

# **MASS CASUALTY EVENTS ON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CAMPUSES: THREAT MANAGEMENT LESSONS LEARNED FROM BATH, MICHIGAN TO CHENPENG VILLAGE PRIMARY SCHOOL**

**KRIS MOHANDIE, Ph.D., ABPP**

**J. REID MELOY, Ph.D., ABPP**

**8<sup>th</sup> Biennial Threat Management Symposium**

**Ontario Provincial Police**

**May 13, 2015**



Newtown Bee

Copyright Mohandie & Meloy, 2013. All rights reserved. Use by permission only.

# **Presentation Outline**

- 1) Examination of worldwide events where elementary age children were targeted on school or school like campuses**
- 2) Categories of offenders, motivation, and fact patterns**
- 3) Commonalities & lessons learned**
- 4) Ideas for future prevention, early identification, and disruption of these tragic events**

# Bath, Michigan, May 18, 1927



Copyright Mohandie & Meloy, 2013. All rights reserved. Use by permission only.

**Farmer Andrew Kehoe killed 45 people (38 children, the town's postmaster, a retired farmer, the superintendent, two teachers, Kehoe's wife, and Kehoe himself)**

- ⇒ **Treasurer of the local school board**
- ⇒ **Furious with new taxes levied to pay for the school**
- ⇒ **Angry and bitter**
- ⇒ **“Criminals are made not born...”**
- ⇒ Note: Various speculative diagnoses have been assigned to Mr. Kehoe, ranging from manic-depression by a group of medical scientists a few days after the bombing, to psychopathy in a recent study of the case (Bernstein, 2009).

- Defeated in Spring 1926 in a local political race for county clerk
- Pending foreclosure on his property (he received notice in June, 1926)
- Wife suffered from tuberculosis
- Stopped mortgage payments
- Experimented with explosives on his property
- A neighbor noticed he had stopped taking care of his property for approximately a year and wondered if he might be contemplating suicide

