

The Adult Mass Murderer in Europe and North America: The Paranoid Spectrum from Distrust to Delusion

Bram van der Meer, M.A.

J. Reid Meloy, Ph.D.

Jens Hoffmann, Ph.D.

ATAP 2017



What do we know about adult mass murder?

- Review of research over past 5 years
- Integrated with previous knowledge
- Integrated with clinical and forensic experience



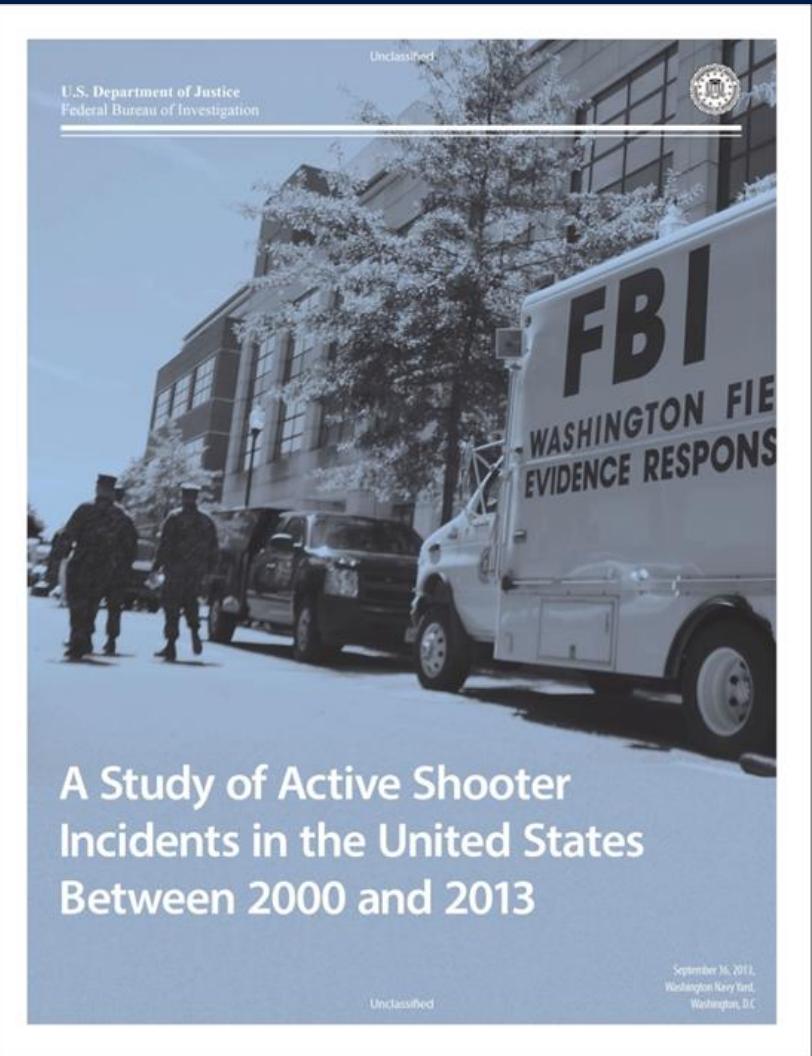
Mass murder is increasing in the United States

- Despite a continued decrease in violent crime over the past 30 years
- Key studies
 - Harvard Public Health
 - FBI
 - Mother Jones database and M. Follman



Active Shooter Incidents in the United States 2000-2013

FBI



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 (M. Follman, 2012, (www.motherjones.com)

updated July, 2015

However, it is very rare

- 3-4% of homicides in US involve more than one victim (1976-2000)
- Number of mass murders in US between 2000-2012 (four or more victims) was one tenth of one percent (0.1%) of all murders (excluding 9/11)



But definitions matter

- Do we count gang related mass murders?
- Do we count domestic mass murders, e.g., familicides?
- Do we count all casualties or just deaths?
- Do we count the perpetrator?
- Is the death count 3 or 4?
- Do we count attempted mass murders when there are no deaths?
- Read the definitions carefully

Major mental disorder is present
in **22-48%** of mass murderers

- Stone M. Mass murder, mental illness, and men. Violence and Victims. 2: 2015.
- Horgan J, Gill P et al. Across the Universe? A Comparative Analysis. 2016.



