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THESIS

**PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN CHILDREN AND
ADOLESCENTS: AN ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL
LIFE-SAFETY EDUCATION PROGRAM**

by

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September 2019

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AN ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL LIFE-SAFETY
EDUCATION PROGRAM**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
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ABSTRACT

The threat that Islamic jihadists pose to U.S. security is often highlighted in political debates and media commentary; however, U.S. citizens who have no affiliation with foreign terrorist organizations commit the vast majority of violent attacks within the United States. Violent extremists are becoming more common, and researchers believe the ideology and mental health of lone violent individuals is different from that of group-organized political terrorists. To address this growing threat to homeland security, this thesis demonstrates how fire departments, specifically the Virginia Beach Fire Department, can address mental health in their life safety programs for elementary and middle schools to reduce the likelihood that students will become school shooters or violent extremists. This thesis surveys and incorporates best practices from national and foreign programs to outline a new safety curriculum for the city of Virginia Beach.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AACP	American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
BAM	Becoming a Man
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
SAMHSA	Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
SEL	social and emotional learning
SSDP	Seattle Social Development Project
START	National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The threat that Islamic jihadists pose to U.S. security is often the focus of political debates and media commentary; however, U.S. citizens who have no affiliation with foreign terrorist organizations commit the vast majority of violent attacks on U.S. soil, including violent attacks in schools.¹ According to former Central Intelligence Agency Director Leon Panetta, lone-wolf-style attacks pose an increasing threat to American security.² Furthermore, researchers believe the ideology and mental health of individual violent extremists are different from those of group-organized political terrorists.³ Many social, psychological, and cultural *drive* factors lead individuals to violent extremism, including grievances and perceived injustices, exclusion or marginalization, and personal tragedies.⁴ There are also *pull* factors that affect radicalization, such as the individual's search for a social network and other means of personal fulfillment.⁵

The significant rise in school shootings by individual violent extremists over the last several years has left Americans grappling with gun control and mental health issues. The 2018 shooting at Florida's Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School by nineteen-year-old Nicolas Cruz was the most recent mass school shooting in the country.⁶ Before the 2016 Orlando nightclub shooting by Omar Mateen, the largest mass killing in the United

¹ Peter Bergen and David Sterman, "What Is the Threat to the United States?" in *Jihadist Terrorism 17 Years after 9/11* (Washington, DC: New America, 2018), <https://www.newamerica.org/international-security/reports/jihadist-terrorism-17-years-after-911/what-is-the-threat-to-the-united-states/>.

² Jeffrey Simon, *Lone Wolf Terrorism: Understanding the Growing Threat* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2013), <https://www.lawfareblog.com/lone-wolf-terrorism-understanding-growing-threat-jeffrey-d-simon>.

³ Simon.

⁴ Magnus Ranstorp, "The Root Causes of Violent Extremism" (issue paper, RAN, April 2016), https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/issue_paper_root-causes_jan2016_en.pdf.

⁵ Ranstorp.

⁶ Lisa Marie Segarra et al., "Sheriff's Office Had Received about 20 Calls Regarding Suspect: The Latest on the Florida School Shooting," *TIME*, February 18, 2018, <http://time.com/5158678/what-to-know-about-the-active-shooter-situation-at-florida-high-school/>.

States occurred at Virginia Tech in 2007, when twenty-three-year-old student Seung Hui Cho killed thirty-two students and faculty members before killing himself.⁷ Scores of school shootings with fewer casualties are so common that they receive relatively little national attention.

On April 5, 2009, a mass school shooting was averted when a Landstown High School student in Virginia Beach reported to police that his friend and classmate Philip Bay was planning an attack inside the school cafeteria. When Virginia Beach Fire investigators were called to the scene, Bay told them that “he had taken sulfur from school and purchased cannon fuses and smokeless powder off the Internet.”⁸ While searching Bay’s bedroom, investigators found nine pipe bombs and cans labeled *shrapnel* and *glass*.⁹ Subsequent investigations found over 400 video clips detailing an attack plot, as well as a hit list of over a dozen people who had bullied Bay; Bay had planned “to kill at least 30 people. . . . Then he would turn a sawed-off shotgun he called Magdalena on himself.”¹⁰ According to local news, “Three mental health experts testified that Bay suffered from untreated mental illness, and that family problems and social issues had created the perfect storm that was Bay’s plot.”¹¹

In a review of Danish programs for countering violent extremism, Ann-Sophie Hemmingson, a researcher for the Danish Institute for International Studies, noted that “it will never be possible to conduct a quantitative evaluation of the preventive efforts by counting the number of individuals who have not become radicalized as a result of them or

⁷ “Virginia Tech Shooting Leaves 32 Dead,” History.com, accessed April 11, 2019, <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/massacre-at-virginia-tech-leaves-32-dead>.

⁸ Kathy Hieatt, “Philip Bay Case: The Bomb That Almost Blew,” *Virginian-Pilot*, February 27, 2011, http://pilotonline.com/news/local/crime/philip-bay-case-the-bomb-that-almost-blew/article_d085fb3d-fb74-5450-a005-d9679c9d9b87.html.

⁹ Hieatt.

¹⁰ Kristin Davis, “Judge Sentences Bay to Years in Landstown Bomb Plot,” *Virginian-Pilot*, February 24, 2011, http://pilotonline.com/news/local/crime/judge-sentences-bay-to-years-in-landstown-bomb-plot/article_41e8e545-8816-5d46-938a-ea18149c87c2.html.

¹¹ Davis.

the number of terrorist plots that have not been started.”¹² Hemmingson may be correct in her assertion; it may be difficult or impossible to determine the exact number of plots that have been countered, or to quantify how much the threat has been reduced by increased attention to mental health wellbeing. However, there may well be a correlation between better mental health resources and decreased violence in schools.

B. RESEARCH QUESTION AND FOCUS

This thesis asks the question: How can fire departments, specifically the Virginia Beach Fire Department, address mental health in their life safety programs to prevent students in elementary and middle school from becoming school shooters or violent extremists? The goal of this thesis is to use best practices from national and international organizations that counter violent extremism to outline the scope of a new safety curriculum for the city of Virginia Beach.¹³ The Virginia Beach Fire Department has a robust, award-winning life safety education program that reaches all third- and fifth-grade students in the city. The current curriculum centers on fire and life safety in the home and in other surroundings. The proposed program will work to counter violent extremists before they mature by preventing the ill effects children experience from being bullied, harassed, rejected, or attacked by peers, and by identifying students who have mental health disorders that could potentially evolve into threats of violence. This thesis also presents a set of recommendations that could be used to establish national policies and programs to similarly address the pre-radicalization process in other institutions.

There are several reasons this proposal may not succeed; impediments range from economic limitations, political opposition, lack of metrics, and time constraints. Due to fiscal constraints both in the education system and the fire department, obtaining the proper funding for a program of this magnitude could prove difficult. The program would also need to be approved by the school board and city leaders, which could be another difficulty;

¹² Ann-Sophie Hemmingson, *An Introduction to the Danish Approach to Countering and Preventing Extremism and Radicalization* (Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2015), 40, <http://hdl.handle.net/10419/144731>.

¹³ Hemmingson.

the education system has little time to spare for extra programming. Furthermore, neither literature nor experience provide metrics that might indicate effectiveness of such a program. This proposal would certainly require additional time and resources from both the school system and the fire department.

C. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews literature concerning violent extremism and the psychological markers that accompany it. Sources examined include trade and scholarly journal articles and research reports, government documents, and case studies. This review focuses on four areas pertaining to violent extremism: the correlation between mental illness and violent extremism, the relationship between psychological and sociological markers of violent extremists, ideological extremism, and the prevention of violence in children of elementary and middle school age.

1. Correlation between Mental Health and Violent Extremist Attacks

The relationship between mental illness and organized group terrorism has been reviewed many times, but the mental health of school shooters and violent extremists has received comparatively little attention. The Department of Justice has, however, funded studies to compile data on lone-wolf attackers in an effort to identify their motivation. Criminologist Mark Hamm and sociologist Ramon Spaaij built one of the two databases funded by the Department of Justice to compile this information, and concluded it is dangerous to generalize about lone wolves, particularly because violent extremist attacks have been rare in the United States: fewer than 100 successful politically motivated attacks have occurred since the 1940s.¹⁴ Hamm and Spaaij estimate this trend may change, however, due to the rising number of attacks as well as the number of people injured and killed since 2000; from 1904 to 1999 there were approximately thirty-five lone-wolf attacks but between 2000 and 2016 the number of attacks grew to fifty-eight.¹⁵

¹⁴ Katie Worth, “Lone Wolf Attacks Are Becoming More Common—And More Deadly,” PBS, July 14, 2016, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/lone-wolf-attacks-are-becoming-more-common-and-more-deadly/>.

¹⁵ Worth.

Several trends emerge from the literature to suggest that attackers with a perceived personal grievance have more mental health issues than their politically motivated counterparts, and are more similar to apolitical mass murderers than other types of terrorist groups. Paul Gill and Emily Corner of the University of London believe that as many as 32 percent of lone-wolf attackers have a mental illness, and Spaaij indicates this number could be as high as 40 percent.¹⁶ These researchers compared the mental health of group-based terrorists to violent extremists to show vastly higher incidences of mental illness among the extremists. One reason mental health issues have not come to the forefront with violent extremists is that they continuously slip through both the mental health and the criminal systems.¹⁷ Scholars like Gill and Corner and Spaaij explain how family members, counselors, and coworkers of lone-wolf attackers reported either criminal intent, mental health issues, or both to authorities; however, the authorities neither investigated nor deemed the individual risky enough to continue tracking.

In comparing lone-wolf attackers, data from U.S. government reports support a connection among the attackers in four common areas: “perceived grievance, depression, a personal crisis ... and history of weapons use outside the military.”¹⁸ Attackers have come from all walks of life, educational backgrounds, and ethnicities; their ages have ranged from twenty-three to eighty-eight years old, they have been everything from high school dropouts to college graduates, and some have been military veterans.¹⁹ Jerrold Post of the Elliot School of International Affairs suggests that lone-wolf terrorists have narcissistic personality disorder, which means they lack empathy and exhibit paranoia toward others.²⁰

¹⁶ “About 40 Percent of Lone-Wolf Terrorists Are Driven by Mental Illness, Not Ideology,” Homeland Security News Wire, December 22, 2014, <http://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20141222-about-40-percent-of-lonewolf-terrorists-are-driven-by-mental-illness-not-ideology-researchers>.

¹⁷ Homeland Security News Wire.

¹⁸ Clark McCauley, Sophia Moskalenko, and Benjamin Van Son, “Characteristics of Lone-Wolf Violent Offenders: A Comparison of Assassins and School Attackers,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 7, no. 1 (2013), <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/240/html>.

¹⁹ McCauley, Moskalenko, and Van Son.

²⁰ McCauley, Moskalenko, and Van Son.

Research from the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) suggests that while there is no correlation between mental illness and terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda, there is a correlation between mental illness and lone-wolf shooters.²¹ Terrorist groups have rarely, if ever, recruited mentally unstable individuals to carry out their attacks, but START implies that, given the Islamic State's desire to increase terrorist attacks in the United States at any cost, the group may begin to encourage anyone, mentally ill or otherwise, to attack.²²

2. The Psychological and Sociological Markers of Violent Extremists

The field of study examining individual violent extremists is nascent. A 2015 study by Georgetown University's National Critical Issues Task Force examined 119 lone-wolf terrorists.²³ The study demonstrated wide diversity in education and income among the offenders; however, 41 percent of attackers were not employed at the time of their attack. The authors note that over half the individuals were single white men but predicted this pattern might shift to non-white men with the rise of extremist ideologies and attacks by radical Muslims.²⁴

Since the September 11, 2001, attacks, scholars have tried to predict violent behavior using a linear model. In other words, they are attempting to identify the sequence of events that must occur to produce a violent act.²⁵ J. Reid Meloy, a professor of clinical psychology at the University of California San Diego, maintains that traditional violence risk factors are useless in predicting lone-wolf terrorism. Meloy separates typical violence from targeted violence, which involves the decision to act violently toward a group or

²¹ "Is There a Relationship between Mental Illness and Terrorism?," The Mackenzie Institute, July 28, 2016, <http://mackenzieinstitute.com/relationship-mental-illness-terrorism/>; Homeland Security News Wire, "Lone-Wolf Terrorists."

²² Mackenzie Institute, "Mental Illness and Terrorism."

²³ Lydia Alfaro-Gonzalez et al., "Report: Lone Wolf Terrorism" (report, Georgetown University, 2015), <http://georgetownsecuritystudiesreview.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/NCITF-Final-Paper.pdf>.

²⁴ Alfaro-Gonzalez et al.