# Cleveland Elementary School, San Diego, January 29, 1979

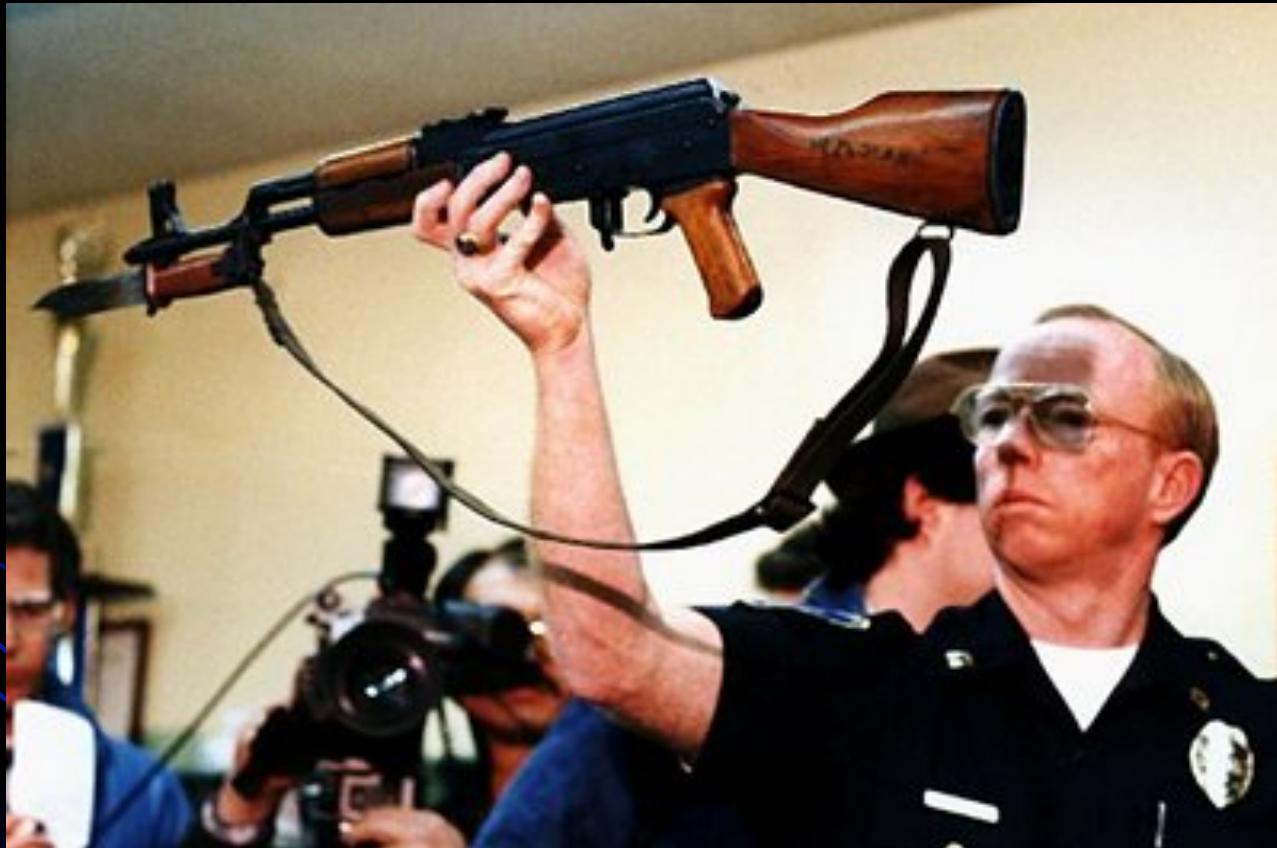


Copyright Mohandie & Meloy, 2013. All rights reserved. Use by permission only.

- 16-year-old Brenda Spencer opened fire upon the Cleveland Elementary School across the street from her house
- Wounded eight children and a police officer before killing the principal and a custodian attempting to protect the children
- Chronic drug abuser and poorly supervised by her father, she told a friend two days earlier, “**I am going to do something big.**”

- Had been caught burglarizing the school one year prior, sent to probationary diversion, received counseling.
- Her counselor reported suicidality. Spencer had received a .22 rifle and several hundred rounds of ammunition as a gift from her father several days prior to the shooting; decided to kill the night before while watching *Battlestar Gallactica* on television.
- Taken into custody after several hours of dialogue with police negotiators: “I don’t like Mondays,” when asked about her motivation.

# Stockton, CA, Jan. 18, 1989



Copyright Mohandie & Meloy, 2013. All rights reserved. Use by permission only.

- 25-year-old Patrick Edward Purdy opened fire in an attack lasting several minutes on Cleveland Elementary School in Stockton, California.
- 9mm handgun and an AK-47 rifle. He displayed symbols reflective of his extremist leanings: he had carved the words “**freedom**” and “**victory**” into the butt of his AK-47 and wrote on his camouflage shirt he wore over his military jacket the words, “**PLO**,” “**Libya**,” and “**Death to the great Satin (sic).**”
- Killed five Southeast Asian children, and wounded 29 more before killing himself with a single shot to his heart with a pistol.
- As a diversionary tactic prior to opening fire, Purdy parked his car and set it ablaze with a Molotov cocktail in a Budweiser bottle before sneaking onto school property.
- Had been a student there from kindergarten through third grade--the demographic had changed since that time and more than 600 of the 980 students were recent immigrants of Southeast Asia ancestry.

- He reportedly hated almost everyone, but especially people in positions of authority and Southeast Asians.
- Often bragged about his father's Vietnam War experience and how his father had killed "**gooks**."
- Frequently made hostile racial comments to co-workers about the influx of Southeast Asians into the United States, and angry about their large representation in industrial arts courses he was taking at a local community college.
- Complained that these immigrants were taking all the jobs, and resented having to compete with them. Just prior to the mass murder, Mr. Purdy told another resident of the El Rancho Motel, "**The damn Hindus and boat people own everything!**"

- Fantasized about becoming a soldier like his father, but the withdrawal of US forces from Vietnam when he was just a boy precluded the channeling of his homicidal impulses.
- Four days before the event, **told his half-brother that he would soon make headlines.**
- Multiple past arrests: In 1987, he was arrested for indiscriminately firing a 9mm pistol in the El Dorado National Forest. He was also charged with resisting arrest for kicking a deputy sheriff and shattering a window of the patrol car with his feet. While in jail awaiting trial, he attempted to commit suicide by hanging and cutting his own wrist with one of his fingernails.
- Lived in a room at a nearby motel (about two miles away) for weeks prior to the massacre, and many of his final plans seemed to occur there, with evidence of military obsession and fantasy rehearsal. Spent hours in this room manipulating hundreds of toy soldiers, tanks, jeeps, and weapons in simulated attacks.
- Likely tracked other school violence events.

# Oklahoma City, April 19, 1995



Oklahoma City, 1995

Copyright Mohandie & Meloy, 2013. All rights reserved. Use by permission only.

