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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND MASS SHOOTINGS:

A REVIEW OF CURRENT ACADEMIC LITERATURE

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I. Executive Summary

This report originated with a House Appropriations Committee directive that requested that the Attorney General investigate whether it is possible to use an individual's history of domestic violence to determine the likelihood that he will commit a mass shooting.ⁱ The National Institute of Justice added a request to determine whether there is potential for criminal justice professionals to use records of domestic violence abusive offenses as part of a process for assessing risk for carrying a mass shooting.

The results of an extensive literature review of domestic violence and mass killings and their possible intersections are presented herein. Both domestic violence and mass shootings have varying definitions in the literature, but these variations do not affect the results here.

Domestic Violence

The definition of domestic violence in Federal law "includes felony or misdemeanor crimes of violence" by a past or current intimate partner, other family members, or others similarly situated (34 USC § 12291(a)(8)). State statutes and academic researchers usually use broader definitions that include emotional, psychological, and economic abuse laden with tactics

that abusers use such as intimidation, isolation, threats, blaming her for anything he finds displeasing, and using their children against her.

In the typical domestic abuse situation, the man believes that due to male privilege, he is entitled to have power and control over his partner. In his view, he owns her, and he will resort to violent means to maintain his privilege and sense of self-esteem. He maintains control by instilling her with fear that he will arbitrarily become violent at any time.

Mass Shootings

Congress defines mass shootings as killings of three or more people, not including the shooter. This report follows the usual practice of excluding mass killings that are part of other criminal events, such as robberies. Most mass killings are domestics, where typically a present or past intimate partner kills family members in a domicile. Much of the academic literature does not distinguish between mass shootings and non-firearm mass killings, and the literature review here includes the latter. Much of the literature discusses only subtypes of mass shootings, such as public or domestic mass shootings, and thus are of limited relevance. Measurements of mass shootings are also inconsistent. Even when the number of victims and the use of firearms is the same, some datasets compiled by popular media sources report very different numbers of offenses and numbers of victims killed during the same period of time.

Academic literature related to Question 1

Question 1. Is a history of domestic violence offenses a risk factor for mass shooting? Whether or not a man's domestic abuse history is a risk element for mass shootings, several studies of mass killings and shootings have attempted to obtain killers'

abuse histories. The results are imprecise, but the overall impression is that a sizeable percentage of the men have such histories, more so than men in the general population. Thus, prior domestic abuse is a risk element. The research reports when there are physical injuries, but not the severity of those injuries. There is some evidence that prior abuse is more frequent in domestic than in public mass shootings and that much of the abuse was not reported to the police or courts.

The relative frequencies of domestic violence and mass shootings prevent using a man's domestic abuse history to forecast his likelihood of committing a mass shooting. There are vastly more domestic abusers than mass shooters, such that the chance of a domestic abuser becoming a mass shooter is very small. This is true even if one focuses on the more extreme cases of domestic abuse, such as those involving firearms, since even these vastly outnumber mass shootings. In technical terms, the number of "false positives" is unacceptably large. Is there potential for criminal justice professionals to use records of domestic violence abusive offenses as part of a process for assessing risk for carrying out a mass shooting?

Domestic violence is but one type of violence that criminal justice authorities would be wise to watch closely. Others may include short-tempered men and those who use violence in attempts to get their way in interactions outside the home. As is pointed out in this paper, some police departments are holding the men accountable for abusive behavior. Doing so in High Point, North Carolina, their chief asserts, has reduced intimate partner homicides (Sumner, 2014). By extension, it should also mean that some domestic mass murders are also being prevented.

Some researchers have suggested that laws intended to limit domestic violence can incidentally reduce mass shootings. Misdemeanor and felony assault and battery laws have not been applied equally behind the closed doors of a family compared to when the same laws are applied to situations involving non-family members. In places using programs that respond to domestic violence with more vigor, e.g., High Point, they have experienced a significant reduction in recidivism among domestic abusers. Here again, the small likelihood that a domestic abuser will commit a mass killing suggests that the causal train may be too tenuous to produce an impact. Still, considering domestic mass murders, this assumption may prove incorrect. This report recommends further research.

Laws pertaining to certain restrictions on firearms and ammunition may have the potential to reduce mass shootings or at least the number of people killed during an incident. A sizeable number of papers have concluded that large-capacity magazines, which limit the number of rounds in semi-automatic handguns and rifles, contribute to mass shootings and that these shootings are much fewer when Federal and State laws ban large-capacity magazines.

Future research may also benefit from more precise definitions of domestic violence, mass murder/shootings, and the characteristics of offenders. Saying that mental illness, for example, is or is not a factor, for example, is much too imprecise. Personality types are much more descriptive and may be useful additions to models exploring mass shootings.

To summarize, this report presents the results of an extensive literature review of the academic literature on domestic violence, mass killings, and their possible intersections. The literature did not indicate that a history of domestic violence offenses is a risk factor for

committing a public mass shooting. However, when considering domestic mass murders, any connections should be examined in more depth. Criminal justice professionals would be wise to record domestic violence abusive offenses as part of a process for assessing risk for carrying out other types of violence, including a mass shooting, especially a domestic mass shooting or murder? Along with other individual characteristics, domestic abuse has the potential to play a significant role in explaining domestic but not public mass shootings.

I. Introduction

House Report 116-101

House Report 116-101 - COMMERCE, JUSTICE, SCIENCE, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS BILL, 2020. In this report, the House Appropriations Committee directed the Attorney General to complete an investigation into whether it is possible to use a person's "history of domestic violence to determine the likelihood of such (an) individual committing a mass shooting ..." (p. 45).