²⁵ D. Elaine Pressman, *Risk Assessment Decisions for Violent Political Extremism* (Ottawa: Canada Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, 2009), <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsrscs/pblctns/2009-02-rdv/index-en.aspx>.

particular person.²⁶ Meloy believes there are patterns of conduct that could be used as warning behaviors, but he points out warning behaviors are not necessarily predictors of violence; they should be used as an investigative template, not a risk assessment checklist. Meloy believes these behaviors, described in more detail in Table 1, can provide an investigative template that will help better identify individuals who may be of higher concern.²⁷ In a subsequent study, Meloy found that five of the warning behaviors shown in Table 1 “pathway, fixation, identification, novel aggression, and last resort ... significantly discriminated the shooters from the other students who had no intent to act.”²⁸

Table 1. Meloy’s Typology of Warning Behaviors²⁹

Behavior	Description
Pathway	“Subjects engage in various behaviors that encompass part of research, planning, or preparation for a terrorist act or implementation of such an attack.”
Fixation	“Certain behaviors indicate someone’s increasingly pathological preoccupation with a person or cause. There is an accompanying deterioration in relationships or occupational performance.”
Identification	“Persons have a psychological desire to be a ‘pseudo-commando’ or have a ‘warrior mentality.’”
Novel aggression	“For the first time, subjects commit an act of violence that appears unrelated to any pathway behavior. They do so to test their ability to become violent.”
Energy burst	“An increase in the frequency or variety of noted activities—even if relatively innocuous—related to the target occurs, usually in the hours or days before the attack.”

(continued on next page)

²⁶ J. Reid Meloy, “Identifying Warning Behaviors of the Individual Terrorist,” Federal Bureau of Investigation, April 8, 2016, <https://leb.fbi.gov/2016/april/perspective-identifying-warning-behaviors-of-the-individual-terrorist>.

²⁷ Meloy.

²⁸ Meloy

²⁹ Adapted from Meloy.

Table 1 (continued)

Behavior	Description
Leakage	“When planning to harm a target through an attack, persons communicate such intent to a third party.”
Last resort	“Subjects demonstrate through word or deed a violent action or time imperative or display increasing desperation or distress.”
Directly communicated threat	“Individuals communicate a direct threat to the target or law enforcement before a violent action.”

Similarly, Jeanine de Roy van Zuijdewijn and Edwin Bakker have explored characteristics of lone-wolf terrorists across Europe. They found the average age of lone wolves to be 29.7 years old; however, right-wing killers tend to be older (47 percent are over the age of forty) than individuals who are motivated by religion.³⁰ They also found a strong correlation between mental health issues and lone wolves who attack schools: the general population has 63 percent fewer mental health diagnoses than the studied population of school shooters.³¹ This is a stark contrast considering psychotic illness affects one percent of the general population. In addition, van Zuijdewijn and Bakker note a strong correlation between social isolation and school shooters. The general population is half as likely to be socially isolated as school shooters.³² Mental health disorders and social isolation appear to be linked, according to this research.

³⁰ Jeanine de Roy van Zuijdewijn and Edwin Bakker, *Lone-Actor Terrorism Policy Paper 1: Personal Characteristics of Lone-Actor Terrorists* (The Hague, Netherlands: ICCT, 2016), https://www.icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/201602_CLAT_Policy-Paper-1_v2.pdf.

³¹ van Zuijdewijn and Bakker.

³² Jeanine de Roy van Zuijdewijn and Edwin Bakker, “Analysing Personal Characteristics of Lone-Actor Terrorists: Research Findings and Recommendations,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 10, no. 2 (April 2016): 42–49, <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/500>.

3. Ideologically Based Violence

Both right-wing extremists and jihadist-inspired American extremists play a role in the number of lone-wolf killings on U.S. soil. The director of the Center on National Security at Fordham Law School, Karen Greenberg, states, “These individuals [seem] to be looking to attach to something that can help define them as well as give them a cause worth fighting for.”³³ A large majority are dissatisfied with American society and harbor ill will toward the country because of its oppression of Muslims.³⁴ ISIS-inspired attackers feel socially isolated and have identity issues, and they are attracted to serving the “larger purpose of the caliphate.”³⁵ Sarah Lyons-Padilla, a social psychology expert from Stanford University, argues, “Discrimination against first- or second-generation Muslims could be particularly harmful to those who [feel] a kind of ‘cultural homelessness’”; she further suggests that discrimination “is related to greater support for radicalism.”³⁶ van Zuijdewijn and Bakker also found a high incidence of mental health issues among right-wing extremist attackers.³⁷ In one of the most comprehensive studies on the topic, Jeff Gruenewald, Steven Chermak, and Joshua Freilich have analyzed the differences between right-wing offenders in groups and right-wing offenders who act alone.³⁸ The study shows that lone extremists have mental illnesses at much higher rates than group offenders: 40 percent for lone extremists and only 7.6 percent for the group-based right-wing extremists.

In an article titled “The Radicalization Puzzle,” Mohammed Hafez and Creighton Mullins describe early research into the radicalization; according to Hafez and Mullins, early researchers tend to describe radicalization as a process in “which individuals (or

³³ Karen Yourish and Jasmine C. Lee, “What the Americans Drawn to ISIS Had in Common,” *New York Times*, July 6, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/07/06/us/isis-in-america.html>.

³⁴ Yourish and Lee.

³⁵ Yourish and Lee.

³⁶ Yourish and Lee.

³⁷ Lasse Lindekilde, Francis O’Connor, and Bart Schuurman, “Radicalization Patterns and Modes of Attack Planning and Preparation among Lone-Actor Terrorists: An Exploratory Analysis,” *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* 11, no. 2 (2017): 113–33, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19434472.2017.1407814>.

³⁸ Emily Corner and Paul Gill, “A False Dichotomy? Mental Illness and Lone-Actor Terrorism,” *Law and Human Behavior* 39, no. 1 (February 2015): 24, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/lhb0000102>.

groups) change their beliefs, adopt an extremist viewpoint, and advocate (or practice) violence to achieve their goals.”³⁹ Subsequent research, however, has “treated radicalization as an evolutionary, nonlinear phenomenon that emerges out of a convergence of several ‘predisposing risk factors,’” or “random and decentralized network dynamics.”⁴⁰ Such research cautions that using a checklist with linear categories will lead to false positives. Hafez and Mullins use a puzzle metaphor instead of a linear description to explain the nuances of the radicalization process, with the puzzle pieces comprising “[g]rievances, networks, ideologies, and enabling environments and support structures.”⁴¹ They believe the process of radicalization may follow any number of paths and that the process is too complicated for a singular explanation. Instead of continuing to use a uniform and linear analysis, they propose a multifactor and conceptual approach to predicting violent extremism.⁴²

Perspectives on the set nature of personality have been challenged in recent years. Traditional psychology perspectives indicate personality is relatively set once adulthood is reached, and in particular after the age of thirty; after thirty, any change is slight. Later studies suggest, however, that personality is more like soft plaster: there can be some change, though experts still believe such change is only marginal.⁴³ Scholars agree that personality does change up through middle age, according to recent longitudinal studies.⁴⁴ This has led to a broad consensus “that the extent to which personality changes is comparable to other characteristics, such as income, unemployment and marital status.”⁴⁵

³⁹ Mohammed Hafez and Creighton Mullins, “The Radicalization Puzzle: A Theoretical Synthesis of Empirical Approaches to Homegrown Extremism,” *Studies and Conflict & Terrorism* 38, no. 11 (2015): 960, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2015.1051375>.

⁴⁰ Hafez and Mullins, 960, citing Horgan and Sageman.

⁴¹ Hafez and Mullins, 959.

⁴² Hafez and Mullins.

⁴³ Christopher J. Boyce, Alex M. Wood, and Nattavuth Powdthavee, “Is Personality Fixed? Personality Changes as Much as ‘Variable’ Economic Factors and More Strongly Predicts Changes to Life Satisfaction,” *Social Indicators Research*, 111, no. 1 (March 2012): 287–305, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11205-012-0006-z>.

⁴⁴ Boyce, Wood, and Powdthavee.

⁴⁵ Boyce, Wood, and Powdthavee, 298.

While social media has been shown to enhance radicalization because of its relational nature, other research shows that social media alone is not a sufficient explanation for radicalization.⁴⁶ The literature on radicalization does not agree on the significance of the role the media plays on homegrown terrorism, especially when dealing with leaderless terrorism.⁴⁷ Among a sample of fifteen terrorist and extremist cases in the United Kingdom, a RAND study shows little correlation between self-radicalization and internet use alone; according to the report, digital media accentuates radicalization by aiding the distribution of propaganda and validating extreme beliefs.⁴⁸

4. Prevention

A lack of problem-solving and social skills has been linked to violence in youth; aggression and violence can also occur when adolescents are placed in social situations for which they are unprepared emotionally and cognitively.⁴⁹ The aggression can manifest mundanely, as in the schoolyard bully, or can be more sinister—such as the cases of Nikolas Cruz and Dylann Roof, who maimed and killed innocent classmates and church attendees. A myriad of programs has been implemented over the years to try to reduce these types of incidents. The programs range from anti-bullying to countering violent extremism, each attaining varying degrees of success.

Bullying is traditionally defined as “repeated, intentional, harmful, and aggressive behavior inflicted by a person or group with seemingly more power on a person or group with lesser power.”⁵⁰ The ironic twist when it comes to bullying and violent extremism is that it is not the bully who ultimately carries out the heinous act of violence, but rather the

⁴⁶ “UNESCO Releases New Research on Youth and Violent Extremism on Social Media,” UNESCO, November 30, 2017, <https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-releases-new-research-youth-and-violent-extremism-social-media>.

⁴⁷ Ines von Behr et al., *Radicalisation in the Digital Era: The Use of the Internet in 15 Cases of Terrorism and Extremism* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2013), https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR400/RR453/RAND_RR453.pdf.

⁴⁸ von Behr et al.

⁴⁹ Pepler and Slaby 1994; Baranowski et al. 1997

⁵⁰ Clara Mills, “Bullying Programs” (PowerPoint presentation, U.S. Office of Education, April 8, 2009), slide 2, https://ed-psych.utah.edu/school-psych/_documents/grants/specific-disabilities/bullying.ppt.

person who is being bullied. Schools typically follow the Olweus Bully Prevention Program model, developed in Norway.⁵¹ The program tries to identify bullies in elementary, middle, and high school, and uses a classroom-based approach to improve social competence and reduce anti-social behavior.

Meta-analysis discussed in the *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* shows varying results with anti-bullying programs, however.⁵² The research shows a much higher success rate in grades seven and below, and identifies that bullying behavior often changes from “physical to relational” in nature.⁵³ Further research shows that “in high school, the students who most frequently bullied others were not socially maladjusted or unpopular but were approximately between the 75th and 93rd percentiles in terms of popularity.”⁵⁴ Finally, however, the research points out that “many of the most successful programs involve training in bystander intervention. . . . It is of course possible for interventions to remediate social competence in early childhood and then reduce aggression later in life.”⁵⁵ Charles Cunningham et al. note that successful evidence-based social and emotional learning programs have several other attributes in common: “local participation in program selection, standardization, a focus on skills and supportive environments, effective training, and administrative support.”⁵⁶ Nevertheless, Mark Greenberg et al. believe that “a lack of coordination among prevention initiatives and competing curriculum demands may limit their impact.”⁵⁷ Educators in Greenberg et al.’s study believe a solution-based program would work for older students. By giving the students “ownership”

⁵¹ Olweus is discussed in more detail in later chapters. See http://www.violencepreventionworks.org/public/olweus_bullying_prevention_program.page.

⁵² David Scott Yeager et al., “Declines in Efficacy of Anti-bullying Programs among Older Adolescents: Theory and a Three-Level Meta-analysis,” *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* 37, no. 1 (January 2015): 36–51, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2014.11.005>.

⁵³ Yeager et al.

⁵⁴ Yeager et al., 40.

⁵⁵ Yeager et al., 40.

⁵⁶ Charles E. Cunningham et al., “What Limits the Effectiveness of Antibullying Programs? A Thematic Analysis of the Perspective of Teachers,” *Journal of School Violence* 15, no. 4 (2016): 462, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15388220.2015.1095100>.