- Most lethal act of domestic terrorism and the greatest loss of life on American soil to a terrorist event until the September 11, 2001 attacks: 168 people were killed, including 19 children under the age of 6, and more than 680 people were injured.
- The blast destroyed or damaged 324 buildings within a sixteen-block radius, 86 cars, and shattered glass in 258 nearby buildings.
- Primary offender, combat decorated Gulf War veteran Timothy McVeigh, was enamored by the “Patriot Movement” and inspired by extremist philosophy from the writings of William Pierce and others.
- Sought to retaliate against the government for his conspiratorial perceptions about what happened at Waco and Ruby Ridge, and hoped he would establish himself as the **“first hero of the second American Revolution”**, a war he hoped he would initiate through the bombing

- Extensive planning, target reconnaissance, materials acquisition, and preparation were involved in this autonomous cell terrorist attack—he drove the truck alone, but his cohort Terry Nichols helped him construct the bomb the day before, and the third member of the cell, Michael Fortier, eventually testified against him for a reduced sentence. Released January, 2006, into WITSEC
- Identified with imagery and ideas from the Star Trek series; he justified his killing of the innocent via their association to the “evil empire,” and identified himself as a “Klingon,” a member of the fictional warrior race in the series in a motel registration form
- Gave conflicting statements regarding his awareness of the presence of the day care center. On the one hand he stated he was not aware of it and had he been, he may not have selected the location; but he later contradicted this sentiment and justified his killing of children in the bombing: “I didn’t define the rules of engagement in this conflict. The rules, if not written down, are defined by the aggressor. It was brutal, no holds barred. Women and kids were killed at Waco and Ruby Ridge. You put back in [the government’s] faces exactly what they’re giving out.”

# Dunblane, Scotland, March 13, 1996



Copyright Mohandie & Meloy, 2013. All rights reserved. Use by permission only.

- 43-year-old Thomas Hamilton walked to Dunblane Primary School armed with four guns, and burst into the gymnasium where 29 children were attending class
- Systematically killed 16 children, their teacher, and then shot himself. Another teacher and a dozen other students were wounded
- Five-and six-year old children were sitting in circles playing when he began his assault
- It appeared he had timed his assault to coincide with a major school assembly he believed was being held in the gymnasium

- An avid gun collector and disgraced scoutmaster, known as “**Mr. Creepy**” to the boys in this small community, as he seemed to be obsessed with filming young boys with their shirts off
- His fixation with young boys led him to be dropped from, and banned by the Boy Scouts.
- Twenty years subsequent to this, he was still seething with anger over this rejection, and during the weeks prior to the mass homicide, he had been turned down as a volunteer by Dunblane Primary School
- A week prior, **he wrote a letter to the media and Queen Elizabeth II** complaining about a campaign by the police and Dunblane teachers to ruin his reputation

# Jewish Community Center, Los Angeles, Aug. 10, 1999



Copyright Mohandise & Meloy, 2013. All rights reserved. Use by permission only.

- Buford Furrow, a racially motivated and anti-Semitic offender associated with the Aryan Nations, traveled from Washington State and ultimately attacked the Jewish Community Center (a children's day care center) in Los Angeles, California.
- Probed the boundaries of at least two other Jewish institutions (Museum of Tolerance and University of Judaism) and determined they were not soft enough targets--their security was too stringent.
- Killed a Filipino US Postal worker while making his escape, and wounded three children, a counselor, and a receptionist at this day care center. When he turned himself in, he told the police, "**this is a wake-up call for America.**"

- Had a romantic interest in the widow of Robert Mathews (deceased member of a late 20<sup>th</sup> century US white nationalist militant group **The Order**, killed at Whidbey Island during a police operation on Dec. 8, 1984), and had married her in 1995. They separated after six months, and she divorced him three years later. He had demanded her complete submission as his wife
- In July, 1999, prior to the assault he had tried unsuccessfully to reconcile with her
- Furrow had an **extensive psychiatric history**, including civil commitment for both suicidal and homicidal threats (Puckett, 2000), and had been arrested for assault in a psychiatric hospital.
- B.S. in engineering, and had worked for both Boeing and Northrop.

# Mountain View Elementary, Anchorage, May 1, 2001



Copyright Mohandie & Meloy, 2013. All rights reserved. Use by permission only.

- A 33-year-old man armed with a filet knife went onto the campus and attacked four children (aged 8 to 11) while they waited in the playground area of the campus for breakfast provided for low-income students.
- Children fled to the inside of the building with the perpetrator in pursuit, who was mumbling something to the effect of, “**taking people back to God.**”
- Continued to strike them, stabbing them in their necks--until cornered by teachers using a snow shovel, and police officers (trained in active shooter response) quickly arrived and apprehended the subject using less lethal munitions.
- Threatened the interveners and made a number of religiously themed statements that made no sense but inferred a psychotic “mission.”

- Loitering around the campus for several days and even brandished a knife at students, but there were no reports made of trespassers or unusual behavior to school authorities prior to this event.
- Subject had been arrested 13 times since 1994 on charges including assault, stalking, criminal trespassing and driving while intoxicated. He reportedly used a mental health center as his official address.