- a. To answer this directive, the National Institute of Justice provided the authors with two questions:

Is a history of domestic violence offenses a risk factor for committing a mass shooting?

- b. Is there potential for criminal justice professionals to use records of domestic violence abusive offenses as part of a process for assessing risk for carrying out a mass shooting?

Methodology and Overview

To answer the questions posed, the authors began by collecting over 150 academic articles and books focused on various aspects of domestic violence, mass shootings, and related literature. Included are some classic works with the concentration focused on the last ten years of academic literature. Publications were added and deleted as the paper took shape. Some of the publications provide basic background coverage while others bridge together information on domestic violence abusers and mass shooters.

The first section of this paper discusses the legal and academic definitions of domestic violence. Then, there is brief coverage of tactics that abusers use to control their partner, the mutation from a "relatively normal" relationship to an abusive pattern of interaction, and common characteristics that domestic violence abusers share.

The discussion of domestic violence turns to a general introduction to mass shootings resulting in three or more people killed. Literature defining mass shootings, mass murder, mass killing, and mass victimization and popular and official measures of mass shootings are displayed to show how they may influence the outcome of studies. Because over half of the mass murders occur in, or near, a residence, domestic as well as public events resulting in three or more people killed serve as data. Literature that bridges domestic violence and mass shootings follow.

Concluding remarks indicate that knowing the background of domestic violence abusers does not predict whether they will become a mass shooter. However, law enforcement could use the data related to domestic abuse as part of the file warning those answering calls to the home about the possibility of violent behavior.

II. Understanding Domestic Violence

Federal and State Legal Definitions of Domestic Violence

According to 34 USC § 12291(a)(8), the federal-level legal definition of domestic violence "includes felony or misdemeanor crimes of violence committed by a current or former spouse or intimate partner of the victim, by a person with whom the victim shares a child in common, by a person who is cohabitating with or has cohabitated with the victim as a spouse or intimate partner, by a person similarly situated to a spouse of the victim under the domestic or family violence laws of the jurisdiction...or by any other person against an adult or youth victim who is protected from that person's acts under the domestic or family violence laws of the jurisdiction (Violence Against Women Act, 1993, Sec. 1731).

The wording in the 1993 Violence Against Women Act includes the need for training grant support for

SEC. 512. TRAINING PROVIDED BY GRANTS.

... (11) the physical, psychological, and economic impact of domestic violence on the victim, the costs to society, and the implications for court procedures

- and sentencing;
- (12) the psychology and self-presentation of batterers and victims and the implications for court proceedings and credibility of witnesses;
- ... (17) economic, psychological, social and institutional reasons for victims' inability to leave the batterer (Violence Against Women Act, 1993, Sec.512).

In 2011, there was an attempt to better coordinate the federal and state-level definitions of domestic violence by adding the phrase, "as a pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner" (Office of Justice Programs, 2011, p. 1).

Some states include anyone who lives or has lived in the household under their domestic violence laws. Others expand their definitions to include dating partners (Vagi et al., 2015), or the elderly who may have never lived in the household. A state-by-state list of domestic violence laws is available at <https://www.ncsl.org/research/human-services/domestic-violence-domestic-abuse-definitions-and-relationships.aspx>.

Similar to the language noted in the state laws, academic publications on domestic violence and the terms used in them are also quite diverse. Domestic violence is the overarching term that includes intimate partners, elders, children, and other household members. However, dating couples and current or past intimate married or cohabitating partners are the types of relationships that are more likely than those with elders or children to escalate into a mass shooting or mass murder incident (Addington & Perumean-Chaney, 2013, Berry 2000; Klein & Klein, 2020; Snyder, 2019; Stark, 2007). Thus, the focus here is on physically volatile present or past intimate partner relationships.ⁱⁱ

Within the context of current domestic violence laws, academic researchers examine 1) the context, process, and roles violence plays within relationships, 2) the function the

violence serves for the perpetrator, and 3) specific behaviors that perpetrators display (Ganley, 2002, p. 60).

Results of studies that investigate 1) the context, process, and roles that violence plays in intimate partner relationships show that 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men have experienced physical violence, including stalking by an intimate partner during their lifetime (National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NIPSVS, 2020, p. 1). In addition, the NIPSVS report indicates that 2 in 5 lesbian, 3 in 5 bisexual, and 1 in 3 heterosexual women experience rape, physical violence, including stalking by an intimate partner. One in three people also experiences dating violence (Vagi et al., 2015, p. 1). Between 2003 and 2014, intimate partners were responsible for killing 58 percent of all women killed, a percentage that increased to 68.3 in 2017 (Klein & Klein, 2020, p. 8).

Ganley's (2002) work outlines three major domestic violence research areas. The first deals with victims' experience and has received the bulk of the research attention. The second and third research areas, the function violence has for abusers, and the behaviors abusers exhibit, respectively, are of more importance as any potential links between domestic violence and mass shootings are explored.

The function the violence serves for the perpetrator or the motive. Instead of asking,

"Why doesn't she just leave?" Bancroft (2002) asks, "Why does he do that?" In part, the answer is that relationship violence is functional for abusers. In the initial interviews with abused women in Duluth, MN, that led to the power and control wheel and the Duluth model, women explained that their intimate partner acted as if he had a right to, was entitled to, total power and control within the relationship (Pence, 2020). The literature

overwhelmingly argues that the motive for an offender's abuse is to gain and maintain power and control to which he asserts is his because he is a man, and thereby he has male privilege (Bancroft, 2002; Stark, 2007). In other words, physical and sexual abuse is the abuser's means to obtain his goals of total power and control over his intimate partner, and for some, any children present as well.