⁵⁷ Cunningham et al., 462.

in the process and “talking on their level,” the program would have a better chance of succeeding.⁵⁸

Another program that has had success is called the Fourth R. Created for communities and schools, the Fourth R (which stands for *relationships*) assumes that social skills in relationships may be explicitly taught to students just as physical and academic skills are.⁵⁹ The program was developed over a twenty-year span by researchers, teachers, and scientists in Canada, with a curriculum based on “SEL” (“social and emotional learning”) competencies.⁶⁰ SEL emphasizes “processes through which children and adults attain ... core capacities that are critical to positive development.”⁶¹ The five SEL competency domains are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.⁶² David Wolfe, Peter Jaffe, and Claire Crooks similarly argue that education is the key to preventing relational violence, and that education efforts are most successful for children in early to mid-adolescence.⁶³ Rather than building programs for only the adolescents who are showing problems, they state, it is better to use a universal approach through which students can grow resilient to future challenges. According to the Fourth R implementation manual, the program “focuses on positive youth development, which means going beyond avoiding negative outcomes to focus on building strong, core capacities among adolescents.”⁶⁴ Social-cognitive interventions attempt to fortify children with the skills they need to navigate difficult situations; the earlier the intervention, the better the chances are of averting socially undesirable behaviors. Interventions should ideally include all adolescents in a community,

⁵⁸ Cunningham et al.

⁵⁹ The Fourth R, accessed May 19, 2019, <https://youthrelationships.org/>.

⁶⁰ Claire Crooks et al., *The Fourth R Implementation Manual: Building for Success from Adoption to Sustainability* (Ontario, Canada: Western University, 2015), 7, <https://youthrelationships.org/uploads/4implementationmanual1.4.pdf>.

⁶¹ Crooks et al., 7.

⁶² Crooks et al., 7.

⁶³ David A. Wolfe, Peter G. Jaffe, and Claire V. Crooks, *Adolescent Risk Behaviors: Why Teens Experiment and Strategies to Keep Them Safe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006).

⁶⁴ Crooks et al., *The Fourth R Implementation Manual*, 7.

not just those with a history of anti-social behavior.⁶⁵ Research on long-term effects concerning social and emotional competencies shows that this type of approach has positive results for up to eighteen years after the intervention.⁶⁶

5. Summary

The literature shows that, while organized group terrorists tend not to show signs of mental illness, the same cannot be said for school shooters and lone violent extremists; as many as 40 percent of all lone-wolf violent extremists have a mental health disorder.⁶⁷ Researchers believe that as more studies are undertaken, they will reveal that the prevalence of mental health issues among violent extremists is not a coincidence. Currently, there are three key reasons why this issue has not been studied in detail. First, the rise in lone-wolf attacks has been rapid over the last ten years, and research has yet to have time to catch up. Second, violent extremists stay in the shadows until they attack. This anonymity allows them to move about without detection. Third, while family members or coworkers of lone attackers report that the individual may have a mental health problem, civil liberties in the United States make it difficult for mental health professionals or police to act on such reports in a timely manner.

D. RESEARCH DESIGN

This thesis uses a policy analysis approach to suggest methods for implementing mental health programming for elementary and middle school students in the United States in an attempt to halt pathways to violence. The outcome is a specific policy and program implementation through the Virginia Beach Fire Department Life Safety Education Department. To build this program, the research identifies precursors of mental illness in adolescents—as indicated in clinical literature—as well as the type of programming that can be instituted to thwart future violent extremists. The research explores best practices identified in countering violent extremism from a broad spectrum of government, private,

⁶⁵ Claire Crooks et al.

⁶⁶ Claire Crooks et al.

⁶⁷ Homeland Security Newswire, “Lone-Wolf Terrorists.”

and international programs, with the ultimate goal of developing a three-course curriculum. The first course will be provided to the third and fifth grades in the city of Virginia Beach, the second delivered to the sixth and seventh grades, and the final session offered to the eighth and ninth grades.

The purpose of this research is not to suggest that individuals with mental health issues will commit violent acts, but rather that they share traits that may be identifiable in early adolescence. The goal is to extract findings from the clinical literature on adolescent psychology and operationalize them into existing structures within elementary and middle school curricula, as delivered by the Virginia Beach Fire Department Life Safety Education Department.

E. CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Following this introduction, Chapter II explores the issue of violent extremists in American schools. It assesses the extent of violent extremism currently in the United States; identifies the commonalities and differences between school shooters, right-wing extremists, and lone-actor jihadists; and discusses common psychological and sociological characteristics of lone wolves compared to group-based terrorists. Finally, Chapter II evaluates the role of persecution and bullying in violence and extremism.

Chapter III discusses the need for intervention and prevention in adolescents to curb violence, and explores related programs. Chapter IV reviews the Virginia Beach Fire Department's Life Safety Division school programming, which could be adapted to address bullying and persecution in elementary and middle school children. Program implementation and obstacles are identified in this chapter as well.

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II. UNDERSTANDING LONE-ACTOR VIOLENT EXTREMISTS

This chapter demonstrates how people who are bullied, ostracized, or alienated may be led to violence out of a need to prove their value to themselves or the world. The evidence shows how right-wing extremists, school shooters, and lone-actor jihadists have had similar life experiences, which play a part in their decision to become extremists. This chapter first identifies the extent of violent extremism currently in the United States, and then compares and contrasts different types of lone-actor extremists. Finally, the chapter discusses the motives and mental health, both diagnosed and undiagnosed, of lone-actor violent extremists.

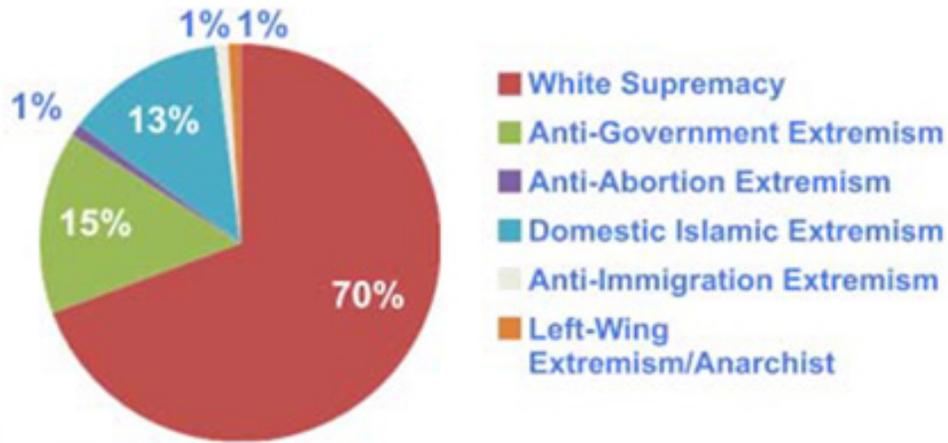
A. CURRENT VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN THE UNITED STATES

The U.S. Extremist Crime Database shows that, since the 9/11 attacks, violent extremists have committed eighty-five attacks in the country, which are responsible for over 200 deaths.⁶⁸ Figure 1 shows a breakdown of all extremist-related killings in the United States between 2006 and 2015. The violent loners have supported far-right, far-left, and jihadist extremism, but the far-right loners are of particular importance in the United States. Far-right extremists commit the most violent attacks, and the frequency of these attacks is increasing.⁶⁹ More deaths have been attributed to white supremacists since 1995 than to any other extremist group.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Government Accountability Office, *Countering Violent Extremism: Actions Needed to Define Strategy and Assess Progress of Federal Efforts*, GAO-17-300 (Washington, DC: Government Accountability Office, 2017), <https://www.gao.gov/assets/690/683984.pdf>.

⁶⁹ Government Accountability Office.

⁷⁰ Anti-defamation League, “Murder and Extremism in the United States in 2015” (report, Anti-defamation League, 2015), <https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/documents/assets/pdf/combating-hate/Murder-and-Extremism-in-the-United-States-in-2015-web.pdf>.



Number of Deaths: 295

Note: Includes both ideologically and non-ideologically motivated killings

Source: Anti-Defamation League

Figure 1. Domestic Extremist-Related Killings in the United States by Perpetrator Affiliation, 2006–2015⁷¹

When it comes to ideological killings, the Government Accountability Office notes that Al-Qaeda and other extremist Muslim groups committed thirty killings between 1990 and 2010, and far-right extremists committed nearly 130 killings during the same period.⁷² As shown in Figure 2, these numbers had changed by 2016, when 119 deaths were attributed to Muslim extremists; however, 41 percent of these deaths are linked to one incident, the Orlando nightclub shooting by Mateen in 2016. But this particular incident’s link to jihadism is questionable. Mateen claimed allegiance to two conflicting Iraqi factions, and may have had other motives: research shows he was bullied for his “chubbiness” and a speech impediment when he was in school.⁷³ He also may have been conflicted about a repressed homosexual identity, which his father openly abhorred; his father was a supporter of the Taliban, a group that often kills known homosexuals.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Source: Anti-defamation League, 3.

⁷² Government Accountability Office, *Countering Violent Extremism*.

⁷³ Patrick Andres James and Daniela PISOIU, “Mental Illness and Terrorism,” *Small Wars Journal*, accessed April 11, 2019, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/mental-illness-and-terrorism>.

⁷⁴ James and PISOIU.

From Sept. 12, 2001, to Dec. 31, 2016, 47% of deaths resulted from far-right extremists. The other 53% resulted from attacks by radical Islamic extremists.

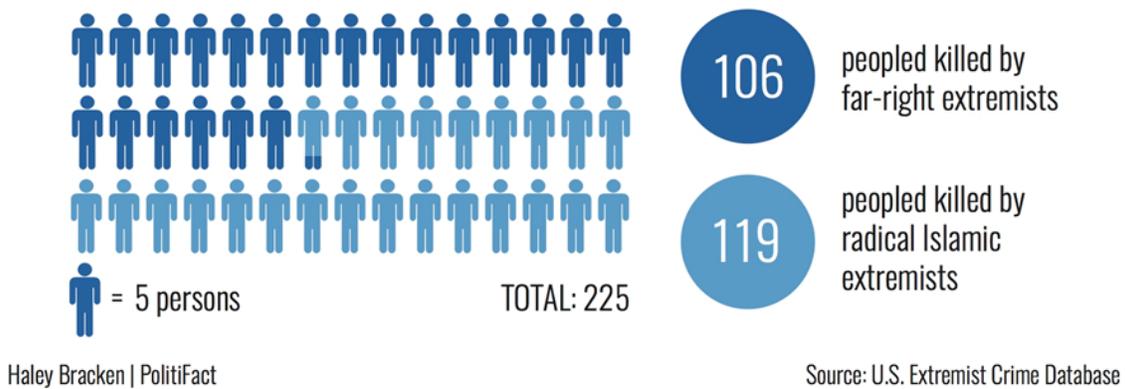


Figure 2. Deaths Caused by Far-Right and Islamic Extremists in the United States, 2001–2016⁷⁵

The statistics presented in Figure 3 demonstrate that right-wing offenders are the primary violent extremism threat in the United States. Many contemporary observers have reached similar conclusions. According to Albert Ford at New America, “The terrorist threat in the United States is almost entirely homegrown, as no foreign terrorist organization has successfully directed and orchestrated an attack in the United States since 9/11.”⁷⁶ John Horgan, a University of Massachusetts Lowell scholar, and his coauthors observe that right-wing extremism has been underestimated and that the jihadist threat has been overstated; in 2009, a Department of Homeland Security report concurred.⁷⁷ Researchers Charles Kurzman of the University of North Carolina and David Schanzer of Duke University conducted a survey in 2015 of 382 law enforcement departments across

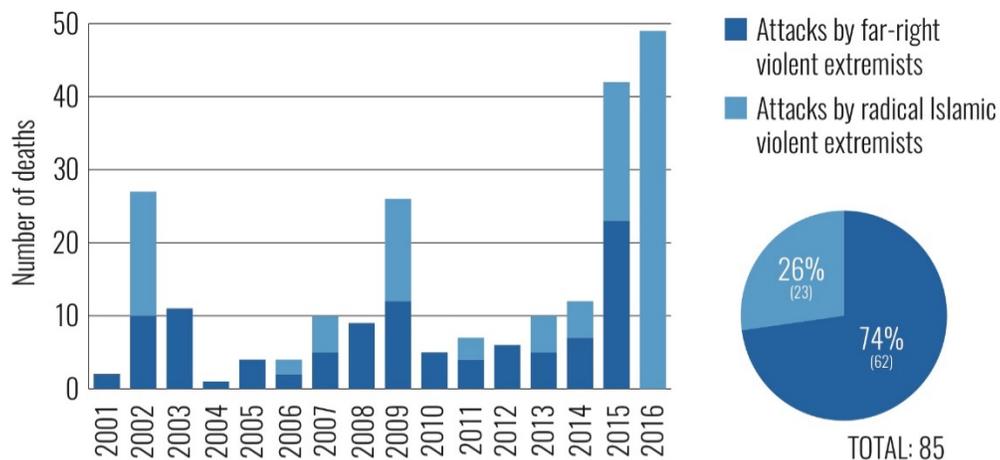
⁷⁵ Source: Haley Bracken, “A Look at the Data on Domestic Terrorism and Who’s Behind It,” PolitiFact, August 16, 2017, <https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/article/2017/aug/16/look-data-domestic-terrorism-and-whos-behind-it/>.