# Beslan, Ossetia, Sept. 1-3, 2004



Copyright Mohandise & Meloy, 2013. All rights reserved. Use by permission only.

- The siege started September 1, 2004, the first day of school, with the taking of over 1100 hostages, most of them children.
- Assailants were a group of heavily armed **Islamic separatist militants, mostly Ingush and Chechen**, in the town of Beslan, North Ossetia, an autonomous region of the Russian Federation.
- Terrorists demanded recognition of the independence of Chechnya at the UN and Russian withdrawal from Chechnya.
- On the third day of the standoff, Russian security forces entered the building with tanks, incendiary rockets, and other heavy weapons: at least 334 hostages were killed as a result of the crisis, including 186 children, with a significant number of people injured and reported missing.
- To date, this is the world's most lethal episode of school violence.

- Multiple groups attacked, including one female who was reportedly a surviving widow of a terrorist and another who was a veteran of other terrorist events.
- Offenders quickly exerted control, confiscated mobile phones, and insisted that victims speak in Russian. When a father tried to explain to other victims using the local regional dialect what was being demanded of them, a hostage taker asked him if he was finished, then shot him to death. Another dissenter was also shot and left to bleed to death. A group of 15-20 male adult victims perceived by the hostage takers as strongest were taken into a separate room where an explosion took place and survivors of this attack were reportedly executed.
- Ultimately “secret” negotiations between government and militant leaders took place and the tactical assault resulted in nearly all of the estimated 32 hostage takers being killed, while substantial innocent life was lost, mostly children. Some of the deaths were attributed to detonated explosives from the hostage takers, as well as from firearms, but others may have been inadvertent casualties of the tactical assault by authorities.

# Nanping School, China, March 23, 2010



Copyright Mohandie & Meloy, 2013. All rights reserved. Use by permission only.

# China 2010

- First of a cluster of 2010 Chinese school attacks occurred at Nanping City Experimental Elementary School on March 23, 2010, in the city of Nanping, Fujian Province.
- Offender used a knife to kill eight children and seriously wounded five others. Zheng Minsheng was a few weeks away from his 42<sup>nd</sup> birthday and had previously worked as a community physician.
- Had a good reputation among the factory patients he treated, but his relationship with his employers deteriorated over the course of several years.
- In 2009 he quit, and at the beginning of 2010, he gave up hope of finding another job and **became depressed**. Reported history of mental illness which was disputed at his trial.

# China 2010

- He told police that he perpetrated the attack because he thought "**life was meaningless.**"
- Stated that he perpetrated the attack after being rejected by a romantic interest, and suffering "**unfair treatment**" from the girl's wealthy family.
- His failures in both love and work were the two major reasons reported for his depression (Steinmuller & Fei, 2011).
- He was found guilty and executed on April 28, 2010, one month after the crime

# China 2010

- More elementary school massacres occurred in different parts of China over the next several months-all appeared to be perpetrated by mentally disturbed men, individuals with personal grievances, or those reacting to changes in Chinese society.
- In China, knives are the weapon of choice in violent crimes due to strict gun control laws.
- Just a few hours after the execution of Zheng Minsheng in neighboring Fujian Province, in Leizhou, Guangdong, another knife-wielding man, aged 33, attacked Hongfu Primary School and wounded 16 students and a teacher.
  - The offender had been a teacher at a different primary school in Leizhou, and was also sentenced to death in June of 2010.

# China 2010

- On April 29 in Taixing, Jiangsu, 47-year-old Xu Yuyuan went to Zhongxin Kindergarten and stabbed 28 students, two teachers and one security guard.
  - Unlike the other killers, he was from a wealthy family. Many people disliked his temper, he often gambled, and was accused of sexual harassment and domestic violence; following an accusation of fraud, he was terminated by his employer.
  - He accumulated substantial debts, and a week before the massacre, a creditor slapped him during an argument.

# China 2010

- On April 30, Wang Yonglai used a hammer to cause head injury to preschool children in Weifang, Shandong; then he used gasoline to commit suicide by self-immolation.
  - He was a farmer who had been in a property dispute—after the government found out that his village committee issued building permits without proper authorization, his new home was torn down and he lost substantial assets.
- May 12, 2010, Wu Huanming, aged 48, killed seven children and two adults and injured 11 other persons with a cleaver at a kindergarten in Hanzhong, Shaanxi.
  - Later committed suicide.
  - Reportedly had been the landlord of the school and had been involved in an ongoing dispute with the school administrator over when the school would relocate from his building.