Behaviors that perpetrators display. It is sifting through this part of the literature that potential links between offenders of domestic violence and mass shootings may begin to take shape. According to Bancroft (2002), each form of control is chosen by the abuser to restrict any independent thought or action she may have. In his view, she is to be consumed by and devoted to his every whim or desire. "The pattern is *not* impulsive or "out of control behavior" (Ganley, 2002, p. 62). Instead, the perpetrator develops a pattern of abusive behavior designed to gain and maintain power and control over the victim (Jones, 2000; Stark, 2007).

The abuser will maintain control by intimidating, isolating, and other tactics, which he intermingles with physical and sexual abuse. As the perpetrator figures out which tactics work best to gain power and control over their partner, the victim begins to lose her sense of self. The offender takes away her right to make decisions, to go where she wants to go, to see who she wants to see, and so on. She acts out of fear.

The cycle of violence. Some research argues that there is no cycle of violence, e.g., Pence (2020), like that created by Walker (1979 & 2017). However, the majority of the literature refers to the cyclic nature of abusers' behavior. As experienced by victims, this cycle may begin with a relationship that seems relatively normal. Once the abuse begins, victims describe their daily routine as exhausting because their time is spent doing whatever may keep

their partner satisfied or at least not physically abusive (Corzine, 2020). This phase may last for days, weeks, or years. Eventually, he explodes and attacks her no matter what. Then, the abuser reacts to having used violence against her by blaming her for making him use physical force. The abuser denies any wrongdoing. The couple eventually "make up," and the cycle begins anew.

As time progresses, however, the phases tend to occur closer together, and the physical injuries become more severe. Violence escalation occurs during the abuser's use of psychological and low-level physical coercive controls, which are before the misdemeanor and felony levels of physical abuse required to meet the current Federal official definition of domestic violence. As the violence escalates, it is as if the abuser needs more and more control over the life of the intimate partner and family unit to feed his need for power and control, to feed his self-esteem, and his sense of masculinity, but most of all because he sees it as his male privilege. Anything less, questions his masculinity.

Taking the evidence of domestic violence escalation to mass shootings only takes one step beyond the abuser killing his intimate partner. The most likely scenario involves the victim leaving the abuser who goes to the victim's home, killing everyone, or nearly everyone, present. Usually, that means the murder of the abuser's intimate partner and children. Like mass public shootings, these events are usually well-planned retaliatory incidents that reinstate the abuser's sense of power and control; even if they commit suicide or set up a situation known as "suicide by cop" they are in control.

Abusive perpetrators have several characteristics in common (NCADV, 2020). Abusers are extremely jealous, possessive, unpredictable, cruel to animals, verbally abusive, excessively controlling, and demeaning. Also, abusers have low self-esteem, bad tempers, and hold rigid

gender role definitions. Likewise, abusers will force the partner to have sex, blame the victim for anything bad that happens, control all of the finances, refuse to allow the victim to work or harass the victim at work, and accuse the victim of flirting and having affairs (Pence & Paymar, 1993a).

Characteristics such as these are typical of people with narcissistic personalities. The narcissist, according to Lambe et al. (2016, p. 1), is "characterized by a dissociation between an unconscious sense of inadequacy and a conscious feeling of superiority." Thus, they strike out at those they view as menacing when their weak ego is threatened.

Bancroft (2002) recognizes that most narcissists are men, and he breaks down the ways that narcissistic men strike out at their intimate partners to feed their low self-esteem (Lambe et al., 2016).

Included in his list are

1. The Demand Man – you exist to serve my needs
2. Mr Right – your opinions are not worth listening to, I am always right
3. The Water Torturer – I make cruel remarks, and if you respond I call you crazy
4. The Drill Sergeant – I control your every move
5. Mr Sensitive – I control you by analyzing how your mind and emotions work
6. The Player – Women were made to have sex with men, especially me
7. The Victim – Poor me. When you say I am abusive, you are unfair and cruel just like Others
8. Rambo – I am your protector until I turn violent. I fear homosexuality and interpret behavior like walking away from possible violence as acting "homosexual."

9. The Terrorist – I am controlling and sadistic. Seeing you terrified excites me.

It is as if they think that there is a finite amount of self-esteem to go around, so they must take some away their partner to bolster their own, to feel better about themselves.

Domestic Violence Summary

Although most academic publications and U.S. states define domestic violence as having both psychological and physical aspects, the current Federal-level definition only includes physical abuse. The physical violence that abused women endure has been the primary group focus of research. Too often questions like, "Why doesn't she leave?" and "What services should be provided at shelters?" are asked when what we need answers to are questions like, "Why does he do that?" and "What can be done to make him stop?" This is important. Between 2003-2014, homicide was the leading cause of death among women under 45 years old, and over half (55.3%) were killed by an intimate partner (Kivisto & Porter, 2020; Petrosky et al., 2017). Domestic abusers are dangerous.

Law enforcement officers need to stay advised about how the perpetrator is acting for their safety as well as the safety of the targeted victim(s). Again, these men are dangerous.