⁷⁶ Miriam Valverde, “A Look at the Data on Domestic Terrorism and Who’s Behind It,” PolitiFact, August 16, 2017, <https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/article/2017/aug/16/look-data-domestic-terrorism-and-whos-behind-it/>.

⁷⁷ John Horgan et al., “Across the Universe? A Comparative Analysis of Violent Behavior and Radicalization across Three Offender Types with Implications for Criminal Justice Training and Education” (report, U.S. Department of Justice, June 2016), <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/249937.pdf>.

the country to identify the top threats from violent extremism in their regions. They found that “74 percent reported anti-government extremism as one of the top three terrorist threats in their jurisdiction; 39 percent listed extremism connected with al Qaeda or like-minded terrorist organizations.”⁷⁸ Kurzman told the *New York Times* that “[l]aw enforcement agencies around the country have told us the threat from Muslim extremists is not as great as the threat from right-wing extremists.”⁷⁹

From Sept. 12, 2001, to Dec. 31, 2016, there were 85 attacks by violent extremists in the U.S. resulting in 225 deaths.



Haley Bracken | PolitiFact

Source: U.S. Extremist Crime Database

Figure 3. Deadly Violent Extremist Attacks in the United States, 2001–2016⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Charles Kurzman and David Schanzer, “Law Enforcement Assessment of the Violent Extremism Threat” (report, Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security, June 2015), 3, https://sites.duke.edu/tcths/files/2013/06/Kurzman_Schanzer_Law_Enforcement_Assessment_of_the_Violent_Extremist_Threat_final.pdf.

⁷⁹ Scott Shane, “Homegrown Extremists Tied to Deadlier Toll Than Jihadists in U.S. since 9/11,” *New York Times*, June 24, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/25/us/tally-of-attacks-in-us-challenges-perceptions-of-top-terror-threat.html>.

⁸⁰ Source: Bracken, “A Look at the Data on Domestic Terrorism.”

Attributing violence to broad ideological motivations, however, is complicated by the myriad of motivations that propel individuals toward violent action. In 2015, for instance, four different domestic extremist movements inflicted fifty-two deaths (see Figure 4).⁸¹ The mass shooting by Dylann Roof was responsible for almost half of these deaths, and nineteen of the deaths were from domestic Islamic extremists.⁸²

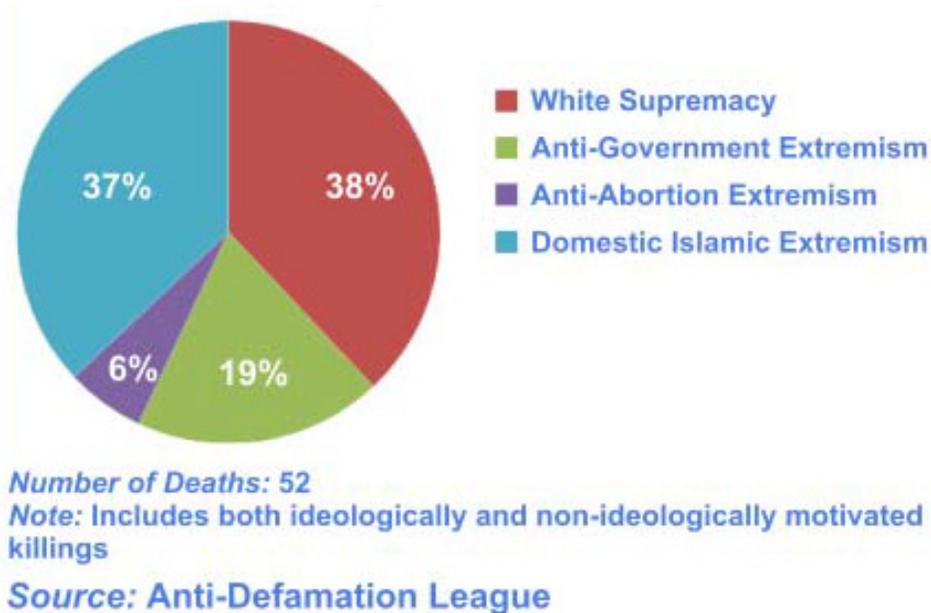


Figure 4. Domestic Extremist-Related Killings in the United States by Perpetrator Affiliation, 2015⁸³

In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, the common belief was that group-based terrorism, specifically jihadism, was the number one security threat to the United States. Data and research since then have shown that homegrown violent extremists are much more dangerous. Excluding a few high-profile, possibly jihadist-inspired cases, the number of attacks by homegrown violent extremists has far exceeded those by group-based terrorists. Over the last few years, however, the number of lone-actor jihadist attacks has increased;

⁸¹ Anti-defamation League, “Murder and Extremism in the United States.”

⁸² Anti-defamation League.

⁸³ Source: Anti-defamation League, 2.

this could potentially lead to the jihadist threat outweighing the historical problem of right-wing, anti-government extremists.

B. SCHOOL SHOOTERS, RIGHT-WING EXTREMISTS, AND LONE-ACTOR JIHADISTS

Nearly eighteen years after the 9/11 attacks, scholars still cannot entirely explain the transformative process that causes normal individuals to become violent extremists; a one-size-fits-all explanation is elusive. As described in Chapter I, Hafez and Mullins use a puzzle metaphor to describe the nuanced factors involved in the radicalization process.⁸⁴ Despite limited data, scholars do agree on some of the key variables involved in violent extremism and radicalization. Through 2010, according to Spaaij, there were only three studies that thoroughly delved into the many facets of lone violent extremists.⁸⁵ Spaaij used the Research and Development Corporation Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism to build a knowledge base that spanned fifteen countries and included seventy-four lone offenders.⁸⁶ The study identified “motivational patterns, as well as social and psychological indicators.”⁸⁷ Another study, conducted by Jeff Gruenewald, Steven Chermak, and Joshua D. Freilich, looked at the variances between loners and other violent extremists. The results showed there was not a straightforward comparison which could be utilized from one group to another.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Hafez and Mullins, “The Radicalization Puzzle.”

⁸⁵ Mark Hamm and Ramon Spaaj, “Lone Wolf Terrorism in America: Using Knowledge of Radicalization Pathways to Forge Prevention Strategies” (report, U.S. Department of Justice, February 2015), <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/248691.pdf>.

⁸⁶ Brian J. Phillips, “Enemies with Benefits? Violent Rivalry and Terrorist Group Longevity,” *Journal of Peace Research* 52, no. 1 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343314550538>.

⁸⁷ Phillips.

⁸⁸ Jeff Gruenewald, Steven Chermak and Joshua D. Freilich, “Distinguishing ‘Loner’ Attacks from Other Domestic Extremist Violence: A Comparison of Far-Right Homicide Incident and Offender Characteristics,” *Criminology and Public Policy* 12, no. 1 (2013): 78.

Whether lone actors differ from other types of extremists is undetermined. Paul Gill, John Horgan, and Paige Deckert examined the characteristics and ideologies of 119 lone-actor terrorists.⁸⁹ Their study had seven key findings:

- Lone-actor terrorists do not share a single profile.
- Before most active-shooter events, other people witnessed evidence of the shooter’s grievance, extremist views, and a motivation toward violence.
- Lone-actor scenarios and events follow many previous activities and experiences.
- Many lone actors are socially isolated.
- A larger civil society group, terrorist group, or social movement usually has open lone-actor engagement.
- Lone-actor extremist acts are usually deliberative and considered over a long period of time.
- “Despite the diversity of lone-actor terrorists, there [are] distinguishable differences between subgroups.”⁹⁰

While data are generally limited to the few studies discussed here, there are several identifiable patterns in the motivational, social, and psychological findings. Gill, Horgan, and Deckert discovered that over half of the extremists they studied were single and never married, and 22 percent were separated or divorced.⁹¹ In 83 percent of the cases, the attackers’ ideological motivations—or the fact that they were planning an attack—were known to others. They also identified that right-wing lone extremists were less likely to have secondary education and more apt to work in the construction field, whereas jihadist lone extremists worked more predominantly among professional ranks. Thirty percent of the actors in the study were affiliated with a group that was involved in nefarious activities, as well as legitimate organizations. But some were rejected by these groups. An example

⁸⁹ Paul Gill, John Horgan, and Paige Deckert, “Bombing Alone: Tracing the Motivations and Antecedent Behaviors of Lone-Actor Terrorists,” *Journal of Forensic Sciences* 59, no. 2 (March 2014): 425–35, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1556-4029.12312>.

⁹⁰ Gill, Horgan, and Deckert, 434.

⁹¹ Gill, Horgan, and Deckert.

of this is the Oklahoma City bomber, Timothy McVeigh, who was removed from the National Rifle Association.⁹²

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has made the study of active shooters a recent priority. In a 2014 study, the FBI reviewed active-shooter incidents between 2000 and 2013; the bureau conducted a second phase of the original study in 2018 to include the fifty shootings that occurred in 2016 and 2017—the thirty that occurred in 2017 alone represented the highest number of active-shooter killings the FBI has seen in a one-year period.⁹³ The first phase of the study examined the parameters of the shootings themselves: “what happened during and after the shooting.”⁹⁴ The second phase looked specifically at sixty-three cases from the original study in an attempt to determine how the shooters behaved before the attacks, and why they attacked.⁹⁵ The shooters’ demographics varied so greatly that the study concluded it would be impossible to create a standard profile for the shooters. The two exceptions were that 94 percent of the attackers were male and 63 percent were white (see Figure 5 for a more detailed breakdown of race demographics). Evidence also found that active shooters were likely to exhibit abusive and harassing behaviors.⁹⁶ Although there were no overwhelming commonalities among the shooters outside of these two areas, the study gives the FBI a basis for further research.

⁹² Gill, Horgan, and Deckert.

⁹³ FBI, “A Study of Active Shooter Incidents in the United States between 2000 and 2013” (report, U.S. Department of Justice, 2013), <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/active-shooter-study-2000-2013-1.pdf/view>; “Active Shooter Incidents in the United States in 2016 and 2017,” FBI, accessed April 4, 2019, <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/active-shooter-incidents-us-2016-2017.pdf/view>.

⁹⁴ FBI, “Active Shooter Incidents between 2000 and 2013.”

⁹⁵ FBI, “Active Shooter Incidents in 2016 and 2017.”

⁹⁶ FBI.

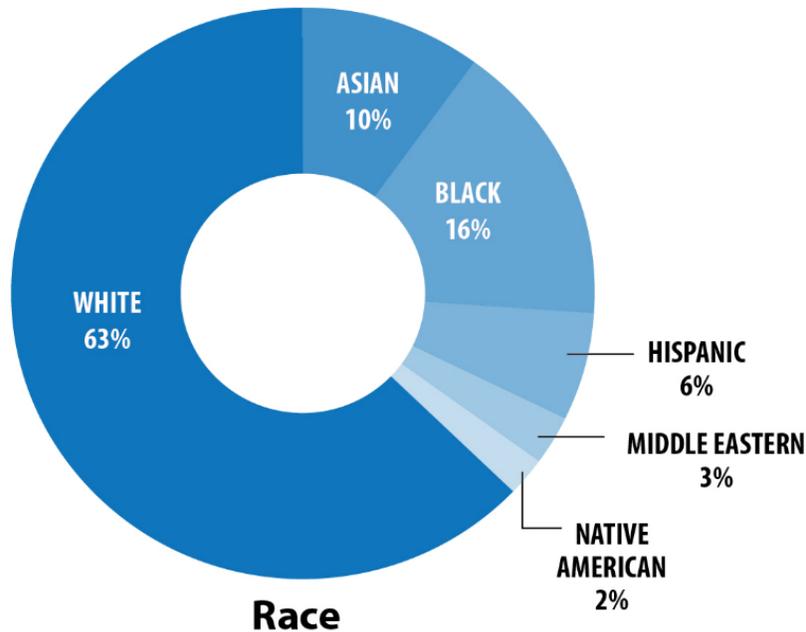


Figure 5. Race Demographics of Active Shooters in the United States, 2000–2013⁹⁷

School shooters share common variables with their adult counterparts when it comes to the path toward violence. In its “Safe School Initiative” report, the Secret Service and Department of Education show that school shooters have varying social relationships; some are popular before the attacks while others are socially isolated. Only about one-quarter, 27 percent, of the attackers studied in the report were “fringe” students—those disliked by the majority of their classmates—while 30 percent were described as loners. Forty percent of the attackers were “mainstream” students who played sports, engaged in extracurricular activities, or were part of school clubs and religious groups.⁹⁸ As with other lone-actor extremists, it is futile to try to predict which students will become violent; thus far, the students who have engaged in school attacks do not fit any consistent “profile.” Demographics, personality, and psychosocial characteristics of the attackers vary

⁹⁷ Source: James Silver, Andre Simons, and Sarah Craun, “A Study of the Pre-attack Behaviors of Active Shooters in the United States between 2000 and 2013” (report, FBI, June 2018), 10.