# China 2010 to 2011

- August 4, 2010, 26-year-old Fang Jiantang slashed more than 20 children and staff with a large knife, killing 3 children and 1 teacher, at a kindergarten in Zibo, Shandong province; three other children and 4 teachers were taken to the hospital.
  - Eight children, all aged four or five, were injured in Minhang District, Shanghai, when an employee at a child-care center for migrant workers attacked them with a box cutter.
- In September 2011, a young girl and three adults taking their children to nursery school were killed in Gongyi, Henan by 30-year-old Wang Hongbin who was armed with an axe.
  - Offender was a local farmer who reportedly suffered from schizophrenia.
- “**Revenge against society**” (**baofu shehui**) was the most commonly claimed motivation for all the killers

# Macro-factors for Chinese Attacks

- Social changes, a failure to adequately address mental illness treatment needs, and especially a contagion or copycat effect (Cantor, Sheehan, Alpers & Mullen, 1999) were all factors that likely played a role in the plethora of school attacks in China during 2010.
- Reportedly, parents asked local government and school officials to address their serious concerns about safety, and an emergency panel was created by the education ministry.
- There was an attempt by the state media to reduce news about the attacks to prevent copycat crimes and panic.
- Efforts were made to increase school security by providing pepper spray and metal pitchforks to security personnel.
- Following the Chenpeng school attack, the Chinese government began posting security guards in schools throughout the country. Schools were scheduled to all receive a security guard by 2013.

# Chenpeng Village, Dec. 14, 2012



Copyright Mohandie & Meloy, 2013. All rights reserved. Use by permission only.

- **The same day as the Newtown massacre**, 36-year-old villager Min Yongjun stabbed 24 people, including 23 children and an elderly woman, in a knife attack at Chempeng Village Primary School in the Wenshu Township, Guangshan County, Henan province, China.
- The child victims were between six and eleven years old, and the attack began as the children were arriving for classes.
- Event was partially captured on security video cameras.
- First attacked an elderly woman, aged 85, who lived next to the school, after he had entered her house and then stole one of her knives.

- He then pursued the children with the knife and slashed them, many on their heads.
- None of the victims were fatally wounded, several were reported to have had fingers or ears cut off during the attack. Given the manner of the wounds inflicted, it was surmised that his goal was to maim and disfigure the victims.
- He was captured at the scene and taken into police custody.
- Reportedly the offender had a long history of seizures, and may have been influenced by the 2012 Mayan Doomsday prophecy, something which was also of interest to a local cult.

# Sandy Hook, Dec. 14, 2012

- Shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School: Report of the Office of the Child Advocate, Nov. 21, 2014
- Key Findings on Adam Lanza:
  - Significant developmental challenges from earliest childhood
  - Public school services were limited
  - Socio-emotional challenges worse after 9 yrs
  - Preoccupation with violence unaddressed

# Key findings on Adam Lanza

- Severe anxiety > homebound status age 13
- Psychiatrist (no notes) supported decision in 8<sup>th</sup> grade to homebound status
- Little surveillance for that one year by school
- Yale Child Study Center (age 14) said accommodating him would lead to further dysfunction and isolation
- Dx of autism spectrum, anxiety, and OCD
- Father made efforts to seek treatment, coordination, and planning; Yale recommendations largely went unheeded
- Resistance to medication reinforced by mother

# Key findings on Adam Lanza

- His ed plan misclassified his disabilities and did not apply guidelines for his dx
- Showed progress age 15 to return to school, but short lived
- IQ was average, but viewed by school and parents as intellectually gifted
- Completed high school through tutoring and community college
- School system cared, but accommodated and appeased
- No mental health treatment after 2008; no mental health consult after 2006

# Key findings on Adam Lanza

- Parents did not understand depth of disturbance
- Pediatric records from ages 13-17 note his diagnoses, but do not state need for mental health treatment.
- Adult medical records do not reflect awareness of his mental health needs.
- Progressively deteriorated into almost complete isolation last several years of life.
- Stopped communicating with father in 2010; father continued to email him til 2012 wanting to meet.
- Preoccupied with mass murder; emailing community of mass murder enthusiasts on the internet.

# Key findings on Adam Lanza

- Communications during this time suggest depression and some suicidality, but not psychosis
- Throughout this time maintained access to high capacity firearms and ammunition despite deterioration; had been recreational shooter with family, esp mother
- In the waning months of his life, no consideration of his access to weapons or suicidality
- Anorexic at time of killings, 6 feet tall, 112 pounds
- Triggering event may have been plans to move out of Sandy Hook and fear of leaving his comfort zone at home.