Officers know all too well that domestic calls are the most dangerous for them to answer. In some jurisdictions, domestic violence has been turned upside down. The authors of this report suggest that the very successful program located in High Point, North Carolina, can, and is, being picked up by other police departments around the country. The High Point police department decided to work on stopping offenders rather than forcing women and children out of their homes to obtain services. The Offender-Focused Domestic Violence Initiative works at High Point, but other programs, e.g., the Lethality Assessment Program, also work to reduce

intimate partner homicides. The message is that domestic violence is not different from other crimes. Violence is violence. It hurts no less because the victim is a family member. Abusive behavior needs to be viewed as an equal-opportunity offense, one for which the strength of the response is the same as for assault and battery on a non-family member. What they have found in High Point, is that if the abuser is held accountable, he is less likely to repeat the offense. According to Klein and Klein (2020, p. 228), "What these programs prove is as fundamental as it is simple. It really doesn't matter what programs police adopt. Commitment to making domestic violence a priority is the key." Training is necessary, but there must also be backup from command staff who must keep track of the work done by line officers. Programs, such as the one at High Point, were set up to reduce intimate partner homicide and, by extension, would also potentially reduce domestic mass murders.

III. Understanding Mass Shootings

Mass shootings are rare events that are commonly described by their characteristics or the style of committing the mass event (Ressler et al., (1988, p. 138). The style is decided by the

1. number of victims killed and/or injured
2. public location(s) of incidents
3. length of time between the first and the last person injured or murdered and
4. weapon(s) used

Answers to the criteria listed here are commonly used as definitions for mass shootings, but just as there were various definitions of domestic violence, there is no standard

definition for mass shooting or mass murder. This paper is based on the definition in Lopez et al. (2020). Placing their definition in historical context shows that

The Congressional Research Service defined a *public* mass shooting incident as one that occurred, "...in relatively public places, involving **four** or more deaths— not including the shooter(s) —and shooters who select victims somewhat indiscriminately" and where '...the gunmen do not pursue criminal profit or kill in the name of terrorist ideologies.'

On January 14, 2013, the 112th Congress amended Title 28 of United States Public Law 112-365. The Act defines the term "mass killings" as **three** or more killings in a single incident (see <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PLAW-112publ265/html/PLAW-112publ265.htm>).

In keeping with the current Congressional definition, the authors examine public mass shootings that result in three or more victims killed with a firearm, excluding the shooter. As noted earlier, domestic mass shootings with three or more victims killed with a firearm are included in this review because they account for over half of all mass shootings (Duwe, 2020).

Public mass shootings or mass murders are not new phenomena. Research interest in mass murders, particularly mass shootings, however, did not begin until the 1980s. One of the first, if not the first, definition appeared in Ressler et al., 1988. These authors, who were associated with the FBI, argued that there were two types: Classic and Family: Classic mass violent events result in four or more people killed in one public location by one offender within 24 hours or less. Family mass violence was defined merely as family killings (Ressler et al., 1988, p. 138). Also, if the perpetrator committed suicide, the incident was simply called a family murder-suicide. As such, family killings did not and still do not gain the enthusiastic attention and financial backing needed to promote a reduction in family violence, which results in the deaths of innocent victims. A significant difference between domestic and mass shooting events is that incidents that are random public acts rather than among people in a family household, the victims are mostly, if not totally, randomly chosen.

Our perceptions of mass shootings tend to follow those mass shootings that receive more mass media attention. Most of us probably first think about a public shooting with many deaths, such as the 58 people killed while attending a concert in Las Vegas, the 49 people gunned down at The Pulse in Orlando, or the 26 churchgoers in Sutherland Springs, Texas. However, in an analysis of mass shootings between 2009 and 2018, Everytown for Gun Safety (2020) found that 61 percent of the mass shooting cases occurred entirely in a home, and another 10 percent occurred partly in a home. Only 29 percent were entirely public.

Definitions and Measurements Do Make a Difference

Collecting and studying data is crucial if we are serious about learning how to approach policy changes that have a chance of reducing mass shootings in the U.S. Table 1 below provides easy access to compare mass shooting definitions used by popular collection entities. The different definitions lead to differences in the number of mass shooting events reported between 2014 and 2018. On average, for the five years studied, USA Today has more events than the other measures, even though like USA Today, the Washington Post, and Everytown report including four or more victims. Logically, Mother Jones should report more events because they report events with three or more killed or injured, but Everytown reports more killed. What this means is that because of the different definitions and measurements used to study mass shootings, it is difficult to draw conclusions about their causes and indirectly about the motivations behind a gunman's behavior.

Table 1: Mass Shooting Definitions and Measures Used by Popular Reflection Entities, 2014-2018.

| Publication & Definition | Year Started, Number Needed & Outcome | Notes on Data | 5-Year Mean Number of Events Counted & Number Killed |
|--|--|---|---|
| Washington Post – Four or more injured or killed. It does not include shootings tied to robberies that went awry, and it does not include domestic shootings that took place exclusively in private homes. A broader definition would yield much higher numbers (Berkowitz & Alcantara 2019). | 1966-> (4+) Killed by lone shooter or two | Includes the legality of firearm used, but excludes gang disputes, domestics, & robberies | Average 5 Events/Year Average 66 Killed/Year |
| Mother Jones keeps their definition of mass shootings congruent with the FBI's definition. Until 2013, mass shootings included attacks in which the killer murdered four or more people in a public place. When Congress went to 3+ Mother Jones followed (Follman, 2020). | 1982-> 2012 (4+) 2013-> (3+) Injured or killed | Data available on offenders; Does not include armed robbery shootings or gang violence | Average 7.3 Events/Year Average 228.6 Killed/Year |
| Everytown for Gun Safety defines a mass shooting as any incident in which four or more people as shot and killed, excluding the shooter (2020). | 2006-> (4+) Killed and injured | Annual reports on gun deaths and injuries Work on gun control measures | Average 18.2 Events/Year Average 244 Killed/Year |
| USA Today uses any public or private mass shooting where four or more people have been killed by shooting or other means (2020). | 2006-> (4+) Killed | Firearms + Knives, blunt force, smoke inhalation, burns | Average 23.5 Events/Year Average 146.5 Killed/Year |
| *Data for this table were obtained from the four sources cited here. Each is cited in the references. | | | |

