

From the Guest Editor: Understanding Targeted Violence

Russell Palarea, Ph.D.

Consulting Operational Psychologist (CTR), Office of Protective Intelligence Investigations
Diplomatic Security Service, U.S. Department of State*
President, Association of Threat Assessment Professionals

Understanding why people commit targeted violence attacks and how to prevent them has become an increasingly urgent issue over the years. Whether it's a mass shooting, mass stabbing, mass vehicular attack, chemical/biological weapon, or explosive device, the commission of targeted attacks have reached public health epidemic proportions. Despite the founding of the Association of Threat Assessment Professionals (ATAP) in 1992 (www.atapworldwide.org), creation of the U.S. Secret Service's behavior-based threat assessment model in 1995 (www.secretservice.gov/data/protection/ntac/tatv95.pdf), and current practice of threat assessment across the Federal Government, state/local agencies and communities have been slow to adopt its practice.

While attacks are committed by both insiders and outsiders, those committed by insiders afford coworkers and supervisors the opportunity to observe the concerning behavior escalating over time, and thus implement threat management strategies to prevent the attack. The current proliferation of Insider Threat Programs across the Federal Government, Government contractors, and the broader corporate community brings new opportunities for implementing behavior-based threat assessment programs. Although Executive Order 13587 was originally created to protect classified information, the 2012 Presidential Memorandum expanded insider threat programs to preventing acts of violence against the Government or Nation. This merger of the information disclosure/espionage prevention and violence prevention missions is critical.

*The views expressed in this article are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect those of the U.S. Department of State or the U.S. Government.



From a human factors perspective, disgruntled employees have a spectrum of harmful acts at their disposal: they can shoot/stab/run over coworkers, set off a bomb at the worksite, sabotage mission critical equipment, launch a cyberattack, disclose classified information, or commit espionage. The use of the behavior-based threat assessment model to identify, investigate, and assess pre-attack behavior, and then mitigate the attack, is the solution to preventing these acts of harm and violence.



In this edition of **The Insider**, you will hear from threat assessment experts with the U.S. Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center, FBI Behavioral Threat Assessment Center, University of Nebraska Public Policy Center, University of Virginia Youth Violence Project, and the VA Hospital Behavioral Threat Management Program, on using behavior-based threat assessment models to prevent violent attacks. Thank you to the editorial staff for dedicating this edition of **The Insider** to this critical aspect of the insider threat mission.

U.S. Secret Service

NATIONAL THREAT ASSESSMENT CENTER

The U.S. Secret Service has a longstanding tradition of conducting threat assessments as part of its approach to protecting the President of the United States, other senior-level government officials, and their families. The Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC) is dedicated to expanding the field of violence prevention by examining the targeted violence that affects communities across the United States.

RESEARCH AND GUIDANCE

For over 20 years, NTAC has studied all forms of targeted violence, including assassinations, attacks against

government, school and campus attacks, workplace violence, and mass attacks in public spaces.

TRAINING AND CONSULTATION

NTAC is available to provide no-cost training on threat assessment and the prevention of targeted violence to government agencies, state and local law enforcement, school teachers and administrators, mental health professionals, and corporate security.

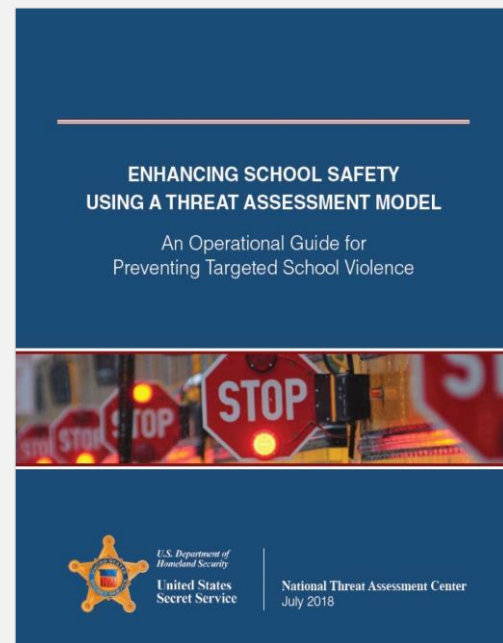
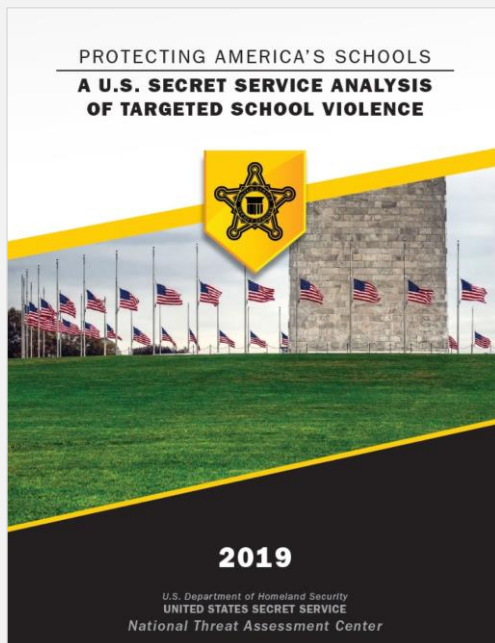
NTAC is also available to consult on individual threat cases or on the development of threat assessment policies and protocols.