Stone, 2015

- 235 mass murderers (4% women)
- Indirect assessments
- 87% had 4 or more dead victims
- 1913-2015
- 45 cases were mentally ill (22% males)
- Three fourths within schizophrenic spectrum (72%)
- Rest paranoid delusions, paranoia and depression

Horgan, Gill et al., 2016

- Lone actor terrorists show higher prevalence of psychotic disorders (eg schizophrenia, delusional disorder)
- Solo mass murderers show higher prevalence of depressive disorder, substance abuse disorders, personality disorders, developmental disorders (ASD), and juvenile onset disorders (ODD, CD)



Paranoid conditions are pervasive in mass murder

- Many diagnoses: a spectrum from PD to Paranoid Schizophrenia
- Common dynamics:
 - a pre-emptive strike
 - revenge for cumulative maltreatment

Knoll & Meloy, Psychiatric Annals,
44:236-242, 2014

Hempel, Meloy & Richards, JAAPL, 1999

A nonrandom sample ($N = 30$) of mass murderers in the United States and Canada during the past 50 years was studied. Data suggest that such individuals are single or divorced males in their fourth decade of life with various Axis I paranoid and/or depressive conditions and Axis II personality traits and disorders, usually Clusters A and B. The mass murder is precipitated by a major loss related to employment or relationship. A warrior mentality suffuses the planning and attack behavior of the subject, and greater deaths and higher casualty rates are significantly more likely if the perpetrator is psychotic at the time of the offense. Alcohol plays a very minor role. A large proportion of subjects will convey their central motivation in a psychological abstract, a phrase or sentence yelled with great emotion at the beginning of the mass murder; but in our study sample, only 20 percent directly threatened their victims before the offense. Death by suicide or at the hands of others is the usual outcome for the mass murderer.

Dietz P. Bulletin of the NY Academy of Medicine, 1986

- “Paranoid symptoms of some kind have been evidenced by all of the men who have killed 10 or more victims in a single incident in the United States.”



There may be a **hot zone** for the contagion effect

- During **two weeks** after a highly publicized mass murder, there will be an increase in the frequency of mass murders, then a return to base line.
- Towers et al., PLoS One, 2015
 - Mass killings with firearm, 4+ deaths
 - School shootings, 4+ deaths
 - Average temporary probability increase lasts next 13 days

Lankford & Tomek, 2017

- Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior
- Same data set as Towers et al., 2015
- Simulated data sets generated
- Random effect, no contagion
- But copycat phenomenon may exist



But contagion and copycat are different

- **Contagion**: brief time frame (days or weeks), imitation of the act
- **Copycat**: longer time frame (months or years), identification with the actor
- Copycats aggregated over time may lead to a **cultural script**, e.g, the Columbine effect (Mother Jones: 88 plots since 1999 in US; 75% thwarted)



Cultural Script, Dr. White:

- “cultural scripts”—prescriptions for behavior—a schema
- that point the way toward an armed attack as a model for problem solving,
- particularly for altering the shooter’s reputation from that of a loser, socially marginalized, to that of a notorious antihero;
- a masculine solution to lessen an inferior social position.



Lone actor terrorists and solo mass murderers are more similar than different

- Horgan, Gill et al. Across the Universe? A Comparative Analysis. 2016.
- 71 US lone actor terrorists
- 115 US solo mass murderers



Lone actor terrorists more likely to:

- Attempt to recruit others
- Interact with others in a wider network, both in virtual and terrestrial world
- Make public statements before attack
- Have university, military, and combat experience
- Change address before attack
- Live alone and be socially isolated



- Engage in dry runs
- Show escalating anger before attack
- Stockpile weapons
- Engage in more leakage
 - Verbalize intent (59%)
 - Express desire to hurt others (69%)
 - Others aware of their attack planning (37%)

