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The Violence Project

Recent mass shootings in Atlanta, Indianapolis, Boulder, and Buffalo, Minnesota have increased state and national attention on mass shootings. Advisory Group member James Densley, professor and department chair of criminal justice at Metropolitan State University, provided a presentation about mass shooters, as well as resources and strategies for preventing such attacks.

James and his colleague Jillian Peterson created The Violence Project, a database of mass shooters, to help understand the causes of mass shootings. The database compiles 170 life history variables from shooters involved in non-gang-related incidents from 1966 to present and which resulted in the deaths of four or more people in a public place.

The Violence Project reveals that most mass shooters are “insiders.”

- 90% of workplace shooters are current or former employees.
- Most school shooters are current or former students.
- Many place of worship shooters are current or former congregants.

Shooters commonly die during the act, with 40% committing suicide and another 19% killed by law enforcement. Mass shooters typically do not have elaborate getaway plans, but consider the act to be their final one, and often plan to take their own lives during the act or provoke law enforcement officers to kill them (“suicide by cop”). Mass shooters usually signal suicidal thoughts before the act, research other mass shootings, and often exhibit many outward signs of crisis to others, such as increased agitation, paranoia, depression, and violent thoughts. Shooters reveal their plans to others 42% of the time, but often others do not know what to do.

The Violence Project identified four commonalities of mass shooters based on research and interviews:

- Childhood trauma
- Reaching identifiable crisis point, often suicidal
- Researching other mass shooters
- Access to people/places and firearms

Several programs nationally or in other states seek to interrupt the long “pathway to violence” by building more exits or off-ramps. The Off-Ramp Project is the resource hub of The Violence Project that offers training and courses to recognize and help prevent those going through a mental crisis from committing violence against themselves and others.

Other programs include Colorado’s Safe 2 Tell, an app that allows users to make a report that is triaged to, depending on the type of response required, a crisis intervention team or law enforcement. Sandy Hook Promise, another resource hub and intervention network, offers immediate 24/7 responses, an important aspect as mental crises usually happen at night.

James encouraged Advisory Group members to share these resources with their organizations and other stakeholders, and strongly highlighted the need for a reporting app, segueing into the BCA’s presentation.

See It, Say It, Send It

The Advisory Group heard a presentation on the BCA’s See It, Say It, Send It app by Diane Bartell. The anonymous tip reporting app is housed in the BCA’s Minnesota Fusion Center. The app had a limited launch this year for the Chauvin trial, but will have a full launch later this year with a media campaign. The app will be used for reporting:

- Planned violence or criminal activity
- Suspicious activity/terroristic plans
- Planned school violence
- Information about cold cases

Have a question or suggestion?

Contact Matthew Pizza (651-793-2595 or matthew.pizza@state.mn.us) for more information.
The Fusion Center is staffed during normal business hours, Monday through Friday, with one staff person on-call 24/7. The governor’s budget proposal included 24/7 onsite staffing for the Fusion Center, but the legislature did not take up this budget item.

BCA staff will plan to provide details about the app and the media campaign for promoting it at the Advisory Group’s next meeting.

**RAP Back**

The BCA’s Julie LeTourneau Lackner provided a presentation about the FBI’s Rap Back program. Rap Back is an optional FBI service that allows authorized agencies to receive notification of subsequent activity on individuals who hold positions of trust (e.g., school teachers, daycare workers, nurses, security guards), thus eliminating the need for repeated background checks on a person from the same applicant agency.

With a standard background check, an employer or licensor makes a hiring decision based on a current background check but the employer or licensor may not find out about a later arrest or conviction. With Rap Back, the employer or licensor would receive a notification about the subsequent arrest or conviction.

States implementing Rap Back must have the legislative authority to participate, security/privacy risks mitigated, and systems set up to facilitate the program. Rap Back is currently used in several states and federal agencies such as the TSA.

The BCA and FBI hosted stakeholder meetings in 2019 and 2020 with representatives from the Minnesota Association of School Administrators, Minnesota Department of Human Services, various license boards, the ACLU, tribal organizations, and the Association of Minnesota Counties, among others. Stakeholders expressed concerns about extra costs and privacy issues, which along with the pandemic may have stalled further progress on implementing Rap Back in Minnesota.

**Updates and Announcements**

- The Data & Identification Standards White Paper has been distributed with a cover letter and Advisory Group members are already receiving positive feedback from their organizations along with some suggestions for improvement. The suggestions will be passed along to the subcommittee.

- The Advisory Group’s subcommittee on diversity and inclusion proposed some ideas to increase diversity, including adding specific language for filling vacancies, inviting speakers or guests from justice-related organizations that focus on historically oppressed groups, and potentially working with legislators to change the governing statutes of the Advisory Group. The subcommittee plans to provide specific action items for each idea at the August meeting.

- Members of the Advisory Group are implored to consider filling the leadership seats (vice chair and 2nd vice chair), as the current chair’s term ends later this year. If you wish to volunteer, it is not a big time commitment!

**Next Advisory Group Meeting**

Friday, August 13, 2021
9 a.m. – 11 a.m.
Location TBD