Featured Research and Guidance

In *Protecting America's Schools: A U.S. Secret Service Analysis of Targeted School Violence*, NTAC provides the most comprehensive analysis of targeted school violence ever produced, and analyzes 41 school attacks that occurred in the United States from 2008-2017.

In *Enhancing School Safety Using a Threat Assessment Model: An Operational Guide for Preventing Targeted School Violence*, NTAC provides communities with clear recommendations on implementing a multidisciplinary school threat assessment team as part of a targeted violence prevention plan.



COMING SOON

In summer 2020, NTAC will release *Mass Attacks in Public Spaces – 2019*, the latest in a series of annual reports analyzing attacks that took place at businesses, houses of worship, schools, and other public and semi-public locations in the United States, in which three or more persons were harmed.



ACCESSING RESOURCES

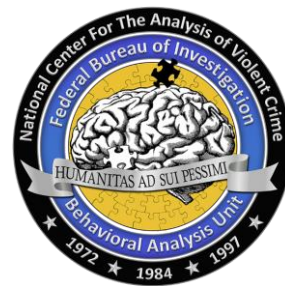
All NTAC research and guidance publications can be found at www.secretservice.gov/protection/ntac
Requests for NTAC training or consultation can be sent to NTACtraining@uss.s.dhs.gov or NTACconsults@uss.s.dhs.gov

FBI's Behavioral Threat Assessment Center

The FBI's Behavioral Threat Assessment Center (BTAC), established in 2010, is a national-level, multidisciplinary, and multi-agency (ATF, HSI, and the U.S. Capitol Police) threat assessment and management team. BTAC provides threat assessment and threat management support to international, federal, state, local, tribal, and campus law enforcement partners, as well as community stakeholders, who work diligently across the United States to prevent targeted violence. BTAC's expertise in terrorism and targeted violence prevention

includes evaluating persons/adults of concern, potential active shooters, school shootings/threats, stalking, and workplace violence.

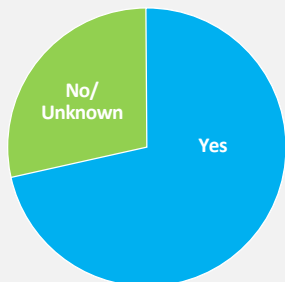
BTAC also conducts extensive research on prior acts of terrorism and targeted violence to learn from past events, to enhance and improve prevention capabilities, and to train the community and other stakeholders.



Lone Offender Terrorism in the United States

In 2019, BTAC released a research report titled "A Study of Lone Offender Terrorism in the United States (1972-2015)". This study examined the case files of 52 ideologically-based lone offenders who conceptualized and carried out a lethal or potentially lethal attack not at the behest of a larger terrorist organization or ideological movement. The study covered topics such as ideological radicalization, concerning behaviors, bystander behaviors, and attack methods. Below are some key findings on target selection.

Target was Instrumental to Ideological Goal



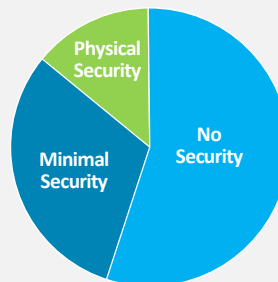
73% of offenders selected the attack target because it was instrumental to their goal or ideology (e.g., targeting a clinic to stop abortions).

Target Chosen for Media Attention



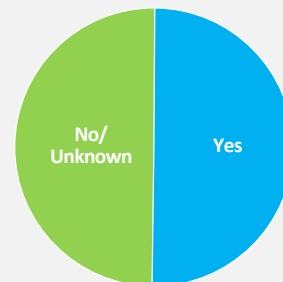
42% of offenders selected their target and/or chose to carry out an attack at least in part to attract media attention.