The Supplementary Homicide Report (SHR)

The SHR supplies data about homicides in addition to what is available in the Uniform Crime Reports. Information includes age, sex, and race of the victim and offender, and it is from the SHR that we learn how many victims and offenders were involved, circumstances of the homicide, the victim-offender relationship, and the weapon used by the offender to kill the victim(s). All of this is useful information, but the location of the murder and details of the situation are not available. It can be used to study mass shootings, but since it only gives the victim-offender relationship with the first victim, more information would undoubtedly be helpful.

The National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS)

In 2021, NIBRS is scheduled to become the primary source of data on law enforcement arrests. Overall, NIBRS will offer significant improvements over the SHR. All of the crimes for which people are arrested will be in NIBRS rather than the one most serious crime, as is currently recorded. NIBRS collects detailed information on 52 crimes. By covering all of the crimes that a person committed during an incident of mass violence or with which he or she is being charged, much more is learned about the event than can be found using the SHR.

Mass Shooters and Mental Illness

There is currently a disagreement among researchers about whether or not mass shooters are mentally ill. Part of the problem is that the term mentally ill is not clearly defined in the literature (Skeem & Mulvey, 2020). If the legal term for insanity is the one used, Duwe's study of 1186 mass killers using the SHR yielded twenty-four who were considered insane. He estimated that mass killers with mental disorders, which the Mayo Clinic classifies as the same as mental illnesses (2020, paragraph 1), comprising 13 to 28 percent (154 to 332 individuals) of

the 1186 mass killers in his sample. Thus, Duwe (2007, p. 104-105) argues for an association between mental illness and mass violence, including mass shooters.

Fox and Fridel assert that mass shooters are generally not psychotic. According to the Mayo Clinic (2020), however, a person does not necessarily need to exhibit psychosis to be considered mentally ill. Thus, in Fox and Fridel's words, "there are tenuous connections between severe mental illness, gun control measures, and mass shootings" (2016, p. 1).

Stone (2015, p. 80) estimates that less than 20 percent of all mass killers that he studied had a serious mental illness. This figure is approximately 4.5 times the average percentage for the U.S. general population (National Institute of Mental Health, 2020). The majority, he argues, are men who come from working-class backgrounds and who have a personality disorder, not a mental illness, or who were disgruntled about relationships at home or work. Except for those who committed mass shootings because of relationship problems, if the Mayo Clinic definition that includes mental disorders as types of mental illness is applied, nearly all of the mass shooters he studied could be classified as mentally ill.

Summary of Mass Shootings

To summarize, Webster et al. (2020) argue that the numbers killed in mass murders are small compared to other murders in the U.S. Mass shootings kill only about two percent of the total homicide victims in any given year. The authors agree, however, that the effect that a tragic mass shooting ending with three or more deaths at basically one time in one place is difficult for families and communities to comprehend.

IV. Bridging the Gap: Mass Shootings and Domestic Violence

Here the literature relevant to the questions at hand is coordinated. Does a history of domestic violence predict mass shootings? And is there potential for criminal justice professionals to use records of domestic violence abusive offenses as part of a process for assessing risk for carrying out a mass shooting?

Because these questions are related to domestic violence and mass shootings in the United States, the focus is also on literature concerning mass murders and domestic abuse in the United States. Past work uses various definitions of domestic violence and mass shootings.

That is, academic research includes psychological, emotional, financial, abuse as well as physical and sexual violence, and the perpetrator is or was in a family or dating relationship with the victims. Since mass shooters are almost always men and most domestic abusers are men, we look only at domestic violence by men. A mass shooting involves the death of at least three people, excluding the shooter, usually within 24 hours. The two main sub-categories of mass shootings include 1) domestic mass shootings where a man targets his intimate partner and other family members, and 2) public mass shootings, where a man usually chooses victims randomly in a public place. About two-thirds of mass shootings are domestic mass shootings (see Fox and Levin, 2015; Duwe, 2020; Everytown for Gun Safety, 2020).

Table 2 compares commonalities between the two categories of violent individuals; men who are domestic abusers and men who are mass shooters. A clear sense of male privilege exists among both sets of violent perpetrators. As Pence & Paymar (1993b) argue, it is that the man of the house expects to have the power and control in the relationship simply because he is

| Table 2. Common characteristics comparing domestic violence abusers and public mass shooters. | |
|--|---|
| Domestic Violence Abuser Characteristics | Public Mass Shooter Characteristics |
| ✓ a sense of entitlement to power and control in the relationship because of male privilege | ✓ a sense of entitlement because of White male heterosexual privilege |
| ✓ use violence to control, thus as a solution | ✓ see violence as a solution |
| ✓ view using violence as masculine | ✓ view violence as a characteristic of masculinity |
| ✓ have a personality/mental health disorder, e.g., narcissistic personality | ✓ have mental health issues and stressors |
| ✓ approximately half that kill 3 or more family members then either commit suicide or suicide by cop | ✓ most public shooters are suicidal |
| ✓ a sense of loss usually when the intimate partner leaves or tries to leave the relationship often is the trigger leading to homicide | ✓ a sense of loss when they fail to achieve financial success; middle-class instability |
| Characteristics from Madfis (2014), Silver et al. (2018), and Peterson & Densley (2019). | |