Solo mass murderers more likely to

- Have a substance abuse problem
- Experience being degraded in run up to the attack
- Experience being a helpless victim
- Problems with personal relationships
- Recent and chronic stress
- Have a history with event location



Some pathways are becoming runways

- Meloy & Pollard, J Forensic Sciences, 2017
- There is a pathway, but shortened, eg, recruitment elements of ISIS and subsequent knife attacks
- Planning and partial preparation, then impulsive act



Warning Behaviors (Meloy, Hoffmann, Guldmann & James, BS&L, 2012; 30:256-279)

- Pathway
- Fixation
- Identification
- Novel aggression
- Energy burst
- Leakage
- Directly communicated threat
- Last resort behavior

Fixation Warning Behavior

- An increasingly pathological preoccupation with a person or a cause, accompanied by a deterioration in social and/or occupational life
- TRAP-18 Manual, gifrinc.com



Identification Warning Behavior

- A psychological desire to be a pseudocommando or have a warrior mentality; closely associate with weapons or other military or law enforcement paraphernalia; identify with previous attackers or assassins; or identify oneself as an agent to advance a particular cause or belief system.



- “Fixation is what one constantly thinks about; identification is what one becomes.”
 - TRAP-18 Manual



Fixation and Identification are key warning behaviors

- “It kept going around, floating round my head, day after day after day. And then after awhile *I became that thought you know, I was going to do it.*”
 - David Copeland, neo NAZI lone terrorist, UK, 1999
- From preoccupation to self-identity
- Research suggesting evolution from fixation to identification will distinguish (with a large effect size) POCs without intent from attackers: our North American study in progress (Meloy, Genzman, Goodwill & Katsavdakis)

Horror movie drove Nazi bomber to kill



STUNNED: Survivors stand outside their barbershop in Liverpool.
HAPPY Nazi aviator David Cagelioen reached his maximum plane load minus another pilot watching the enormous Maltese Cross flying. The distinctive cross identifies St. Paul's Bay Bombs.

The blindfolded lot was one of the scores of prisoners captured since the Allies started their vast North African Front which had been so successful with tanks.



Leila Khaled, 1968, PFLP

- “My work as a freedom fighter has given me happiness: you identify yourself with the struggle. It is the difference between a freedom fighter and an ordinary person.”



Are jihadists the only terrorists?

- No
- Strong bias within government and the media to only consider jihad inspired terrorism and dismiss other ideologically motivated acts of mass murder as terrorism
 - Dylann Roof—racist lone actor terrorist
 - James Hodgkinson—extreme left lone actor terrorist

Charleston, SC, June 17, 2015



Alexandria, VA, June 14, 2017



Charlottesville, VA, August 12, 2017



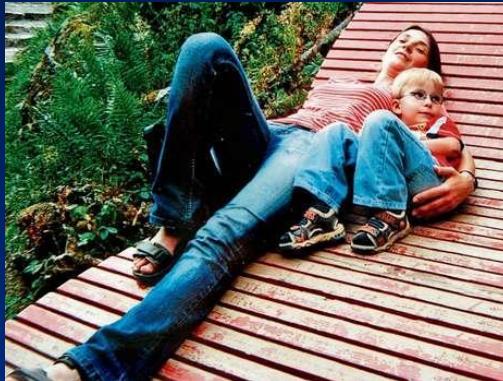
Psychotic mass murderer



Lucerne, Switzerland 2013

- Employee shot four co-workers & committed suicide
- Married and 3 children
- Thought that dark forces and colleagues were spying on him
- Psychiatric autopsy revealed paranoid schizophrenia

Non-psychotic mass murderer



Lörrach, Germany 2010

- Attorney killed 5 year old boy and husband
- Destroyed her home with a firebomb
- Shot three strangers and attacked a hospital
- Shoot-out with police

Mass murderers - a threat assessment perspective

Allwinn, Hoffmann & Meloy

- 33 cases in Germany (2000-2010)
- 94% male
- 25 – 78 years; average 47 years
- 35 dead victims, 86 injured
- 49% unemployed, 55% lived alone
- 46% attacks on more than one location
- 80% moved from buildings to public space