Target Chosen due to Level of Security



79% of offenders attacked targets that had either no security or minimal security.

Target Chosen due to Ease of Access



50% of offenders, where it could be determined, selected their targets based at least partially on the target's ease of access.



COMING SOON

How similar are the stressors and concerning behaviors of active shooters to persons of concern seen by threat assessment teams? Two upcoming BTAC publications explore the similarities and differences between the two groups, as well as the actions of both groups' bystanders to determine if there are key items that may help threat assessment teams better manage risk.

ADDITIONAL REPORTS

Other FBI reports on threat assessment and targeted violence can be found online:

Pre-attack Behaviors of Active Shooters - <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/pre-attack-behaviors-of-active-shooters-in-us-2000-2013.pdf/view>

Making Prevention a Reality: Identifying, Assessing, and Managing the Threat of Targeted Attacks – <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/making-prevention-a-reality.pdf/view>



The University of Nebraska Public Policy Center (NUPPC)



Mario Scalora & Denise Bulling

The University of Nebraska Public Policy Center (NUPPC) is pleased to collaborate with a range of partners researching threat assessment and management strategies to address issues pertinent to insider threat and targeted violence. One area of our research portfolio has focused on observer and bystander responses to concerning behavior that may signal insider threat or targeted violence. Our team has and continues to perform such research across a range of governmental, commercial, and educational settings (Bulling & Scalora, 2008; Scalora, Bulling, DeKraai, Hoffman & Avila, 2014; Scalora, Bulling, DeKraai, Senholzi, & Shechter, 2016). Rather than summarize a single study, the following is a synopsis of consistent findings across studies.

The literature indicates that non-targeted bystanders are often aware of concerning warning and precursor behaviors to violent activity (Meloy, 2014; Meloy, Hoffmann, Guldemann, & James, 2012). Further, many such attackers often shared or “leaked” their violent intentions to others prior to attack (Meloy & O’Toole, 2011). Sadly, many bystanders do not report such information, suggesting the need for continuous outreach to stakeholders to enhance reporting utilizing empowerment based strategies consistent with the culture of organizations.

The NUPPC has performed multiple studies across a range of settings (Hodges, Low, Viñas-Racionero, Hollister, & Scalora, 2016; Hollister, Scalora, Hoff, Hodges, & Marquez, 2016; Hollister, Scalora, Hoff, & Marquez, 2014). The data suggest a large variability in willingness to inform authorities across situations. Reporting is dependent upon multiple factors, including:

- The *nature of the behavior(s) of concern*— Observers were more willing to inform authorities after viewing multiple

behaviors, direct threats, and/or weapons. Respondents, in the absence of factors directly raising safety issues, express reluctance to be involved in what are perceived to be personal matters.

- *Psychological factors* of the respondent, particularly:
 - Fear for personal safety (e.g., retaliation)
 - Fear they may be over-reacting
 - Concern they may be viewed as incompetent or unable to deal with problem situations
 - Unsure or less confident of their ability to accurately identify behaviors
 - Disbelief that something could happen
 - Visceral reaction to what the behavior of concern may mean
- The *nature of the relationship* between parties. Specifically, respondents are hesitant and may fear the impact the reporting upon the relationship. If the potential reporter perceives they are of lower status or authority compared to the party being reported, anonymous reporting options are viewed as more desirable.
- *Desire to handle it on one’s own*, or to handle it prior to reporting. Particularly within military samples, potential reporters indicate a desire to potentially engage in their own intervention (either in lieu of or in addition to reporting) when behaviors were less directly threatening in nature.
- *Perceived organizational barriers* or consequences of response. Subjects noted potential organizational impediments across samples that included ignorance of reporting mechanisms as well as concern about how the report would be handled. If there was a perception of potential organizational over-reaction, reporting was less likely to occur.

For more information, contact mscalora1@unl.edu

LEAST likely to be reported. Most likely to be handled on own or NO ACTION TAKEN	MOST likely to be reported. Least likely to be handled on own
Engages in risky behaviors	Endangers someone else
Loses temper	Hurts significant other
Exhibits behavior perceived to be a personal matter	Browses terrorist websites
Exhibits unusual behavior	Endangers me
Tends to be withdrawn	Exhibits stalking behavior

Virginia Youth Violence Project



CURRY SCHOOL of EDUCATION and HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

The Youth Violence Project led by Professor Dewey Cornell conducts research on youth violence prevention and school safety. Over the past 25 years, we have conducted studies about bullying, school climate, and youth violence. We

developed the original Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines (renamed the Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines) and created the Authoritative School Climate Survey that is used in Virginia secondary schools.