# Key findings on Adam Lanza

- Minimal evaluation and treatment of mental health needs throughout his entire life; only Yale CSC appreciated gravity of his diagnoses
- Weakness and lapses in educational and health care systems: all siloed.
- Parents need assistance to understand complex developmental and psychiatric disorders.
- Dramatic lack of resources for autistic spectrum disorders.
- Ready availability of assault weapons and high capacity ammunition clips played lethal role—a critical public health issue

# Key findings on Adam Lanza

- These diagnoses most likely are internalized; not externalized
- In Lanza's case, severe mental health problems + atypical preoccupation with violence + access to firearms = mass murder
- However, his predisposing factors and compounding stresses do not inevitably lead to mass murder, which is quite rare.

# Lessons Learned- offenders

- Our sample of cases is nonrandom and small (**n=14**), but may represent those individuals who have perpetrated mass casualty events in elementary schools over the past century
- A Wikipedia search of primary school assaults across the world indicate that there have been approximately **109 incidents** since July 26, **1764**: four Lenape Indian warriors entered the Enoch Brown Elementary School in Franklin County, Pennsylvania, and killed and scalped 9-10 of the 12 children present.
- The next attack did not occur for over a hundred years. The Wikipedia citation defines such mass casualty events as “attacks on school property or related primarily to school issues or events.”
- Since the Bath, Michigan event there have been about **88 worldwide** incidents of attacks on primary schools. The Wikipedia data, however, should be treated with caution since the definition of “mass casualty” is unclear, and the citations are typically not drawn from primary source historical material, but secondary source news reports or historical footnotes.

# TRIGGERING EVENTS

“Precipitating events may have occurred or the person may act out in anticipation of something...”

- Other events
- School and work related events
- Outside economic events
- Family changes
- Interpersonal conflict
- Internal psychological changes
- Intervention

# Lessons Learned-offenders

- Nearly all adult outsiders (with the exception of Brenda Spencer) who seemed to fit into one of several, sometimes overlapping categories:
  - 1) psychotic individuals with a delusional agenda,
  - 2) those with personal grievances that caused them to target the school, and,
  - 3) those with a sociopolitical agenda, namely terrorists (autonomous cell and large group) utilizing the location to make a statement and potentially destabilize the existing power structure.
- High prevalence of Type I subjects (no real connection to the school) were represented, along with some Type II offenders (individuals like Mr. Purdy and Mr. Lanza would technically fit into this category although it had been over 15 years since either had attended the respective schools), and one apparent Type III (Andrew Kehoe, the treasurer of the school board) (Mohandie, 2000).

# Lessons Learned-offenders

- Similar to those who perpetrate mass murders (Meloy, Hempel, Gray, Mohandie, Shiva, & Richards, 2004), with the possible exception of the terrorists at Beslan; many evidenced a military and weapons preoccupation (pseudocommando or warrior mentality; Dietz, 1986; Hempel, Meloy & Richards, 1999; Knoll, 2010a, 2010b),
  - An obsession with violence, and identified and tracked other perpetrators of mass casualties.
  - Psychologically they often exhibited extreme detachment, chronic unresolved anger, interpersonal isolation, a sense of having been victimized, and were easily offended and apt to perceive mistreatment by others.
  - In addition to being homicidal, they tended to also be suicidal, often killing themselves rather than submitting to arrest.
  - A number of them also demonstrated likely psychotic thought processes, often seen in mass murderers who target strangers (Hempel et al., 1999): "psychotic action"
- Generally speaking--with the exception of the ideologically-motivated offenders (Beslan case and Oklahoma City bombing case)--they acted alone.

# Lessons Learned-offenders

- Warning behaviors (Meloy, Hoffman, Guldimann, & James, 2012)—acute, dynamic accelerating behavioral patterns that likely signal increasing risk of violence--were often demonstrated by the offenders, including:
  - 1) pathway,
  - 2) fixation,
  - 3) identification,
  - 4) energy burst,
  - 5) leakage, and
  - 6) last resort warning behavior
- Fixations, ie, pathological preoccupations, were variable in frequency and intensity, but included racial and sociopolitical agendas, as well as personal grievances and overvalued ideas which were often delusional.

# Warning Behaviors

## (Meloy et al., Behavioral Sciences and the Law, 2012)

1. Pathway warning behavior – any behavior that is part of research, planning, preparation, or implementation of an attack (Calhoun & Weston, 2003).
2. Fixation warning behavior – any behavior that indicates an increasingly pathological preoccupation with a person or a cause (Mullen et al., 2009)
3. Identification warning behavior – any behavior that indicates a psychological desire to be a “pseudocommando,” (Dietz, 1986), have a “warrior mentality,” closely associate with weapons or other military or law enforcement paraphernalia (Hempel, Meloy, & Richards, 1999), identify with previous attackers, or identify oneself as an agent to advance a particular cause or belief system.