⁹⁸ Bryan Vossekuil et al., “The Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the Prevention of School Attacks in the United States” (report, Secret Service and Department of Education, 2004), <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/preventingattacksreport.pdf>.

significantly. This makes profiling at-risk students for violence an ineffective method of identification.⁹⁹ There are two significant risks, as well, when relying on profiles. First, most people who fit the profile will never become violent. Second, law enforcement routinely misidentifies those who pose a risk.¹⁰⁰ Rather than trying to develop a specific profile, teachers, school counselors, and family members must center attention “on a student’s *behaviors and communications* to determine if that student appears to be planning or preparing for an attack.”¹⁰¹

C. DATA ON VIOLENT EXTREMISTS

While there is no one-size-fits-all explanation for why violent extremists become violent, researchers have been able to identify critical components that show a possible starting point. It appears that attackers, whether they are school shooters, right-wing extremists, or lone-actor jihadists, do exhibit warning signs before they carry out their attacks. This section describes data about those warning signs, encompassing the stages of radicalization, mental health signals, and bullying or persecution.

1. Stages of Radicalization

Though there is no clear path to becoming a violent extremist, there are some precursor stages that mark an individual’s escalation toward violence: marginalization, identity-seeking, and finally radicalization.

a. Marginalization

Marginalization is the treatment of a person or group in a way that regards the person or group as insignificant and unworthy.¹⁰² Its impact has resounding consequences, both directly and indirectly, which are sometimes violent. Whether a person is a jihadist or right-wing extremist, feelings of marginalization can lead to violence. Two studies of

⁹⁹ Vossekul et al.

¹⁰⁰ Vossekul et al.

¹⁰¹ Vossekul et al., 34.

¹⁰² “Marginalize,” s.v. *English Oxford Living Dictionaries*, accessed April 11, 2019, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/marginalize>.

minority discrimination show a correlation between the perception of discrimination and terrorism. The first is from James Piazza, who conducted an analysis of actors and events between 1970 and 2006, compiling over 3,000 observations from 172 countries. In the second, Jeff Victoroff, Janice Adelman, and Miriam Matthews examined Pew Research records, which reviewed over 2,600 Muslims living in the West.¹⁰³ They found a link between suicide and a feeling of being discriminated against, especially among younger Muslims. Far-right, anti-Muslim rhetoric from political parties and media outlets further increases this feeling of discrimination among second- and third-generation Muslims born in the United States who know no other country as home and therefore experience dual feelings of exclusion.¹⁰⁴ This could explain why some U.S.-born Muslims have become involved in the jihadist movement as lone-wolf attackers. Because the Muslim community has been viewed as suspicious and has been subjected to surveillance, members of the community have felt an increasing sense of alienation.¹⁰⁵

White supremacists, on the other hand, believe they represent an inherently superior master race that is under attack from intercultural exchange and race mixing. They believe they are being marginalized and that their world is on the brink of collapse.¹⁰⁶ Professor Pete Simi of the University of Nebraska and his coauthors state, “White supremacists unite around genocidal fantasies against Jews, Blacks, Hispanics, gays, and anyone else opposed to white power. They desire a racially exclusive world where non-whites and other ‘sub-humans’ are vanquished, segregated, or at least subordinated to Aryan authority.”¹⁰⁷

b. Seeking Identity and Belonging

Another factor that prompts a turn toward violence is a desire for political identity or belonging in a larger community. In his study of eighty-three violent Islamist radicals in

¹⁰³ Hafez and Mullins, “The Radicalization Puzzle.”

¹⁰⁴ Hafez and Mullins.

¹⁰⁵ Hafez and Mullins.

¹⁰⁶ Pete Simi, Steven Windisch, and Karyn Sporer, “Recruitment and Radicalization among US Far-Right Terrorists” (report, START, November 2016), https://www.start.umd.edu/pubs/START_RecruitmentRadicalizationAmongUSFarRightTerrorists_Nov2016.pdf.

¹⁰⁷ Simi, Windisch, and Sporer, 6.

the United States between 2001 and 2010, Daniel Kleinmann found that, in seventy-seven cases, the key to ideological socialization was social ties.¹⁰⁸ Friendship and kinship have a robust effect on religious extremism, right- and left-wing terrorism, gangs, social activism, and political participation. These individuals derive psychological as well as material benefits from radical associations.¹⁰⁹ Ideological extremism appeals to dreamers who want to change an unfair world, and to “lost souls” who are looking for redemption. Inclusion can give a sense of purpose to those who feel marginalized, along with personal power and status.

In “The Search for the Terrorist Personality,” John Horgan explains that preexisting networks recruit individuals in many ways, often seeking to link those who have comparable beliefs, thus creating a shared identity.¹¹⁰ When people who share beliefs meet in non-threatening surroundings, radicalizers can impart new information to them and recruit them easily.¹¹¹ Groups that participate in high-risk activism, to include violence, need trust and commitment as a fundamental component. The recruitment of likeminded individuals is easier when trust is already established, which is usually the case when recruiting family and friends; this also minimizes “the risk of talking to the ‘wrong people.’”¹¹² Social networks also offer the opportunity of “bloc recruitment.” Group commitments are self-reinforcing because individuals do not want to be left behind their friends. Psychological factors—such as concern for reputation, a desire to fit in, and peer pressure—make bloc recruitment easier. Scott Helfstein proposes that “domestic U.S. terrorism data, specifically regarding lone wolf terrorists, indicates that very few individuals self-radicalize toward violent action” without a socialization process.¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ Hafez and Mullins, “The Radicalization Puzzle.”

¹⁰⁹ John Horgan, “The Search for the Terrorist Personality,” in *Terrorists, Victims and Society: Psychological Perspectives on Terrorism and its Consequences*, ed. Andrew Silke, 1–27 (London: Wiley, 2003).

¹¹⁰ Horgan.

¹¹¹ Horgan.

¹¹² Horgan.

¹¹³ Hafez and Mullins, “The Radicalization Puzzle.”

Recruiters home in on people who are isolated, and encourage them to question the principles of societal order. As Hafez and Mullins explain, when people are isolated, they see life through a fatalistic lens: “‘things have always worked this way,’ ‘things will never change,’ ‘there is nothing we can do about this.’”¹¹⁴ Recruiters then use ideology to convince these isolated potential recruits that the status quo is wrong and to “invoke moral outrage by labeling the status quo as ‘unjust,’ ‘exploitative,’ ‘oppressive,’ or ‘heretical.’”¹¹⁵ Weaknesses and grievances turn into disgust of a “target group”; for a few, this creates an impetus or justification for viciousness. The process “begins by framing some unsatisfying event or condition as being unjust, blaming the injustice on a target policy, person, or nation, and then vilifying, often demonizing, the responsible party to facilitate justification for aggression.”¹¹⁶ Either the drive for identity and belonging can be a catalyst for positive change or, conversely, it can lay the groundwork to welcome disenfranchised individuals looking for a sense of self.

c. Radicalization

The path to radicalization takes different forms depending on the ideology of the actor. Edwin Bakker and Beatrice de Graaf note that loner attacks are the “most puzzling and unpredictable forms of terrorism.”¹¹⁷ Although many loners are not in the mainstream of the general public, they often try to endorse the radical ideology they support.¹¹⁸ Loners are more likely to self-radicalize because they do not integrate well into society. In their study of 119 loners Gill, Horgan, and Deckert found that 59 percent wrote documents or manifestos that defined their beliefs publicly.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, more than 68 percent had “read or consumed literature or propaganda from a wider movement,” 27 percent read

¹¹⁴ Hafez and Mullins.

¹¹⁵ Hafez and Mullins.

¹¹⁶ Randy Borum, “Understanding the Terrorist Mind-Set,” *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin* (July 2003): 7, http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/fbi/terrorist_mindset.pdf.

¹¹⁷ Edwin Bakker and Beatrice de Graaf, “Lone Wolves: How to Prevent This Phenomenon?,” ICCT, November 2010, <https://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Bakker-deGraaf-EM-Paper-Lone-Wolves.pdf>.

¹¹⁸ Bakker and de Graaf.

¹¹⁹ Gill, Horgan, and Deckert, “Bombing Alone.”

similar materials about other lone actors, and 15 percent “read literature or propaganda produced by other lone-actor terrorists.”¹²⁰

While social scientists offer theoretical models, law enforcement has its own views of the radicalization process based on social psychological principles. The FBI, the New York Police Department, and the Danish Ministry of Justice mention a similar, sequential process of radicalization that involves pre-radicalization identification, indoctrination, and action.¹²¹ This conceptual model—which represents “a linear sequence of stages rather than a process or pathway”—has become the standard among some law enforcement groups.¹²² It identifies key mechanisms of radicalization at individual, group, and mass-public levels, as identified in Table 2.¹²³ Although the sequence model has not been as rigorously tested as the process model, recent studies show promise.

¹²⁰ Gill, Horgan, and Deckert, 430.

¹²¹ Mitchell D. Silber and Arvin Bhatt, “Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat” (report, New York City Police Department, 2007), https://sethgodin.typepad.com/seths_blog/files/NYPD_Report-Radicalization_in_the_West.pdf.

¹²² Silver and Bhatt.

¹²³ Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, “Mechanisms of Political Radicalization: Pathways toward Terrorism,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20, no. 3 (2008): 415–33, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546550802073367>.

Table 2. Factors Leading to Radicalization¹²⁴

Level	Mechanism
Individual	1. Personal victimization
	2. Political grievance
	3. Joining a radical group—the slippery slope
	4. Joining a radical group—the power of love
	5. Extremity shift in like-minded groups
Group	6. Extreme cohesion under isolation and threat
	7. Competition for the same base of support
	8. Competition with state power—condensation
	9. Within-group competition—fissioning
Mass	10. Jujitsu politics
	11. Hate
	12. Martyrdom

The radicalization path often combines several mechanisms. According to psychology professor Arie Kruglanski, three elements of violent extremism “jointly create the terrorist mindset”: need, narrative, and network.¹²⁵ Kruglanski describes *need* as the desire to matter to oneself as well as others of significance. This element manifests when people yearn for respect, and then the “ideological narrative ... justifies violence and depicts it as an effective and desirable way to gratify the need.”¹²⁶ Members or groups are rewarded through social networks, which validate the ideology. Past violent extremists

¹²⁴ Adapted from McCauley and Moskalenko.

¹²⁵ Arie Kruglanski, “Psychology Expert: Why Extremists Use Violence in Their Quest for Significance,” *The Conversation*, September 19, 2016, <https://theconversation.com/psychology-expert-why-extremists-use-violence-in-their-quest-for-significance-62594>.

¹²⁶ Kruglanski.

have shown that issues with failure, rejection, and humiliation have spurred their violent acts.¹²⁷ The radicalization of lone-actor terrorists can therefore be viewed as a variation rather than a different mentality.¹²⁸ Though lone actors appear to be disorganized and they do not fully integrate into a group, they often follow radical ideologies. Rarely do they follow a singular process toward violence.

2. Mental Health

Mental health is a broad concept that encompasses many aspects of an individual's life. Scholars like Martha Crenshaw and Matthijs Nijboer believe that while most group-based terrorists are psychologically stable, lone wolves are more likely to have mental health issues.¹²⁹ A high incidence of psychological disorders appears in loners who are individual terrorists, according to a survey by Christopher Hewitt.¹³⁰ The command-and-control structure of group-based terrorism is a possible reason mental illness rates are lower among group terrorists than among lone actors.¹³¹ There is also a hierarchy in group-based terrorism that is not present in lone-wolf attacks. Corner and Gill found that 50 percent of single-issue lone actors had mental illnesses.¹³² Their work also highlights that lone actors “are far more likely to have a documented mental health history than their counterparts who engage in political violence as part of a group.”¹³³

Sixty-six percent of individuals with a mental health issue do not seek help, according to the World Health Organization; however, a mental health diagnosis alone is

¹²⁷ Kruglanski.

¹²⁸ Kruglanski.

¹²⁹ Matthijs Nijboer, “A Review of Lone World Terrorism: The Need for a Different Approach,” *Social Cosmos* 3, no. 1 (2012): 33–39, <https://dspace.library.uu.nl/handle/1874/237585>.

¹³⁰ Emily Corner, Paul Gill and Oliver Mason, “Mental Health Disorders and the Terrorist: A Research Note Probing Selection Effects and Disorder Prevalence,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 39, no. 6 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2015.1120099>.