Featured Research

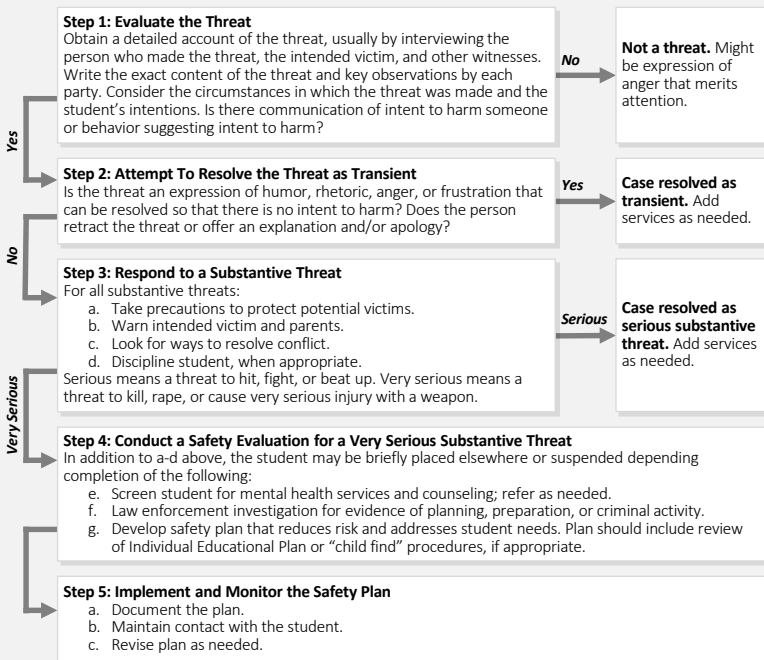
Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines

The Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines (CSTAG) is a practical model for conducting threat assessments in K-12 schools. School-based multidisciplinary teams learn to use a 154-page manual in a one-day workshop. CSTAG was developed at the University of Virginia in 2001 and both field tests and controlled studies demonstrate its utility and effectiveness. Our model was recognized as an evidence-based program by the National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices in 2013 and it is widely used in the United States and Canada. Published studies are available upon request.

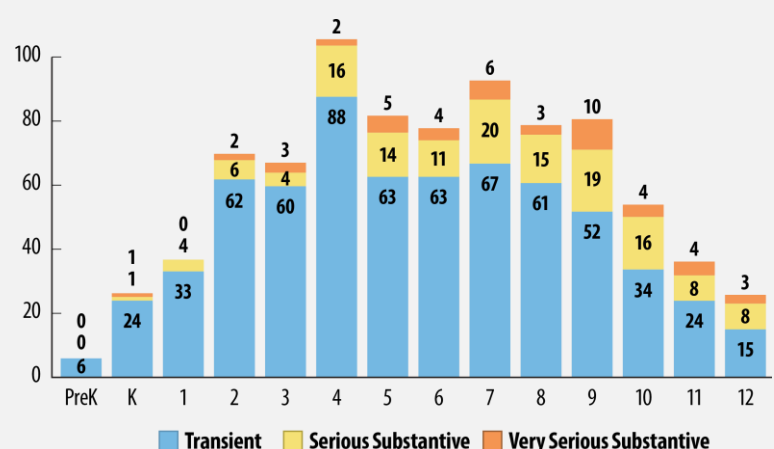
Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines

In 841 threat cases reported by 339 schools, 77% of threats were classified by the school as transient (not serious), 17% as serious substantive (such as a fight), and 6% as very serious substantive (serious threat to kill or severely injure). Nearly all (97.5%) threats were not attempted, 2% were attempted but averted, and .5% were carried out (all fights with no serious injuries). As a result of the threat, 86% of students had no change in school placement. Only 38% were suspended out of school, 1% were arrested, and .5% were expelled. There were no statistically significant differences between Black, Hispanic, and White students in out-of-school suspension, placement change, expulsion, arrest, or incarceration.

Threat assessment can help schools avoid over-reacting to minor misbehavior and also bring needed services to a smaller group of troubled students before problems escalate to violence.



