Mass & Targeted Violence Starter Information

Focus 1. Define & Monitor the Problem

In 2022, 81 victims were killed or injured during mass shooting events in Colorado. Between January 2020 and April 3rd, 2023, a total of 217 people were killed or injured from mass shootings.

– Source: Gun Violence Archive

Mass shootings include a wide range of high casualty events, such as hate crimes that target specific identities, domestic terrorism, school shootings, workplace shootings, and others. Below is a summary of the data provided in the Gun Violence Archive, CDPHE, and Statica.

- **67%** of the 39 recorded recent mass shooting events occurred in the Denver Metro area. Another 28% occurred in the southern Front Range. The remaining two events occurred on the Western Slope.

- **62** people were killed from mass shootings between June 5th, 2020 and April 3rd, 2020. In the same time period, 155 people were injured (see **Figure 1**).

- **96%** of mass shootings nationwide are carried out exclusively by a male perpetrator. This is according to a Statica analysis from 1982 through April 12, 2023.

Figure 1. Victims injured and killed from mass shootings in Colorado from 2020 to April 3rd, 2023. Source: Gun Violence Archive

- **2.8%** of the total firearm related deaths in 2021 were a result of mass shootings in Colorado. That's 30 out of a total of 1,059 firearm-related deaths that year.
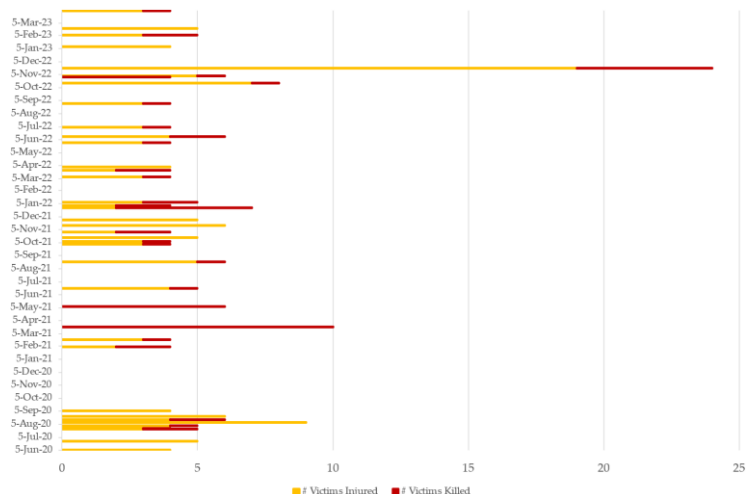
While there are many definitions of mass shootings, we have included those that involve four or more victims killed or injured during a firearm incident. These incidents can occur in a number of public and private settings. Targets of mass violence are disproportionately based on gender, race, religion, or ethnicity and tend to be perpetrated against random individuals with those characteristics.

Focus 2: Develop Understanding of Risk & Protective Factors

Risk Factors: Mass shootings are relatively rare events, and so it is often difficult to understand the risk factors associated with them. It may be impossible to distinguish individuals who will commit an act of mass violence from thousands of others we would classify as "at risk." For this reason, we need

to think about the community and societal risks associated with mass shootings as well as individual risk factors.

Individual Risk Factors: The following may be individual risk factors:

1. Homicidal and/or suicidal ideation.[i]
2. Blame-based ideology (e.g., workplace, school, individual, or identity group).[i]
3. History of research of mass shooting events and perpetrators.[i]
4. Demonstrated lack of empathy.[ii]
5. Sadistic behavior.[ii]
6. Damaged masculinity.[ii]
7. Obsession with weapons and death.[ii]
8. Paranoid thinking.[ii]

Environmental Factors: The following may be environmental risk factors:

1. Family and neighborhood characteristics, such as childhood abuse, exposure to violence at a young age, parental suicide, physical abuse, sexual abuse, domestic violence, and severe bullying.[i] Other factors include being ostracized by peers, social isolation, and not having access to a support system.[iii]
2. Access to firearm(s).[i]
3. Identifiable crisis-point for the shooter in the days, weeks, or months before violence.[i]
4. School characteristics, such as large class size and a high student-to-teacher ratio are associated with more mass shootings.[iii]
5. High exposure to violent media as a child.[iii]

Focus 3: Engage the Community to Promote Multi-Sector Prevention Strategies

Below are potential community public health strategies identified to address mass shootings:

Upstream (e.g., root cause & social determinants)

- Social-emotional skill development.[iv]
- Remove notoriety motivation of shooters.[iv]
- Support for children and families for those with high ACES scores.[iv]
- Destigmatize mental health services.[ii]
- Develop civic and community spaces for men.
- Reduce potential grievances that create motive for an attack – grievances are typically related to feeling bullied, victimized, stress of finances or health, or workplace issues. Consider opportunities for training or supporting adults in addressing grievances through interpersonal communication skills or public dialogue.
- Communities that are most likely to be targets of mass violence may require additional protections.
- Increase funding for child protective services to minimize child abuse and improve access to mental health services.[ii]

Direct Prevention

- School risk assessments.[iv]
- Safe gun storage practices.[iv]
- Crisis infrastructure (this includes architectural adjustments that provide shelter, safety, and safe passage).[iv]
- Confront and report leakage – attackers often tell someone they have a weapon, have grievances, or they say goodbyes. Believe them & report ASAP.
- Hardening schools and other targets.[iv]
- Limit high-capacity firearm availability.[iv]

Intervention

- Anonymous reporting with integrated response system (e.g., Safe2Tell).[iv]
- School threat assessments.[iv]
- Behavioral threat assessments through Release of Information (ROI) and service-coordinated Multidisciplinary Teams (MDTs)
- Integrated law enforcement databases / interagency coordination and reporting.[iv]

Preparedness and Response

- Integrated school, hospital, law enforcement preparedness.[iv]
- Training for unarmed employees to talk down or handle an active shooter.[iv]
- Standard response protocols.[iv]

Recovery

- Counseling supports that bring people together, (e.g., students, teachers, staff in a school setting.[iv]
- Child fatality review teams.[iv]
- Israeli model of crisis recovery.[iv]

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[i] Densley, James and Peterson, Jillian. (2021) *The Violence Project: How to Stop a Mass Shooting Epidemic*. Abrams Press.

[ii] Langman, Peter. (2019) *Desperate identities: A bio-psycho-social analysis of perpetrators of mass violence.* Criminology & Public Policy.

[iii] Bushman, B.J., et. al. (2018). *Risk factors for youth violence: Youth violence commission, International Society for Research on Aggression (ISRA).* Aggr Behav, 44: 331-336.

[iv] Bornstein, Jacob. (2023) *Youth Protection in Every Neighborhood Project*. Wellstone Collaborative Strategies.