug use, weapons possession, psychotic symptoms, etc.) Can be fast or slow.
What are the initial clinical questions?

• What is the mode of violence I am concerned about?
• What am I trying to do?
  – Long term prediction: focus upon static (historical and dispositional) factors
  – Short term risk management: focus upon dynamic (clinical and situational) factors
Are there differences between threat assessment and violence risk assessment?

- Operational context
- Dynamic emphasis
- Idiographic (case-driven) approach: inductive
- Very low base rates
- Risk management rather than prediction
- Subject and potential victim
- Predatory (instrumental, targeted, intended) violence
- Likely urgency
Are there similarities?

- Practiced by professionals with diverse backgrounds
- Goal is to prevent violence
- To assist decisions and actions of others
- Evaluations are a process over time
- Process should be structured and guided
- Violence is result of decision-making affected by perpetrator, target, and circumstances
Reactive vs. Intended Violence

- Reactive (emotional, affective, defensive) violence is more common, treatable, and usually less dangerous.
- Intended (targeted, predatory, offensive) violence is less common, typically untreatable, and more dangerous.
Long term prediction (HCR V3)

- History of problems with:
  - Violence
  - Other antisocial behavior
  - No stable and positive relationships
  - Seeking or obtaining legal employment
  - Substance dependence or abuse
  - Major mental disorder
  - Personality disorder (esp psychopathy)
  - Traumatic experiences (adult and childhood)
  - Entrenched violent attitudes
  - Poor treatment or supervision response
Short term risk management (HCR V3)

- Recent problems with:
  - Insight into mental disorder, aggressiveness, need for treatment
  - Violent ideation or intent
  - Symptoms of major mental disorder, esp positive symptoms and persecutory delusions
  - Instability (affective, behavioral, or cognitive)
  - Treatment noncompliance and nonresponsiveness
Warning Behaviors for Targeted Violence (Meloy et al., 2012)

- Pathway
- Fixation
- Identification
- Novel Aggression
- Energy Burst
- Leakage
- Last Resort
- Directly Communicated Threat
Data Gathering

• Official records>

• Self-report>

• Collateral informants
  • Steadman et al. (1998) *Archives General Psychiatry*, 55:393-401 (table 3)
Can we predict violence?

- Only moderately well using current actuarial and structured professional judgment instruments
- ROC = 0.75
- *Unstructured* judgment is poorest predictor of risk (confidence negatively correlates with accuracy)
Receiver Operator Characteristic

AUC = .76
Can we risk manage without predicting? Of course

• Prevention does not require prediction.
• Medical corollary: management of risk factors for cardiovascular problems without predicting which patient will have a cardiac event (primary care)
• The paradox: one never knows if any one patient would have experienced a heart attack (or committed violence) without the intervention
Deaths attributable to cardiovascular disease (United States: 1900–2008).

Writing Group Members et al. Circulation 2012;125:e2-e220
Therefore, we risk manage behaviors of concern in the present, rather than trying to predict the future.
Clinically manage **Lethality Risk** if Concerned

- Proximity to a firearm
- Voluntary or involuntary removal
- **Always** inquire concerning safe storage in the home
INTERNATIONAL HANDBOOK OF THREAT ASSESSMENT

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Thank You

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