



# A STUDY OF THE PRE-ATTACK BEHAVIORS OF ACTIVE SHOOTERS IN THE UNITED STATES BETWEEN 2000 AND 2013

## QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE – FBI BEHAVIORAL ANALYSIS UNIT (BAU)

### REMINDERS

- There is no one “profile” of an active shooter.
- There is no single warning sign, checklist, or algorithm for assessing behaviors that identifies a prospective active shooter.
- While impossible to predict violent behavior, it is possible to prevent some attacks via effective threat assessment and management strategies.

### ACTIVE SHOOTER DEMOGRAPHICS

The **63** active shooters in the sample did not appear to be readily identifiable prior to the attack *based on demographics alone*.

The youngest active shooter was 12 yoa and the oldest was 88 yoa with an average age of **37.8** years.

**94%** were male and only **6%** were female.

Among active shooters age 18 and older, **44%** were employed and **38%** were unemployed.

**24%** had at least some military experience.

**57%** were single at the time of the offense.

**13%** were married; **13%** were divorced; **11%** were partnered but not married; **6%** were separated.

**35%** had adult criminal convictions prior to the event.

**62%** had a history of acting in an abusive, harassing or oppressive way (e.g., bullying).

**16%** had engaged in intimate partner violence.

**11%** had engaged in stalking-related conduct.

### PLANNING AND PREPARATION

**73%** of active shooters had a known connection with the attack site.

**35%** of active shooters age 18 and older targeted their workplace or former workplace.

**88%** of active shooters age 17 and younger targeted their school or former school.

Active shooters with no known connection to the site were more likely to conduct pre-attack site surveillance as compared to those with a connection to the targeted site.

**21%** of active shooters researched or studied past attacks by others.

In cases where the amount of time spent *planning* could be determined (n=34), **77%** (n=26) of the active shooters spent a week or longer planning their attack.

In cases where the amount of time spent *preparing* could be determined (n=46), **46%** (n=21) of the active shooters spent a week or longer preparing (procuring the means) for the attack.

In the four cases where active shooters took less than 24 hours to plan and prepare, all had at least one concerning behavior and three had an identifiable grievance.

### FIREARMS ACQUISITION

**40%** of active shooters purchased a firearm legally and specifically for the purpose of the attack.

**35%** of active shooters already possessed a firearm and did not obtain it for the express purpose of the attack.

**11%** of active shooters borrowed or took a firearm from a person known to them.

**6%** of active shooters stole a firearm.

**2%** of active shooters purchased a firearm illegally.

### STRESSORS

Active shooters experienced multiple stressors (with an average of **3.6** separate stressors) in the year prior to the attack. The stressors reported included:

**62%** Mental health

**49%** Financial strain

**35%** Job-related stressors

**29%** Conflict with friends/peers

**27%** Marital problems

**22%** Abuse of illicit drugs/alcohol

**22%** Other (e.g., caregiving responsibilities)

**22%** Conflict at school

**21%** Physical injury

**18%** Conflict with parents

**16%** Conflict with other family members

**13%** Sexual stress/frustration

**11%** Criminal problems

**10%** Civil problems

**6%** Death of friend/relative

**2%** No stressors

### MENTAL HEALTH

**25%** of active shooters had a diagnosed mental illness prior to the offense.

Of the 25% (n=16), **12** had a mood disorder, **4** had an anxiety disorder, **3** had a psychotic disorder, and **2** had a personality disorder. One active shooter was diagnosed with Autism spectrum disorder, one with a developmental disorder, and one described as “other.”

It could not be determined if a diagnosis had been given in **37%** (n=23) of the cases in this study.

### SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

All active shooters either: a) lived with someone or b) had significant in-person or online social interactions.

**68%** of all active shooters lived with someone else.

- **64%** of active shooters 18 yoa or older lived with someone else.

**86%** of active shooters had significant in-person social interactions with at least one person in the year prior to the attack.

**27%** of active shooters had significant online interactions with another person within a year of the attack.

For this study, the FBI used data that has been verified to the greatest possible extent, relying almost exclusively on information contained in official law enforcement investigative files. Active shooting events which appeared to be spontaneous reactions to situational factors were excluded. The final sample of 63 active shooting incidents was included in this study.

## QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

### CONCERNING BEHAVIORS

Concerning behaviors are *observable* behaviors, with an average of **4.7** concerning behaviors displayed by the active shooters in this sample. The concerning behaviors observed by others included:

- 62%** Mental health
- 57%** Interpersonal interactions
- 56%** Leakage
- 54%** Quality of thinking or communication
- 46%** Work performance
- 42%** School performance
- 35%** Threats/confrontations
- 33%** Anger
- 33%** Physical aggression
- 21%** Risk-taking
- 21%** Firearm behavior
- 19%** Violent media usage
- 13%** Weight/eating
- 13%** Drug abuse
- 11%** Impulsivity
- 10%** Alcohol abuse
- 10%** Physical health
  - 8%** Other (e.g., idolizing criminals)
  - 6%** Sexual behavior
  - 5%** Quality of sleep
- 3%** Hygiene/appearance

### HOW WERE THE CONCERNING BEHAVIORS NOTICED

- 95%** Verbal communication
- 86%** Physical actions
- 27%** Written communication
- 16%** Online behavior
- 89%** Demonstrated concerning behaviors that were observed in multiple ways

### WHO NOTICED THE CONCERNING BEHAVIORS

- 92%** Schoolmate (*if a student*)
- 87%** Spouse/domestic partner (*if in a relationship*)
- 75%** Teacher/school staff (*if a student*)
- 68%** Family member
- 51%** Friend
- 40%** Co-worker
- 37%** Other (e.g., neighbors)
- 25%** Law enforcement
- 10%** Online individual
- 5%** Religious mentor

### COMMON RESPONSES TO OBSERVED CONCERNING BEHAVIORS

- 83%** Communicated directly to the active shooter
- 54%** Did nothing
- 51%** Reported the active shooter to a non-law enforcement authority
- 49%** Discussed the behavior with a friend or family member
- 41%** Reported the active shooter to a law enforcement authority

### CONCERNING COMMUNICATIONS

**55%** of 40 active shooters who had a specific target made threats or had a prior confrontation.

When threats or confrontations occurred, **95%** were in person and only infrequently in writing or electronically (**14%**).

**88%** of active shooters age 17 and younger leaked an intent to commit violence.

**51%** of active shooters leaked an intent to commit violence.

No instances of observed leakage were reported to law enforcement.

**30%** of active shooters created a legacy token prior to the attack.

### PRIMARY GRIEVANCE

The majority of active shooters (**79%**) appeared to be acting in accord with a grievance of some kind, including:

- 33%** Adverse interpersonal action against the active shooter
- 16%** Adverse employment action against the active shooter
- 10%** Other (e.g., general hatred of others)
  - 5%** Adverse governmental action against the active shooter
  - 3%** Adverse academic action against the active shooter
  - 3%** Adverse financial action against the active shooter
  - 3%** Domestic
  - 3%** Hate crime
  - 3%** Ideology/extremism
- 21%** Unknown/no grievance identified

Even the active shooters with no identifiable grievance demonstrated at least two concerning behaviors (with an average of **5.4** behaviors) that were observed by others.

### PRECIPITATING EVENT

Of the 50 active shooters who had an identifiable grievance, nearly half of them (**44%**) experienced a precipitating or triggering event related to the grievance.

### TARGETING

While approximately **one-third** of active shooters in this sample victimized only random members of the public, most active shooters arrived at a targeted site with a specific person or persons in mind.

### SUICIDE: IDEATION AND ATTEMPTS

**48%** (n=30) of active shooters had suicidal ideation or engaged in suicide-related behaviors at some point prior to the attack.

- Of the 30 suicidal active shooters, **90%** showed signs of suicidal ideation and **23%** made actual suicide attempts.
- **70%** of these behaviors occurred within one year of the shooting.

### RESOURCES

Persons suspected of planning an active shooting should be immediately reported to local law enforcement or to a threat assessment team.

The BAU's Behavioral Threat Assessment Center (BTAC) is the only multi-agency behavioral threat assessment and threat management team in the U.S. Government. Requests for BTAC assistance can be made via the BAU Coordinator in your local FBI Field Office.

*A Study of the Pre-Attack Behaviors of Active Shooters in the United States* is available for download at [www.fbi.gov/file-repository/pre-attack-behaviors-of-active-shooters-in-us-2000-2013.pdf/view](http://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/pre-attack-behaviors-of-active-shooters-in-us-2000-2013.pdf/view)