Threat Classification by Grade
n=841



COMING SOON

National Center for School Safety

We are leading the threat assessment section of the new, multi-site National Center for School Safety, a training and technical assistance center funded by the U.S. Department of Justice. One of our primary goals is to build national consensus on school threat assessment training, practice, and fidelity standards. Contact us: youthvio@virginia.edu

U.S. Veterans Health Administration (VHA): Workplace Violence Prevention Program



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

VHA’s Workplace Violence Prevention Program (WVPP) model marries the findings from empirical science with current behavioral threat assessment and management best practices. The result is an evidence-based and data-driven approach to violence prevention. The model is scalable across an enterprise

of 142+ major medical centers and 1,000+ Community Based Outpatient Clinics, which combined, employ over 360,000 people. VHA is a place for healing: “Everyone’s Safety is Everyone’s Responsibility.”

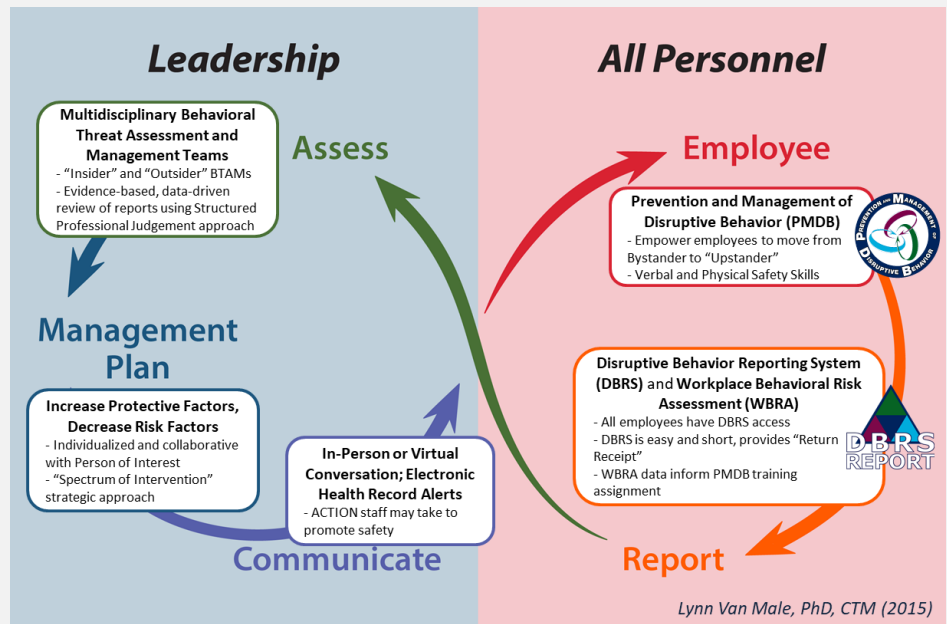
Workplace Violence Prevention Program Design and Implementation

Employee. Relevance of employee training promotes retention of content; thus, training is customized to address the skills needed for employees to manage what actually happens in their workplaces. Knowing what to do increases the likelihood of employees moving from being a bystander to being an “upstander” in a critical situation.

Report. Employees must have direct, simple, secure, and optionally anonymous ways to voice their safety concerns. If a behavior causes a concern, then it should be reported. Event data are used to align employee training assignments (see above).

Assess. Reports of behavioral safety concerns must be addressed promptly and appropriately. Using a Structured Professional Judgment (SPJ) approach, the BTAMs in every VHA facility weigh known risk and protective factors unique to each case, taking into consideration numerous contextual factors regarding the reported behavioral safety concern. The factors comprising the SPJs used in VHA have been identified across over thirty years of peer-reviewed science as relevant for informing threat assessment and management practice.

Management Plan. People tend to support what they, themselves, create. Behavioral threat management plans are



Lynn Van Male, PhD, CTM (2015)

developed collaboratively with patients and employees, whenever possible. These plans attend to the reality that BTAMs might unintentionally escalate behaviors if recommended interventions are not matched and paired appropriately to the concerning incident.

Communicate. Finally, the assessment-informed behavioral management plan must be communicated to personnel. Ensuring employees know what actions to take to promote safety is the final point along the model’s ongoing and iterative pathway.



ADDITIONAL REPORTS

Van Male, L., Vance, K., Hutton, S., & Truman, B. (2018). Comprehensive Workplace Violence Prevention Program: Model and Process Success in a National Healthcare System. In I. Needham, K. McKenna, O. Frank, & N. Oud (Eds.), *Proceedings of the Sixth International Conference on Violence in the Health Sector: Advancing the delivery of positive practice* (pp. 464-470). Toronto: Oud Consultancy.

Wyatt, R., Anderson-Dreves, K., & Van Male, L. M. (2016). Workplace Violence in Health Care: A Critical Issue with a Promising Solution. *Journal of the American Medical Association, 316*(10), pp. 1037-1038.