¹³¹ Emily Corner and Paul Gill, “Is There a Nexus between Terrorist Involvement and Mental Health in the Age of the Islamic State?,” *CTC Sentinel* 10, no. 1 (January 2017), <https://ctc.usma.edu/is-there-a-nexus-between-terrorist-involvement-and-mental-health-in-the-age-of-the-islamic-state/>.

¹³² Corner and Gill

¹³³ Worth, “Lone Wolf Attacks.”

not an indication of lone-actor terrorism.¹³⁴ Social isolation and withdrawal accompany mental illness when it comes to lone actors, according to Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko.¹³⁵ Further research reports the striking prevalence of social isolation across domains of lone-actor extremists' lives: of past extremists, 37 percent lived alone, 40 percent were unemployed, and 10 percent were school dropouts.¹³⁶ Research also shows that "loners had trouble in their personal and work relationships and had problematic home lives."¹³⁷ Statistical analysis shows links, as well, between mental illness and stressors. The most significant stressor that may lead to mental illness is a parent's divorce.¹³⁸

Mental health profiles reflect a mix of external stressors or life changes coupled with the inability to cope with such changes without conflict. The Secret Service's study of attacks on federal targets between 2001 and 2013, which mirrors similar studies, found that lone actors carried out thirty-five of the forty-three attacks.¹³⁹ In the year before their attacks, a vast majority of the offenders experienced stressful events such as civil court actions, criminal charges, family or romantic issues, and employment issues. Over half the offenders had a history of violence. Lone actor Abdulhakim Muhammad had violent tendencies since he was in middle school and he later killed a soldier and injured another in Little Rock, Arkansas. All but one offender studied in the Secret Service report showed warning signs before their attacks, and two-thirds of the offenders' normal communications changed dramatically before the attacks—to a more volatile, frustrated verbal pattern unrelated to their targets. They made threats or veiled references of harm, aired grievances, and referenced ideological and sociopolitical issues. Fifty percent exhibited changes in physical, social, or interpersonal functioning, and behavior related to work. Half of the

¹³⁴ Corner and Gill, "Is There a Nexus."

¹³⁵ McCauley and Moskalenko, "Mechanisms of Political Radicalization."

¹³⁶ Corner and Gill, "A False Dichotomy."

¹³⁷ Gruenewald, Chermak, and Frelich, "Distinguishing 'Loner' Attacks," 70.

¹³⁸ Corner and Gill, "A False Dichotomy."

¹³⁹ National Threat Assessment Center, "Attacks on Federal Government 2001–2013: Threat Assessment Considerations" (report, Secret Service, December 2015), https://www.secretservice.gov/data/protection/ntac/Attacks_on_Federal_Government_2001-2013.pdf.

offenders also displayed interpersonal difficulties. They became withdrawn and alienated from friends or family, disappearing for periods of time or cutting off communications with them. Due to their behavior changes, their relationships became strained, which led to concern and conflicts with family members. The wife of Andrew Stack—who flew a plane into an IRS office—felt that their income taxes, and particularly her husband’s escalating volatility about the subject, was straining their marriage prior to the event.¹⁴⁰

Although such studies are limited, Corner and Gill explain that “empirical studies of lone-actor terrorism suggest there is a greater preponderance of mental illness within this category of terrorist actor than that expected within a group-based sample.”¹⁴¹ Reviewing related literature, they describe several related statistics:

- 61 percent of lone assassins had previous contact with mental health services
- 22 percent of American ‘loners’ [were] psychologically disturbed
- 31 percent of a sample of lone-actor terrorists [had] a history of mental illness¹⁴²

Similarly, Corner and Gill reviewed a study that found the majority of adolescent murderers, 70 percent, had been depicted as rejected by their peers.¹⁴³ In another study they reviewed, “Characteristics of Lone-Wolf Violent Offenders: A Comparison of Assassins and School Attackers,” 78 percent of school attackers were identified to have suffered from depression and despair, and showed a past of suicidal thoughts or suicide attempts. Most notable, however, is that 81 percent of the attackers expressed personal grievances. The authors theorize that understanding common characteristics of school attackers could help mitigate future violence from these types of perpetrators.¹⁴⁴

As discovered during phase two of the previously mentioned FBI pre-attack study, active shooters exhibit multiple stressors and concerning behaviors before their attacks,

¹⁴⁰ National Threat Assessment Center, 41.

¹⁴¹ Corner and Gill, “A False Dichotomy,” 24.

¹⁴² Corner and Grill, 24.

¹⁴³ Corner and Gill, 25.

¹⁴⁴ Corner and Gill.

such as work or school conflicts and financial strain.¹⁴⁵ One active shooter examined in the study had experienced abuse and neglect in his home life, and had issues with peers.¹⁴⁶ Twelve of the shooters had a mood disorder, four an anxiety disorder, three a psychotic disorder, and two a personality disorder.¹⁴⁷ School shooters' concerning behaviors were seen by peers and teachers more than family members, according to the report; domestic partners, however, were most likely to see the behaviors in active shooters over the age of eighteen. Forty-nine percent of primary grievances centered on adverse interpersonal or employment issues.¹⁴⁸ Though no absolute causation can be determined, there is a correlation between psychological and sociological abnormalities and lone-wolf attackers.

The literature on lone actors emphasizes that, when it comes to mental health issues, communities, family, and friends have an essential role to play. They can help facilitate a healthy discourse for mental health advocacy and can help combat the stigma around seeking mental health counseling.

3. Persecution and Bullying

Feelings of disconnection and rejection may be precursors to violent behavior for school shooters. Bullying, persecution, or harm by others before the attack was evident in 71 percent of the cases reviewed by the FBI.¹⁴⁹ In several cases the harassment and bullying were severe and long-standing. In one case the attacker specifically cited bullying as a reason he attacked the school; his classmates described him as “the kid everyone teased” and reported that he had repeatedly had his head held underwater in the pool, had things thrown at him, or had been tripped when he was walking down the hall.¹⁵⁰ Several schoolmates alleged that he attacker appeared agitated and annoyed by the harassment in the days prior to the attack. According to the study, the student did not undergo a mental

¹⁴⁵ FBI, “Active Shooter Incidents in 2016 and 2017.”

¹⁴⁶ FBI.

¹⁴⁷ FBI.

¹⁴⁸ FBI.

¹⁴⁹ FBI.

¹⁵⁰ FBI.

health evaluation before the attack.¹⁵¹ In another case, a student who had previously dropped out of school became the attacker.¹⁵² He did not finish school or earn a diploma because a teacher had failed him in a senior-year course, and he believed he later lost his job because of the absence of this diploma. He ultimately held over sixty students hostage and killed his former teacher and two students. Family and friends of the attacker commented that he became withdrawn and depressed following the job loss. A friend stated that “the attacker blamed his former teacher and had begun planning how to retaliate.”¹⁵³

Several studies have documented numerous assailants who felt browbeaten, victimized, or injured by others preceding their acts of violence. In a number of school violence incidents, assailants described their bullying experiences as approaching torment.¹⁵⁴ Kathryn Farr of Portland State University found that, of thirty-one schoolboys involved in school shootings, all the boys were seen as not being appropriately masculine.¹⁵⁵ Falling short of this perceived benchmark set the boys up to be emasculated, marginalized, and labeled as “homo,” “crybaby,” or “fag” by their classmates.¹⁵⁶ For young males, status and risk-taking accompany maturation. Risk-taking feeds into status and can be used to garner attention. Guns and violence are natural outlets for risk-taking. The term *unfreezing* refers to “a change in circumstances, especially a sudden change,” which can be a precursor to violence.¹⁵⁷ A loss of connection with a loved one and a physical threat are examples of unfreezing.¹⁵⁸ If predictability and control are threatened, individuals will try to regain control by establishing new relationships, or developing new behaviors and new values. Unfreezing creates an opening that “increases the value of acting

¹⁵¹ FBI.

¹⁵² FBI.

¹⁵³ FBI.

¹⁵⁴ FBI.

¹⁵⁵ “What Characteristics Do School Shooters Share?,” Springer, October 19, 2017, <https://www.springer.com/gp/about-springer/media/research-news/all-english-research-news/what-characteristics-do-school-shooters-share----/15145736>.

¹⁵⁶ Springer.

¹⁵⁷ Springer.

¹⁵⁸ McCauley, Moskalenko, and Van Son, “Characteristics of Lone-Wolf Violent Offenders.”

to gain or regain status and respect” and minimizes the perceived cost of acting on a grievance.¹⁵⁹

D. CONCLUSION

Right-wing terrorism is the biggest threat facing the United States based on the number of attacks carried out on U.S. soil, and lone-actor extremists commit many more acts of violence against U.S. citizens than group-based terrorists. The path to radicalization displays commonalities: the need for acceptance and a sense of belonging and identity, coupled with feelings of isolation and marginalization and significant psychological and sociological stressors, often lead extremists to engage with an ideology that becomes maladaptive, creating a tinderbox for violence.

¹⁵⁹ McCauley, Moskalenko, and Van Son.

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III. INTERVENTION AND PREVENTION IN ADOLESCENTS

While *intervention* begins before a crisis occurs, the primary goal of *prevention* is to change the larger environment. Evidence-based programs and community practice show that violence is preventable, and that the benefits of intervention before a crisis outweigh the costs. The criminal justice system typically focuses on behavior after a crisis event has occurred, but approaches that emphasize intervention and prevention can change systems and shape societal norms.¹⁶⁰ Research has found that “universal school-based programs can reduce violence by 15 percent in as little as six months ... and street outreach and interruption strategies reduce shootings and killings by 40 to 70 percent.”¹⁶¹

According to an Institute of Medicine study—reviewed by Rachel A. Davis in “Investing in Prevention”—“it is unreasonable to expect that people will change their behavior easily when so many forces in the social, cultural, and physical environment conspire against such change.”¹⁶² Intervention and prevention programs should therefore address all types of systems, from individual and relational to cultural and societal. Combatting violence, in all its forms, requires comprehensive, multifaceted approaches; such approaches which will not only save lives but will also produce substantial cost savings.¹⁶³

A. THE NEED FOR INTERVENTION TO PREVENT VIOLENCE

As the number of killings by young adults grows across America, experts in homeland security, politics, policing, and the civilian population agree that it is too late to address the problem of a violent young extremist after a shooting has occurred.¹⁶⁴ Lone

¹⁶⁰ Rachel A. Davis, “Investing in Prevention,” *Social and Economic Costs of Violence: Workshop Summary* (October 2011), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK190007/>.

¹⁶¹ Davis, citing Hahn et al. and Skogan et al.

¹⁶² Davis.

¹⁶³ Davis.

¹⁶⁴ “Evaluation Notebook: AACAP’s 61st Annual Meeting,” American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP), February 20, 2015, https://www.aacap.org/App_Themes/AACAP/docs/2014_Annual_Meeting_Evaluation_Notebook.pdf.

wolves have shown a range of motivations for and paths toward violence. Parents and other adults are often the first to witness violent behavior in these children. Typically they either hope the child will grow out of it or do not know how to secure or seek help. Dismissing the behavior as a phase, however, is not acceptable.¹⁶⁵

Antisocial behavior in children and adolescents can take many forms: “physical aggression, fighting, threats or attempts to hurt others, use of weapons, cruelty toward animals, fire setting, intentional destruction of property and vandalism.”¹⁶⁶ Emerging research on violent extremism, however, also shows that “a complex interaction or combination of factors leads to an increased risk of violent behavior in children and adolescents.”¹⁶⁷ According to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, other risk factors for violent behavior include:

- Previous aggressive or violent behavior
- Being the victim of physical abuse and/or sexual abuse
- Exposure to violence in the home and/or community
- Being the victim of bullying
- Genetic (family heredity) factors
- Exposure to violence in media (TV, movies, etc.)
- Use of drugs and/or alcohol
- Presence of firearms in home
- Combination of stressful family socioeconomic factors (poverty, severe deprivation, marital breakup, single parenting, unemployment, loss of support from extended family)
- Brain damage from head injury¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ AACAP.

¹⁶⁶ “Violent Behavior in Children and Adolescents,” AACAP, December 2015, http://www.aacap.org/aacap/families_and_youth/facts_for_families/FFF-Guide/Understanding-Violent-Behavior-In-Children-and-Adolescents-055.aspx.

¹⁶⁷ AACAP.

¹⁶⁸ AACAP.