the man. Similarly, mass shooters think that because they are heterosexual White men, they are the dominant group in society and should reap the benefits of their superior status (Madfis, 2014). Violence is used by both to exert their masculinity and as a solution to problems or grievances (Madfis, 2014, Silver, Simons, & Craun, 2018). Add to this set of characteristics some mental health issues, e.g., depression, and the stage is set for violence.

One-time middle-class White men, who experience the stress of downward mobility and/or losses, e.g., intimate partner, job, etc., are likely to blame themselves, resulting in suicidal thoughts and behavior (Peterson & Densley, 2019). Externalizing the blame for their middle-

class instability (Madfis, 2014) and facing multiple stressors (Silver et al., 2018) will more likely result in homicide, including mass family or public shootings. The outcome may be murder-suicide when the person blames external sources and themselves. Theoretically, the stream analogy offers the best explanation for these behaviors. As the stressors mount, aggression builds within the individual. The proverbial straw that breaks the camel's back, better known as triggers or forces of direction, sets off either suicidal or homicidal behavior (Unnithan et al., 1994).

If someone notices the changes in behaviors and intervenes, the suicide or homicide that the person was considering may be averted. This information could prove useful for law enforcement as they keep track of persons who are unstable or volatile. However, according to Silver, et al.

...once reported to law enforcement, those in authority may also struggle to decide how best to assess and intervene, particularly if no crime has yet been committed. By articulating the concrete, observable pre-attack behaviors of many active shooters, the FBI hopes to make these warning signs more visible and easily identifiable. This information is intended to be used not only by law enforcement officials, mental health care practitioners, and threat assessment professionals, but also by parents, friends, teachers, employers and anyone who suspects that a person is moving towards violence (2018, p. 6).

The Violence Project personnel, Peterson and Densley (2019), have taken the suggestion by Silver et al. (2018) one step further. In an interview with "CBS This Morning," Peterson (2020) explained that they recently completed a study of all mass shootings resulting in four or more deaths in the United States since 1966. She suggested that losses or abuse of some type could lead to a change in behavior days, weeks, or months before the shooting. Peterson thinks that this change in behavior is generally associated with a suicidal crisis and

that up to eight out of ten give a warning, which would allow people trained to understand the signs to step in and respond. Families, friends, and acquaintances may be able to read and respond to the warning signs. Law enforcement could also benefit from the training that Petersen describes because they would be better equipped to ask the right questions and take notice of behaviors an untrained person would likely miss.

Nagin et al. (2020) agree that potential mass shooters leak information about the mass damage for which they envision being responsible. Lankford et al. (2019) question whether some of the deadliest mass shootings could be averted if someone listened and responded. They argue that gun ownership per person is the best predictor of mass public shootings, not mental illness or suicide rates.

Working off of characteristics that domestic and public mass shooters tend to share, these studies of pre-attack behaviors do offer some ideas about what behaviors to watch for among potential shooters. They cannot predict who will and who will not act on their suicidal or homicidal ideations, however. What they offer is the opportunity to assist someone who is depressed and, perhaps, suicidal. Whether training of friends and family would reduce mass shootings would need to be the subject of rigorous evaluation.

What we know. A history of domestic violence is a major risk factor for future domestic violence, including homicide (Campbell et al., 2007). To give further meaning to these tragedies, Hill (2019) explains that home is the most dangerous place for women. In 2017, intimate partners murdered 30,000, and other family members killed 20,000 of the 87,000 women killed worldwide. Similar to Huff-Corzine and Corzine (2020) and Bancroft (2002), Hill (2019) urges researchers to turn the study of domestic violence on its head. Ask why abusers abuse rather than why the victims stay. Taking this angle on domestic violence does turn the

research on its head, but it does not yet provide clear *predictive* links between domestic violence abusers and mass shootings. The relevance of research concerning domestic murders generally is uncertain

- because the vast majority of domestic murders involve only one victim (Kivisto & Porter, 2020) and
- because predicting these events means knowing how to point out abusers who will commit mass shootings in the future, that is, before such an event, not counting the abusers among those who have committed a mass shooting.

At least four peer-reviewed academic studies and one government study have estimated how often mass murderers had histories of domestic violence. First, Fridel (2017) found evidence of past domestic violence in 17% of mass murders in 2006-2016. Her definition of mass murder included four or more deaths committed using all types of weapons, and it includes felony-associated mass murders. She did not define "domestic violence," so she may have included psychological and other non-physical violence. Again, the present study is limited to physical abuse.

Second, based mainly on press reports, Zeoli and Paruk (2020) found some evidence of domestic abuse for 30 of 89 (34%) of mass shooters over the period 2014-2017. Mass shootings were those with at least four deaths, including felony-based mass shootings. Domestic abuse includes non-physical domestic violence (such as "domestic problems").

Third, the National Threat Assessment Center (2020) compiled mass public murders, most committed with firearms, in 2017-2019, and it found that a third of the killers had a history of physical domestic violence or had threatened bodily harm. The report did not say how many

involved actual physical violence, and it did not include domestic mass murders. In 7 out of 39 cases (18%) in 2019, there was a public record of domestic violence.