Psychotic vs. non-psychotic mass murderers

- 30% suicide, 4 (attempted) suicide by cop
- 2 times more non-psychotics suicide
- Psychotics mostly attack strangers in public places
- No psychotic killed intimate partner
- Non-psychotics often personal or professional relationship with victims
- 33% intoxicated



Planning and Preparation

- 52% planned attack for weeks, months or years
- 13% up to 24 hours
- 35% no planning
- Psychotics caused less fatalities***
- 47% criminal record, psychotics (20%) less than non-psychotics (67%)



Significant differences

psychotic vs. non-psychotic

Felt offended easily: 17% 80%

Fantasies of revenge: 13% 60%

Persecutory delusions: 73% 0%

Experience with firearms: 60% 93%



Stressors within one year prior to attack

psychotic vs. non-psychotic

Rejection

romantic relationship:

0%

37%

Relationship

problems:

9%

26%

Financial problems:

36%

42%

One crisis or more:

46%

74%

Presence of warning behaviors

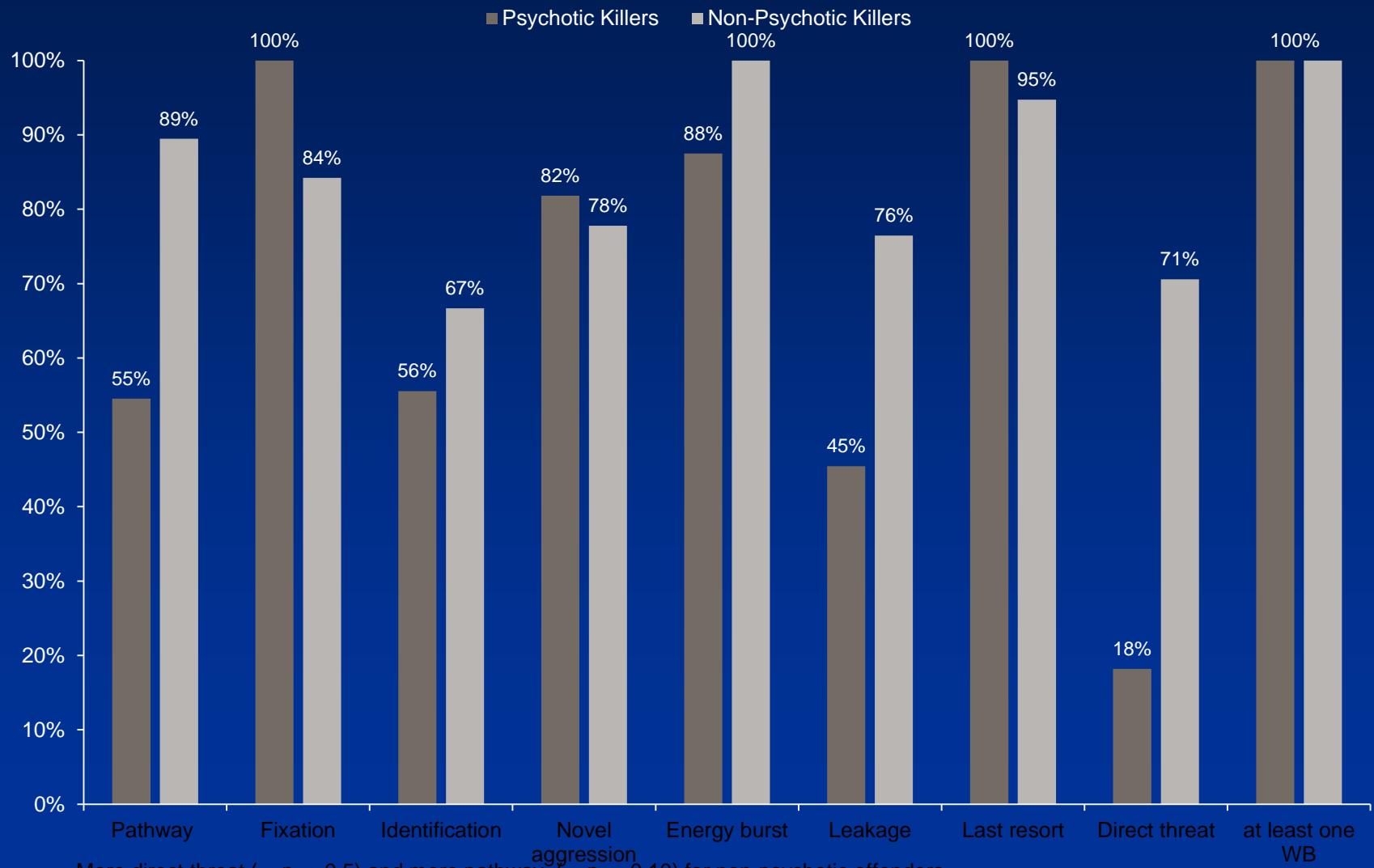
In every case, at least one warning behavior