There are also several warning signs that may signal potential violent behavior in children. A child should be carefully evaluated if he or she exhibits several risk factors *and* the following behaviors:

- Intense anger
- Frequent loss of temper or blow-ups
- Extreme irritability
- Extreme impulsiveness
- Becoming easily frustrated¹⁶⁹

When children are able to ease or eliminate these risk factors, they are less likely to engage in violent behaviors as adolescents.¹⁷⁰ The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry subscribes to a whole-of-community approach to meet this end: “Efforts should be directed at decreasing the exposure of children and adolescents to violence in the home, community, and through the media.”¹⁷¹

The National Threat Assessment Center—a component of the Secret Service—also highlights the importance of acting on initial indicators of untoward behavior; the center’s study of attacks on federal targets mentions the need to lower the “threshold setting for reporting concerning behaviors.”¹⁷² Mental health professionals, human resources representatives, and school personnel should be the first to know about issues, the report suggests. Social service and school agencies can be proactive by helping students, family members, and the community become more aware of the behaviors they see and how to determine which behaviors are appropriate to report to law enforcement.¹⁷³ An impediment to consider when setting a low threshold for reporting, however, is the hesitancy some may feel when sharing personal information about others. Some may also

¹⁶⁹ AACP.

¹⁷⁰ AACP.

¹⁷¹ AACP.

¹⁷² National Threat Assessment Center, “Attacks on Federal Targets,” 2.

¹⁷³ National Threat Assessment Center.

be unsure how to share their concerns, or may worry about consequences for both themselves and the individual they are reporting. The consequences could include a physical confrontation, arrest, or hospitalization. As the report states, “Working to understand these barriers and developing community-level strategies to mitigate them will support our ability to identify concerns at an earlier stage.”¹⁷⁴

The earlier a prevention program begins—and therefore the earlier a child’s risk factors are targeted—the more effectively the program can prevent the need for such reporting. Research by youth.gov, a government website that champions youth community programs, confirms that “juvenile delinquency follows a trajectory similar to that of normal adolescent development.”¹⁷⁵ When families, communities, and schools recognize these developmental paths, they can help curb antisocial behaviors before there are legal implications.¹⁷⁶ The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention suggests instituting the following in schools:

- Classroom and behavior management programs
- Multi-component classroom-based programs
- Social competence promotion curriculums
- Conflict resolution and violence prevention curriculums
- Bullying prevention programs
- Afterschool recreation programs
- Mentoring programs
- School organization programs
- Comprehensive community interventions¹⁷⁷

Youth.gov’s program directory features programs that have been thoroughly researched and reviewed for their “conceptual framework, whether or not the program was

¹⁷⁴ National Threat Assessment Center.

¹⁷⁵ “Prevention & Early Intervention,” youth.gov, accessed April 12, 2019, <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/juvenile-justice/prevention-and-early-intervention>.

¹⁷⁶ youth.gov.

¹⁷⁷ youth.gov.

implemented as intended, how it was evaluated, and the findings of the evaluations.”¹⁷⁸ This work from youth.gov could be used as a blueprint to guide best practices for new programs.

B. PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION PROGRAMS

Although public awareness is at an all-time high, the pervasiveness of bullying remains a severe issue facing youth in America.¹⁷⁹ Research has shown that “bullying affects individuals across ethnicity, gender, grade, and socioeconomic status, whether they live in urban, suburban, or rural communities.”¹⁸⁰ Evidence-based prevention programs can significantly reduce the effects bullying has on children during the school years and into adulthood.¹⁸¹ The programs discussed in this section, though they have different goals and approaches, demonstrate best practices that focus on the many aspects of prevention and intervention.

In response to increasing youth violence, including the fatal shooting at Columbine High School, the Departments of Education, Justice, and Health and Human Services started the Safe School/Healthy Students Initiative in 1999. This model, which has had positive results when incorporated into school systems, uses federal grants to fund community and school programs that focus on mental health and behavioral development services.¹⁸² The framework uses a roadmap to bring stakeholders together toward a common goal of keeping school-age children safe, and incorporates five elements:

- Promoting early childhood social and emotional learning and development focuses on children (0–5) with an emphasis on the development of social and emotional skills that will lay the foundation for future healthy interpersonal relationships, association with non-violent peers, and improved academic achievement.

¹⁷⁸ youth.gov.

¹⁷⁹ Harlan Luxenberg, Susan P. Limber, and Dan Olweus, *Bullying in U.S. Schools: 2014 Status Report* (Center City, MN: Hazelden Publishing, 2015), <https://olweus.sites.clemson.edu/documents/Bullying%20in%20US%20Schools--2014%20Status%20Report.pdf>.

¹⁸⁰ Luxenberg, Limber, and Olweus., 2.

¹⁸¹ Luxenberg, Limber, and Olweus.

¹⁸² President of the United States, 4.

- Promoting mental, emotional, and behavioral health focuses on enhanced integration, coordination, and resource sharing of mental, emotional, and behavioral health services and programs.
- Connecting families, schools, and communities focuses on linking families, schools, and communities together to increase and improve the quality of their engagement in planning and implementing programs and activities that assist students.
- Preventing behavioral health problems (including substance use) focuses on addressing the prevention and reduction of risk factors associated with behavioral health problems, including substance use, in coordination with broader environmental struggles that address change at the individual, classroom, school, family, and community levels.
- Creating safe and violence-free schools focuses on identifying and addressing issues, conditions, behaviors, and policies that contribute to unsafe school environments and violence in schools.¹⁸³

In 2013, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration conducted an evaluation on the Safe School/Healthy Students Initiative, noting the initiative’s surprising outcomes: a 519 percent increase in community-based service delivery and a 263 percent increase in school-based mental health services for students.¹⁸⁴ The evaluation, according to a report from the President of the United States, suggests that programs within the initiative should focus on addressing “violence and substance abuse prevention; social, emotional, and behavioral development; school- and community-based mental health services; and early childhood development.”¹⁸⁵ The president’s report also points to ongoing evaluation that shows that “the initiative has resulted in fewer students experiencing or witnessing violence, increased school safety, and [decreased] violence in communities where the program is active.”¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ “Elements,” National Center for Healthy Safe Children, accessed April 12, 2019, <https://healthysafechildren.org/elements>.

¹⁸⁴ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), *The Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative: A Legacy of Success*, HHS Publ. No. 13-4798 (Washington, DC: Department of Health and Human Services, 2013), 5, <https://store.samhsa.gov/system/files/sma13-4798.pdf>.

¹⁸⁵ President of the United States, “Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States” (strategy document, The White House, August 2011), 4, https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/empowering_local_partners.pdf.

¹⁸⁶ President of the United States, 4.

Another program, Blueprint for Action, was developed in Minneapolis in 2006 in response to escalating youth violence. It uses a public health approach focusing on three areas:

- Primary Prevention: helping communities stay safe and violence-free.
- Secondary Prevention: redirecting at-risk individuals and groups to safer behaviors and environments.
- Tertiary Prevention: rehabilitating those engaged in violence and fostering safe re-entry into the community.¹⁸⁷

Like the Safe School Initiative, the Minneapolis program relies on partnerships with county services and community organizations to reduce adolescent violence. As a result of the program,

- Homicides of youth decreased by 77 percent between 2006 and 2009.
- The number of youth arrested for violent crime is down by one-third of what it was 4 years ago.
- High school graduation rates at Minneapolis public schools increased to nearly three out of four in 2010, up from only 55 percent in 2005.¹⁸⁸

Another program that began in 2006, this time in Norway, is the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program.¹⁸⁹ After resounding success, the program was adopted in the United States. The Olweus program, geared toward children in elementary through high school, uses “an anonymous student questionnaire designed to assess bullying problems in individual schools.”¹⁹⁰ The information gathered from the initial 150,000 surveys sent out as part of the program helped parents and teachers implement interventions aimed at identifying bullying problems.¹⁹¹ The surveys also helped identify best practices; a successful program will, for instance,

¹⁸⁷ “Youth Violence Prevention in Minneapolis,” City of Minneapolis, last updated August 13, 2018, <http://www.minneapolismn.gov/health/youth/yvp/>.

¹⁸⁸ Davis, “Investing in Prevention.”

¹⁸⁹ Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, accessed April 12, 2019, https://olweus.sites.clemson.edu/documents/The_OBPP-2015.pdf.

¹⁹⁰ Olweus.

¹⁹¹ Olweus.

- Focus on the whole school environment
- Assess bullying at school
- Form a group to support bullying prevention activities
- Train all staff in bullying prevention
- Establish and enforce school rules and policies related to bullying
- Involve children in regular discussions about bullying
- Increase adult supervision in locations where bullying occurs
- Intervene consistently and appropriately in bullying situations
- Garner parent support for bullying prevention
- Provide ongoing support
- Continue efforts over time¹⁹²

Another program to consider is Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, which assigns volunteer mentors to at-risk children to forge a supportive and caring relationship. In a review of Big Brothers Big Sisters, Asha Goldweber, a behavioral health researcher at Stanford, noted the program’s wide range of effects for children, including improved academic performance, decreased substance use, social and cultural enrichment, and improved relationships with family and peers.¹⁹³ After one year in the program, youth reported they were less likely to hit someone.¹⁹⁴

The Good Behavior Game began in Baltimore elementary school classrooms in 1986.¹⁹⁵ Its goals are to decrease early aggressive or shy behavior in children and to improve children’s psychological wellbeing. Teachers of first-graders have noted that, after completion of the program, children are less aggressive, less shy, and less antisocial.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹² Olweus.

¹⁹³ Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, “Community-Based Interventions,” *Building Capacity to Reduce Bullying: Workshop Summary* (August 2014), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK241589/>.

¹⁹⁴ Institute of Medicine and National Research Council.

¹⁹⁵ Sheppard G. Kellam et al., “The Good Behavior Game and the Future of Prevention and Treatment,” *Addiction Science & Clinical Practice* 6, no. 1 (July 2011): 73–84, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3188824/>.

¹⁹⁶ Kellam et al.

Long-term evaluations of nineteen- through twenty-one-year-olds who completed the program found “significantly lower rates of drug and alcohol use disorders, regular smoking, antisocial personality disorder, delinquency and incarceration for violent crimes, suicide ideation, and use of school-based services.”¹⁹⁷

Another program that shows promise is the School Transitional Environmental Program. This program “is based on the Transitional Life Events model, which postulates that stressful life events ... place children at risk of maladaptive behavior. The program’s goals are to reduce the stress and disorganization often associated with changing schools by redefining the role of homeroom teachers.”¹⁹⁸ The program is effective with high-risk students and has been most successful when used “in urban, predominantly nonwhite communities with students entering middle and high schools.”¹⁹⁹

The Seattle Social Development Project is a program designed to enrich elementary school students’ connections with their families and schools while decreasing early risk factors for violence.²⁰⁰ The initiative provides training to children designed to affect interpersonal problem-solving and refusal skills.²⁰¹ At age eighteen, children who completed the five-year program were less violent than controls, had lower rates of heavy drinking and less sexual activity, and did better in school.²⁰² The initiative has been effective for both high-risk children and general populations of youths attending elementary and middle school.

¹⁹⁷ Kellam et al., abstract.

¹⁹⁸ Office of the Surgeon General, *Youth Violence: A Report of the Surgeon General* (Rockville, MD: Office of the Surgeon General, 2001), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK44295/>.

¹⁹⁹ Office of the Surgeon General.

²⁰⁰ “About,” Seattle Social Development Project (SSDP), accessed April 12, 2019, <http://ssdp-tip.org/SSDP/intervention.html>.

²⁰¹ SSDP.

²⁰² Summary of Hawkins et al. 1999, SSDP, accessed April 12, 2019, <http://ssdp-tip.org/SSDP/hawkins2.html>.

In 2001, Chicago schools launched a program for at-risk young men called Becoming a Man (BAM).²⁰³ Program founder Anthony Ramirez-DiVittorio wanted to create a safe space for young men to receive support and skills necessary to thrive. BAM incorporates mentoring, youth development, and behavioral therapy.²⁰⁴ A clinical trial conducted by the University of Chicago indicated that violent crime arrests fell by 50 percent under BAM while graduation rates increased by 19 percent.²⁰⁵ BAM found “a minimum savings to the public of three dollars for every one spent on the program.”²⁰⁶ This suggests that relatively low-cost solutions are available that can reduce the likelihood of extreme violence among children and adolescents.

These programs, while in many ways are different, all address self-esteem; social, emotional, and behavioral development; bullying; and cultural enrichment. Successful programs have shown positive results in reducing behaviors associated with violence and have had long-term effects.

C. PREVENTION: CHEAPER THAN THE CURE

Violence has significant direct and indirect financial costs, which makes prevention a solid investment in the future. When violence is reduced, for instance, so too is the need for health-care services. The High Scope Perry Preschool’s cost-benefit analysis showed a \$16.14 return on investment for every dollar spent.²⁰⁷ Further review of this program showed that, “by age 40, the African-American children who participated in the preschool program as 3- and 4-year-olds had significantly fewer arrests for violent crime, drug felonies, and violent misdemeanors and served fewer months in prison compared to

²⁰³ “Violence and Crime Prevention,” University of Chicago, accessed April 12, 2019, http://www.ssa.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/uploads/UChicagoSSA_ViolenceAndCrimePrevention.pdf.