The percent of mass killers with histories of domestic violence is obviously higher for domestic mass shootings. Fridel (2017) found that 29% of domestic mass murderers had histories of domestic violence. Liem and Reichelmann (2013) found that 29% of perpetrators had been the subject of domestic violence restraining orders. Liem et al. (2013) found that 51% of mass domestic killers in 2000-2019 had been suspected of or charged with domestic violence. None of these sources indicate whether domestic violence includes non-physical abuse.

Given that most U.S. state laws much academic research includes psychological and emotional abuse, as well as physical and sexual violence, a major uncertainty is the actual or likely inclusion of non-physical domestic violence, which causes the estimates to be overstated for the purposes of the present report. Thompson et al. (2006) found that non-physical domestic violent acts comprised approximately two-thirds of domestic violence situations in the most recent year, but only a fifth of lifetime domestic violence. Since none of the above studies give a timeline for the prior domestic violence, we cannot estimate the extent to which their estimates might be too high for purposes of this report.

Another key factor in determining whether domestic violence is a predictor of mass shooting is whether officials know about the domestic violence. Most is not reported. Only about a quarter of domestic violence incidents result in a restraining order (Fan, 2014). For example, King (2019) found that of the 431 heterosexual married women killed by an intimate partner in Florida between 2006 and 2016, only 15.3% (66) had prior reports made to law enforcement about physical violence. The other 84.7% (365) had not reported contact with law

enforcement. Given the uncertainties described above, it is not possible to give a precise estimate of how many mass shooters have discernable histories of physical domestic violence, but there is little doubt that they are in the minority.

Several mass public murderers began their shootings by killing relatives and then moved on to non-family victims. Examples are the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooter, who shot 20 children and six staff after killing his mother, and the Texas Tower shooter, who killed his wife and mother before shooting 14 others (Fox & Levin, 2015). Such incidents, however, obviously cannot be used to predict the mass shootings because they do not precede the incident.

The next key fact is the frequency of domestic violence. Information about physical domestic violence prevalence among men is lacking, but there is information about prevalence reported by female victims. The research produces a variety of estimates. We concentrate on conservative estimates since these suggest a closer relationship between domestic violence and mass shootings. Tjaden and Thoennes (2000) report the results of a nation-wide survey of women, finding that approximately 1.5% reported physical domestic abuse in the past year and 24.8% over their lifetimes. The authors estimate that these percentages translate to 1.5 million and 25.0 million women, respectively. Breiding et al. (2008) found that 1.4% of women said they were physically abused in the past year and 23.6% lifetime. Catalano (2012 and 2013), based on the National Crime Victimization Survey, found that approximately one percent of women aged 18-47 reported physical domestic violence over a six-month period in 2009-2010. Thompson et al. (2006) surveyed women clients of a large health company and found that 1.6% reported physical domestic abuse in the past year and 34.1% over their lifetime.

Also, 3.5% reported non-physical abuse in the past year and 7.2% lifetime. Thus, we have information about the portion of mass killers who have histories of domestic violence and about the frequency of domestic violence. In general terms, it is not feasible to use domestic violence history to predict mass shootings because there are many more domestic violence offenders than mass shooters. Mass shootings average less than 30 a year (Duwe, 2020; Everytown for Gun Safety, 2020). As discussed earlier, less than half of mass shooters are known to have committed domestic violence. Thus, there are, on average less than 15 mass shooters a year with histories of domestic violence, and about 1.5 million men commit physical domestic violence each year, suggesting that less than one in 100,000 domestic abusers will eventually commit mass shootings. The odds are even smaller if one looks at long-term domestic violence history.

One piece of evidence suggesting a weak link between domestic violence and mass shootings is their divergent trends. Physical domestic violence per capita declined by 63% between 1996 and 2010 (Catalano, 2012 and 2013), while mass shootings declined little, if at all, during that period and in later years. (Duwe, 2020; Fox & Levin, 2015; Krouse & Richardson, 2015). If domestic violence is a precursor to mass murders, the latter should have declined.

The role of firearms. Firearm use is an essential topic for both mass shootings and domestic violence. Mass shootings, by definition, always involve firearms, but even the broader category, mass murder, involves firearms in more than three-fourths of the incidents (Fox & Levin, 2015). In contrast, only about one percent of physical domestic violence involves firearms (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). According to the risk assessment literature, past attacks and threats with a firearm indicate a greater chance of intimate partner homicide than if no firearm is available (Campbell et al., 2007; Spencer & Stith, 2018; Wintemute et al., 2019;

Kivisto & Porter, 2020). Easy access to a firearm leads to an escalation of domestic violence events (Spencer & Stith, 2018; Zeoli & Paruk, 2020; Campbell et al., 2003). As Glass and Campbell (2004) suggest, the presence of a firearm in combination with the victim's threat of separation leads to a nine times greater chance that the abuser will kill their intimate partner.

Spencer and Stith's (2018) meta-analysis study also indicates that having direct access to a gun is the most influential risk factor that the abuser would kill the targeted victim. The failure to keep firearms out of the hands of abusers is responsible for the United States witnessing women having an eleven times greater likelihood of being murdered by an intimate partner than any other advanced country in the world (Klein & Klein, 2020). Firearm use in domestic violence, however, cannot be used to predict public mass shootings since the volume of domestic firearm violence is much larger than mass shootings. The vast majority of those using firearms in domestic situations do not go on to commit mass shootings.