# Warning Behaviors (accelerating patterns of risk)

4. Novel aggression warning behavior– acts of violence unrelated to attack behavior that are committed for the first time. Such behaviors test the ability of the subject to actually do a violent act.
5. Energy burst warning behavior – an increase in the frequency or variety of any noted activities related to the target.
6. Leakage warning behavior – the communication to a third party of an intent to do harm to a target.
7. Directly communicated threat warning behavior – the communication of a direct threat to the target or law enforcement beforehand.
8. Last resort warning behavior – increasing desperation or distress through declaration in word or deed.

# Lessons Learned-offenders

- The behavioral pattern of **bifurcation—two geographical locations for killings**--seen in some mass homicides (Hempel et al., 1999) was also represented in the selected cases.
- **Violence was predatory (instrumental)**: proactive, driven by fantasy, non-time limited in sequence, directed by cognition and perhaps initiated by emotion which was then transformed into an action plan that was mentally and usually behaviorally rehearsed in some fashion (Meloy, 2004, 2006).
- Contrast to affective (reactive, emotional or defensive) violence which was not in evidence in any of these cases during the behavioral sequence leading to the casualties; however, there may have been a **sequencing** from predatory to affective violence once the killing began.
- In the McVeigh case, he felt tremendous anger over the deaths in the Branch Davidian compound on April 19, 1993; but then over the next two years developed a methodical plan to bomb the Murrah building and evidenced little emotion toward anyone (Meloy case files).

# Lessons Learned-offenders

- Noticeably absent were any direct threats to intended targets.
- While there may have been communications, would be offenders are usually in enough control to realize that if they do telegraph their intentions to the intended target, this will interfere with the consummation of their violent intent.
- Subjects will “leak” statements to third parties (Meloy & O’Toole, 2011), often of an ominous or indirect nature, which often reflects the presence of homicidal thinking along with the cognitive load (Sweller, 1988) it creates, and the dynamic undercurrent of power sought—and perhaps anxiety-- which compels expression.

# Lessons Learned- target selection

- Most convenient and available, high visibility, **maximum shock value and dramatic effect**, attention and notoriety, and the symbolic value of attacking those most innocent, vulnerable, and incapable of defense.
- Selection for this group of offenders usually has multiple determinants.
- Major psychodynamic in these cases may be **pathological narcissism**: the desire for recognition through infamy and the gratification of overdetermined and chronic anger toward others for mistreatment, if not a full blown paranoid state of mind.
- An often overlooked emotion in these cases, which may provide an undercurrent which fuels the act, is **envy: the wish to destroy the goodness in others (Klein, 1975), or the goodness represented by the innocence of children.**
- **Media coverage of high profile events likely stimulates copycat acts** (Cantor et al., 1999) among other unstable or angry subjects who are seeking to channel their grievances and homicidal impulses. This seemed particularly evident in the multitude of Chinese cases occurring between 2010 and 2012.

# Copycat or Contagion Effect

- JB Helfgott, Aggression and Violent Behavior, 2015, 46-64.
  - Demographic characteristic
  - Criminogenic factors
  - Relationship to media
  - Media characteristics
  - Cultural-environmental factors

# Prevention/Mitigation

- Mental health care. Complete prevention of these events is impossible--even totalitarian regimes with much less personal freedoms have not been immune--but it is possible to reduce the frequency of these catastrophic acts of mass violence.
- **Proactive and comprehensive public mental health services** accessible at a moment's notice to facilitate outreach, intervention, and involuntary hospitalization are key to reducing the pool of individuals with untreated psychotic and other mental illnesses--and fixed ideas or delusions that may justify violent problem solving, diminish impulse control, and increase poor judgment.
- Service providers need to be competently trained in the indicators of extreme violence, and *local* medical systems need the legal and financial support necessary for these external controls, including greater flexibility to involuntarily hold individuals of concern.

# Prevention/Mitigation

- Education and awareness. Community education and a sense of shared responsibility for safety from these and other events requires greater public attention and private situational awareness.
- In this regard, the “**see something, say something**” campaigns, first initiated in New York City following the 9/11 attacks, are a helpful venue for this message, along with a supporting network of staff (mental health and law enforcement) who can then field in a timely fashion the investigations generated by such campaigns.

# BACKGROUND CHECKS FOR FIREARMS?

- Inadequate
- Fail to assess problem people in environment
- Need to have ability to reopen investigation
- Tip lines to initiate re-open
- Presence of violent thought and ideas need to be included

# Prevention/Mitigation

- Gun control. Over a thousand individuals were killed by a firearm in the US between the Newtown disaster in December, 2012, and February, 2013 (3 months; 300+ per month, homicide, suicide, and accident)
- Thoughtful gun control is critical, meaning **careful screening, universal registration, and repeated demonstrated competency in use**.
- While certain countries--namely China--have had significant clusters of these tragic events without the use of firearms, the death toll in these events would likely have been higher if the offender had used a handgun or long gun. Limited or nonexistent access to a high capacity firearm not only reduces the practical ability of the subject to carry out such an act, but it also reduces the **anticipatory and secret fantasy** that may motivate planning and preparation.
- Such fantasies are extremely gratifying since they compensate for an often blighted social and occupational existence (Meloy et al., 2004) and facilitate the subject's identification with previous mass murderers.
- For a moment in time the offender can actually look forward to being omnipotent—a stark contrast to his usual daily existence.