- Average 5.18 psychotics
- Average 6.11 non-psychotics

A pattern of warning behaviors can be expected preceding an act of mass murder



Warning behaviors of German mass murderers



Institutional visibility before attack

psychotics vs. non-psychotics

educational: 45% 16%

psych./medical: 73% 26%

work: 18% 21%

legal/police. 64% 89%

***97% had problem behavior in at least one institution

Prevention of non-psychotic mass murder

- TATM in public services, universities, companies etc.
- Awareness
- Internal contact person
- Look for further warning behaviors
- Violence in the past or criminal record?
- Case documentation
- Contact others who had problems with individual of concern
- Link to police and TATM professionals



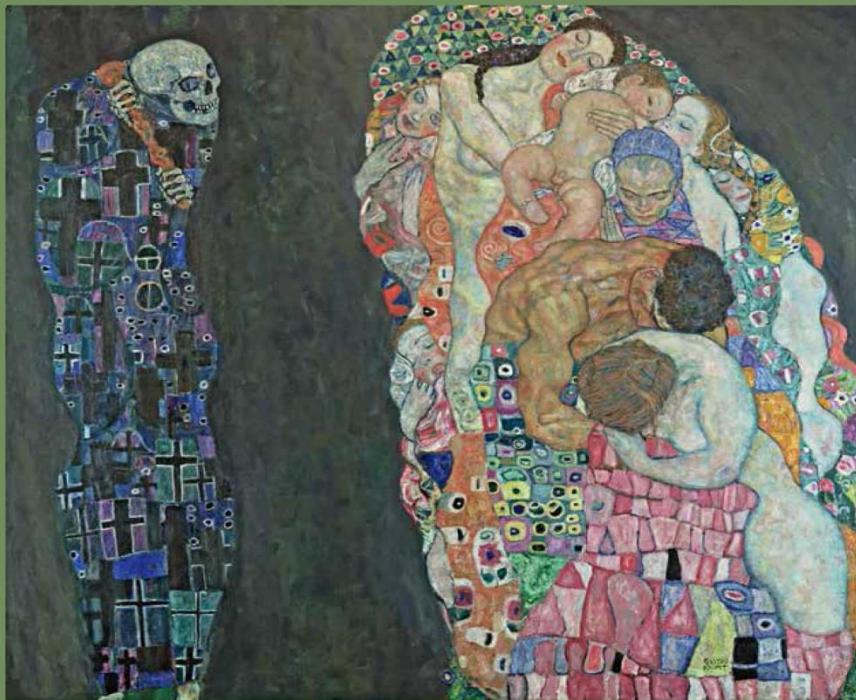
Prevention of psychotic mass murder

- Sensitize for warning behaviors in hospitals and mental health institutions
- Inform professionals about TATM
- Case documentation
- Contact others who had problems with individual of concern
- Involve family members with supportive attitude
- Collaborations between mental health system and law enforcement, e.g. LAPD Crisis Response Support Section, FTAC

Our presentation in PDF

- www.DrReidMeloy.com
- www.i-p-bm.com
- www.vdm-ip.com





INTERNATIONAL HANDBOOK OF THREAT ASSESSMENT

EDITED BY **J. REID MELOY AND JENS HOFFMANN**

OXFORD