Many scholars have suggested that laws designed to limit firearm use in domestic situations might also reduce domestic mass shootings and perhaps all mass shootings (for example, Fan, 2014; Dunlop, 2019; Zeoli & Paruk, 2020; Gold, 2020; Everytown for Gun Safety, 2020). Domestic violence restraining orders in 29 states allow courts to seize the abusers' firearms (Zeoli et al., 2017). Federal and state laws, to varying degrees, prohibit domestic abusers from purchasing firearms (Zeoli & Paruk, 2020). Red flag laws in 19 states allow courts to seize firearms possessed by people who have threatened violence, either domestic or non-domestic (Gifford.com, 2020). Wintemute et al. (2019) located two incidents where red flag laws were used for threatened mass shootings. However, these are far removed from mass shootings and, again, occur far more often than mass shootings (Webster et al., 2020; Laqueur & Wintemute, 2020; Zeoli & Paruk, 2020).

One type of gun control law, however, is directly related to mass shootings – banning large-capacity magazines, which are frequently used in mass shootings and enhance the shooter's ability to kill many people (Klarevas, 2016). Nine states, plus the Chicago area of Illinois, ban large-capacity magazines, typically ten rounds (Spitzer, 2020). Numerous studies find that these bans reduce the number of mass shootings and the number of mass shooting deaths (Blau et al., 2016; DiMaggio et al., 2019; Gius 2015 and 2018; Reeping et al., 2019; Klarevas et al., 2019; Webster et al., 2020, but see Greene-Colozzi & Sliva 2020).

Still, despite the similarities between domestic and public mass shooters, training that Peterson and Densley (2020) think may reduce mass shooters, and theory that explains the process of building up to committing homicide, predicting mass shootings based on domestic violence is not possible. Notably, many students of mass murder also conclude that it is simply not possible to predict mass shooters based on the perpetrator's history (for example, O'Toole, 1999; Stark, 2013; Meloy, 2014; Jarvis & Scherer, 2015; Fox & Levin, 2015; Winegard & Ferguson, 2017; Dunlap, 2019; Lankford et al., 2019; Knoll & Pies, 2019).

Zeoli and Paruk (2020, p. 143) specifically say, "[W]e do not suggest that domestic violence perpetration be viewed as a predictor of mass shootings. Certainly, only a small fraction of individuals who commit domestic violence will conceive of, plan, or commit a mass shooting." Skeem and Mulvey (2020, p. 96) conclude that "Mass violence is caused by multiple social, situational, and psychological factors that interact with one another in complex ways that are poorly understood and difficult to predict in advance." Finally, Haden (2017, p. 99) states, "Predicting a very low-frequency event (e.g., mass murder) is quite difficult, and errors will be made. As many scholars in the field point out, the error rate of false positives will be high since

many people are going to wrongly be deemed violent when a low frequency event is being predicted”.

V. Future Research

Most apparent for the work done here, we need studies completed both with and without the non-physical tactics, so a clearer answer can be offered for the question asking if mass shootings can be predicted by a perpetrator's involvement in domestic violence. As it stands, the Federal law does not include emotional abuse and other non-physical tactics used by domestic violence abusers. The studies included here that searched for links between domestic violence abuse and mass shootings either did not report the type of abuse or reported that both physical and non-physical abuse was included.

The second line of research is needed to gain a better understanding of what is meant by mental illness as used in several of the studies. What is "serious" mental illness vs. depression, or is depression "serious?" Where do the various personality types fit into the picture? A narcissistic personality type, for example, is a personality disorder, which increases their likelihood of domestic violence. They have an inflated idea of their worth and require a great deal of attention. Does this type of personality also rule the behavior of mass shooters? Is it more than a personality disorder? Is it a type of mental illness?

Finally, this literature review examining the current state of academic research did not support the likelihood that domestic violence abuse could predict becoming a mass shooter. It did suggest that law enforcement may benefit by keeping track of persons who show violent tendencies, however. Thus, one area that could benefit from further research, training, and evaluation is focused on changes in law enforcement tactics. The concepts and

attention given to the very successful program located in High Point, North Carolina, can and is, being picked up by other police departments around the country. As noted earlier, the High Point police department decided to work on stopping offenders rather than forcing women and children out of their homes to obtain services. The Offender-Focused Domestic Violence Initiative works at High Point, but other programs, e.g., the Lethality Assessment Program, also work to reduce intimate partner homicides. The message is that domestic violence is not different from other crimes. If the abuser is held accountable, he is less likely to repeat the offense. "Research suggests that early intervention is key in stopping the cycle of IPV" (Sumner, 2014, p. 2). "Commitment to making domestic violence a priority is the key" (Klein & Klein, 2020, p. 228). Potential homicides, including those that would result in domestic mass murders with the death of children as well as the intimate partner, are being stopped. This and other programs need to be established, training of officers completed, and evaluation research undertaken.

VI. References

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End Notes

ⁱ We use he, his, him to refer to the domestic abuser and mass shooter because most are men and it improves the readability of the paper. We are aware that men are also victims of domestic violence at a rate of approximately 1 in 9.

ⁱⁱ General terms used in the literature to refer to domestic violence among intimate partners includes, but is not limited to, domestic abuse, domestic battery, intimate partner abuse, intimate partner violence, intimate partner battering, dating violence, dating abuse, marital assault, spouse abuse, and so on. Domestic violence and domestic abuse will be used interchangeably here to improve the readability of the paper.