# Prevention/Mitigation

- Armed guards and other security. The idea of posting armed guards or police on campuses has also been suggested as a method of prevention.
- Costly, but would certainly dissuade some offenders, and potentially allow for engagement prior to lethal attacks by offenders.
- It becomes critical to address three issues while contemplating such a solution: 1) the cost of coverage while such individuals are on break, out on sick leave, or patrolling other areas of a campus or school district; 2) The need for high level training to ensure such staff can competently use and safely possess a firearm while on campus; and 3) Their presence does not unduly increase perceptions of vulnerability and fear among children.
- The devil, however, dwells in the details. **Should armed guards or police officers be armed with AK-47s or M-16s? If not, can an armed person adequately respond to a semi-automatic assault rifle with a handgun?**
- Perhaps an H&K MP5 fully automatic 9 mm machinegun should be considered by the school protectors to overcome any conceivable firepower advantage by a would be offender.
- With such weapons come additional risks....

# Prevention/Mitigation

- Basic physical security issues--cameras and surveillance systems, gate control and campus access, and identification methods--must **balance deterrence and reassurance**.
- Parental resistance: most adults do not want to send their children to a fortress reminiscent of a prison.
- The school should be a **warm environment** for the children, but appear to the offender to be an **undesirable place for him to consider perpetrating his crimes**.
- Violence needs to be a less acceptable alternative for the offender—and the public at large.

# Disruption

- Disruption is central to threat management, and relies on identification of potentially at-risk individuals, **usually in the late stages of a pathway to violence.**
- **Difficulty:** While mass casualty events may be perpetrated by insiders such as former students, parents, or staff members, most are inflicted by outsiders.
- Students, staff, and parents need to be vigilant for, and report apparently unstable outsiders to the authorities and the school's threat assessment team.
- More likely though, community members will subsequently provide the essential information to police.
- Law enforcement will need to work **proactively** to investigate the subject's ability to pose a risk to the school, and work closely with the school at risk to harden the target.
- Creative use of legal and civil strategies (Mohandie & Hoffmann, 2013) to reduce risk in cases which do not qualify for immediate arrest and hospitalization will be critical to establish boundaries and contain the individual of concern.

# Disruption

- In particular, if the offender is not somehow institutionalized post-intervention, the potential for escalation must be considered and planned for.
- **Monitoring**--including surveillance, online postings, the use of informants and even undercover operations--may be important in other cases.
- Proactive and progressive monitoring by mental health systems that the person may be involved with... LADMH example
- **The philosophy of *need to know* should be balanced with the belief in *need to share*.**
- This eliminates the risk of a **silo-effect**: different individuals know different details, but since information is not exchanged, the totality of violence risk cannot be accurately assessed and managed.

- Prevention does not require prediction.

# Closing Thoughts

- Over a hundred attacks on elementary or primary schools worldwide since the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century.
- Attackers are usually adult outsiders, and are quite similar to other mass murderers; their attacks are virtually always predatory or instrumental. They do not “snap.”
- Offenders are psychotic, have a personal grievance, or, on occasion, are trying to advance an ideology. The latter group typically do not attack alone.

# Closing Thoughts

- Psychologically they often exhibit **extreme detachment, chronic unresolved anger, interpersonal isolation, a sense of having been victimized, and were easily offended and apt to perceive mistreatment by others.**
- Prevention is possible, and risk mitigation is achievable.
- **Mental health care, community education and awareness, firearms regulation, and enhanced security** are central elements to risk mitigate such crimes.
- Disruption in the later stages of a pathway to violence can be accomplished through vigilance and a “need to share” information with those who can and will intervene.

# Are your children safe?

- School violence, especially homicide and mass murder, is extremely rare.
- Your children are very safe at school.
- The probability of homicide is extremely low, but if the probability of an event is not zero, it will eventually happen again.



# INTERNATIONAL HANDBOOK OF THREAT ASSESSMENT

EDITED BY J. REID MELOY AND JENS HOFFMANN

OXFORD

Copyright Mohandie & Meloy, 2013. All rights reserved. Use by permission only.

Out of the mouth of babies and infants,  
you have established strength because of  
your foes,  
to still the enemy and the avenger.

• Psalm 8:2