²⁰⁴ University of Chicago.

²⁰⁵ University of Chicago.

²⁰⁶ University of Chicago, 3.

²⁰⁷ Davis, “Investing in Prevention.”

nonparticipants.”²⁰⁸ In other words, one child nurtured in a healthy environment means one less person in need of systems and institutions.

Programs that focus on prevention provide excellent economic returns as well. A study conducted by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy concluded “that the total benefits of effective prevention programs were greater than their costs.”²⁰⁹ Furthermore, the institute “found that sound delinquency-prevention programs can save taxpayers seven to ten dollars for every dollar invested, primarily due to reductions in the amount spent on incarceration.”²¹⁰ Early intervention “‘not only saves young lives from being wasted,’ but also prevents . . . the likelihood of youth becoming serious and violent offenders,” nipping potential prison stints in the bud.²¹¹

Spending on gun violence and prisons in the United States has never been higher.²¹² Direct costs of annual gun violence total \$100 billion to the U.S. economy, according to the University of Chicago Crime Lab. This takes into account medical costs, lost worker productivity, mental health costs, and costs to the criminal justice system. The Crime Lab’s report noted, “When violence drives people and business out of the city, it reduces the tax base, which degrades the ability of government to tackle the violence problem, which fuels still further violence in a vicious downward cycle.”²¹³ Prison costs are straining budgets and causing reallocation of monies from education, health, and welfare. Early prevention, when compared with imprisonment, has been shown to be a worthwhile investment of resources.

The societal and financial cost of mental health services and violence is significant as well, and is projected to grow exponentially. The vast majority of behavioral health

²⁰⁸ Davis.

²⁰⁹ youth.gov, “Prevention & Early Intervention.”

²¹⁰ youth.gov.

²¹¹ youth.gov.

²¹² Brandon C. Welsh and David P. Farrington, “The Benefits and Costs of Early Prevention Compared with Imprisonment: Toward Evidence-Based Policy,” *The Prison Journal* 91, no. 3 (2011), <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0032885511415236>.

²¹³ University of Chicago, “Violence and Crime Prevention.”

spending is for mental health disorders.²¹⁴ This equates to a \$180 billion. SAMHSA projects that, in “the year 2030, mental illnesses and substance use disorders will account for \$6.0 trillion in direct costs. . . . In the United States, the total burden of behavioral health conditions, including lost earnings/productivity and treatment expenses, is estimated to be nearly \$500 billion per year.”²¹⁵ In the year 2020, in the United States, approximately “43.7 million adults over 18 are projected to have a mental illness, which will surpass all physical diseases as a major cause of disability.”²¹⁶ Currently, one out of five children in the United States experiences a mental health disorder each year.²¹⁷

If we want to stop violent extremists, we must address violence before—not after—it happens. Scholars widely recognize multiple paths and confluences that lead a young person to act out violently, but research demonstrates that intervention and prevention programs are highly effective. Multifaceted and comprehensive programs aimed at children and adolescents who have identifiable markers for potential violence have increased the threshold for behaviors related to violence. The benefits of investing in early prevention and intervention have been proven to exceed the costs; the millions of dollars spent and lost in the criminal process could be allocated to help further curb mental health issues.

²¹⁴ SAMHSA, “Fiscal Year 2016 Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Justification for Estimates for Appropriations Committees.” Report, Department of Health and Human Services, 2016. https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/samhsa-fy2016-congressional-justification_2.pdf.

²¹⁵ SAMHSA, 4.

²¹⁶ SAMHSA.

²¹⁷ SAMHSA.

IV. A PREVENTION PROGRAM FOR THE VIRGINIA BEACH FIRE DEPARTMENT

While violent extremism is a primary concern across the country, many other violent phenomena challenge the safety of citizens. Gang violence, school shootings, and hate crimes are just a few of the violent threats to our communities. To minimize such threats, we must bring together a cadre of organizations and people, including school systems, mayoral offices, law enforcement organizations, community organizations, mental health providers, and the federal government. One yet-to-be-explored method for combatting violence is to employ a trusted group of fire department life safety educators and firefighters who are trained in anti-bullying and socialization skill development.

Though there is no one-size-fits-all explanation for why violent extremists become violent, researchers have been able to warn signs. For example, research shows that past lone-actor attackers felt marginalized or persecuted, were in search of identity and belonging, exhibited mental health precursors, and were socially isolated; typically, people who were close to such attackers knew about their perceived grievances and their potential for violence.²¹⁸ Feelings of disconnection and rejection—as well as experiences with persecution and bullying—are also precursors to violent behaviors for school shooters.²¹⁹ These preliminary patterns may make it possible for a trusted agent—such as the Virginia Beach Life Safety Education Department—to engage in prevention and intervention activities, particularly for adolescents.

A. TRUSTED AGENTS: THE VIRGINIA BEACH FIRE DEPARTMENT LIFE SAFETY DIVISION

Institutions and agencies that serve youth are crucial to responding to the needs of adolescents. The Virginia Beach Fire Department Life Safety Division has been operating for over forty years, and provides twelve life safety education programs to the citizens of Virginia Beach:

²¹⁸ Phillips, “Enemies with Benefits.”

²¹⁹ FBI, “Active Shooter Incidents in 2016 and 2017.”

- Preschool extravaganza program
- Kindergarten through third grade assembly program
- Fourth grade fire safety program
- Summer camp programs
- Adults with disabilities program
- Older adult program
- Youth/juvenile fire setters program
- Civic league and PTA presentation program
- Speaker for Girl and Boy Scouts program
- Community outreach fairs and events
- Operation smoke detector
- Child passenger safety program

Over 35,000 youths, adults, and seniors are served each year by these programs. The commonwealth of Virginia recognized the Life Safety Division in 2014 as the number one training program in the state.²²⁰ The Virginia Beach Fire Department serves its citizens from the time they are born until the time they pass away; this gives the department a unique opportunity to provide a specialized prevention program to the children of Virginia Beach. Firefighters themselves are also in a unique position: they routinely provide care that is not punitive, and are typically not called on to use police powers. The Life Safety Division and the firefighters of Virginia Beach are trusted agents already serving in the school system; because they are not teachers or police officers, they have a safe relationship with students that prevents fear of retribution.

The Virginia Beach Fire Department has a rich tradition of fire and life safety education for children to help reduce their fear toward fire personnel and fire-related topics.

²²⁰ “Virginia Beach Fire Department Wins Two Governor’s Awards for Excellence and Two Citizens Win Governor’s Life Saving Swords,” City of Virginia Beach, February 21, 2012, <https://www.vbgov.com/news/pages/selected.aspx?release=576&title=virginia+beach+fire+department+wins+two+governor%E2%80%99s+awards+for+excellence+and+two+citizens+win+governor%E2%80%99s+life+saving+awards>.

According to national statistics, children under five are one of the most vulnerable groups for fire and burn injuries.²²¹ The department’s program for kindergarten through third graders begins to teach children the basics of 911, burn prevention, and reminding a parent what to do in an emergency. This program reaches all 23,000 students in kindergarten through third grade in the city and initiates a life safety learning process that becomes more advanced in the fourth-grade program. The fourth-grade program covers such topics as the fire triangle/tetrahedron process, surviving in smoke-filled environments, how to install smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, and home escape planning. When it comes to burn-related injuries and deaths, incidents in this age group are almost nonexistent in Virginia Beach, particularly compared to other communities that do not have this type of educational program.²²² This education establishes cultural norms and relationships of trust with the life safety educators. The Virginia Beach Fire Department’s summer camp programs—which cover a myriad of topics—also reach 1,500 children throughout the city, including those from low-income or disadvantaged areas of the city who may not have access to other programs. The interaction with the children helps to reinforce good choices and build deeper trust for public service in general.

Adolescents in high-risk areas also have access to comprehensive services. For example, the Juvenile Fire Setters Program reaches an average of fifty children and adolescents a year. This program is designed to address the legal, emotional, and injury concerns related to youth fire setting as well as actions families need to take concerning the problem. The program uses guidelines from the United States Fire Administration and the National Fire Protection Agency Youth Fire Setter Intervention Programs, and is set up to provide recommendations and referrals to and from mental health services—this gives the fire department staff experience navigating mental health resources.²²³

²²¹ FEMA, “Fire Risk to Children in 2010,” *Topical Fire Report Series* 14, no. 8 (August 2013), <https://www.usfa.fema.gov/downloads/pdf/statistics/v14i8.pdf>.

²²² FEMA.

²²³ “Youth Firesetter Intervention Specialist,” U.S. Fire Administration, accessed April 12, 2019, <https://apps.usfa.fema.gov/nfacourses/catalog/details/10525>.

At-risk youths often lack a nurturing environment due to neglect, abuse, or the family's simple lack of wherewithal. Mentors and other trusted adults in the Virginia Beach Fire Department help fill this gap through existing programming that is designed to enhance—not replace—familial support. The department's Life Safety Division is in a prime position to provide this support; staff members in the Life Safety Division are active in the civic league and participate in Parent Teacher Association meetings, which helps them forge bonds with teachers and parents. This is another example of how the department builds trust in the community.

The Virginia Beach Fire Department's programs reach individuals of different ages in a variety of situations. The programs' successes demonstrate that the members of the Virginia Beach Life Safety Division are trusted agents in the community who have experience carrying out important educational programs. This experience makes the Life Safety Division a good candidate to institute a pilot initiative to reduce violent extremism in adolescents.

B. THE PROPOSED PROGRAM

It is often the case that children or adolescents with poor socialization skills either become the targets of bullying or become the ones perpetrating the harassment. When they are bullied—or when they are bullying—adolescents may become more isolated, depressed, and open to alternative ideas such as violent extremism. An anti-extremism program, using smart practices from similar programs across the country and around the world, would help Virginia Beach schools address bullying and socialization skills at the elementary and middle school level. To institute a program in Virginia Beach, the following groups would need to be involved: the City of Virginia Beach School Board, the Virginia Beach schools superintendent, elementary and middle school leadership, school guidance counselors, school resource officers, the Virginia Beach Fire Department senior staff and the Fire Life Safety Education Division. Parents and students would need to have a part in developing and maintaining the program as well.

A strong curriculum for this type of program in Virginia Beach could be modeled based on the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative, Blueprint for Action, and the

Olweus Bullying Prevention Program. The Safe School/Healthy Students Initiative addresses behavioral development and social and emotional health while offering school- and community-based mental health services.²²⁴ The framework explains how to convene disparate agencies into a cohesive group working toward a common goal: keeping school-age children safe.²²⁵ The Virginia Beach Fire Department has an established relationship with the school system, which would help them establish this type of program. Blueprint for Action also employs a public health, whole-of-community approach to address at-risk adolescents and their communities.²²⁶ The Virginia Beach Fire Department's Youth Fire Setter program incorporates many of the same aspects as Blueprint for Action; the three main focus areas of both programs are safety in the community, the redirection of at-risk youth, and the rehabilitation of individuals who have engaged in violence. The backbone of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program is an anonymous student survey about bullying.²²⁷ The Virginia Beach Fire Department has the resources needed to implement a survey of this kind, and could include best practices from this program into the proposed program curriculum.

Lastly, mentoring and role modeling can provide a protective layer for children who are at risk. Two established programs that focus on mentoring are Big Brothers Big Sisters and Becoming a Man (BAM). Big Brothers Big Sisters pairs at-risk children with volunteer mentors to help the children navigate a variety of challenges. BAM is designed to create a safe space and support for at-risk young men. Firefighters have traditionally been viewed as the quintessential role model in society, and the Virginia Beach Fire Department subscribes to the core elements of caring, honesty, trust, and integrity. The Virginia Beach Fire Department is uniquely poised to provide this level of mentorship and role modeling.

The first step in delivering a new fire and life safety program for the Virginia Beach Fire Department is to organize a committee of the aforementioned parties to determine how

²²⁴ President of the United States, "Empowering Local Partners," 4.

²²⁵ National Center for Healthy Safe Children, "Elements."

²²⁶ "Introduction to the Blueprint for Action," City of Minneapolis, last updated December 19, 2018, <http://www.minneapolismn.gov/health/youth/yvp/blueprint>.

²²⁷ Olweus Bullying Prevention Program.

to develop the program. Once all stakeholders have been identified and a program developed, one elementary or middle school would be chosen as a pilot platform for program delivery. The program delivery may be multifaceted; broad aspects of the program could be delivered via an assembly to the school's total population, followed by breakout sessions for smaller groups focusing on socialization skills or anti-bullying. A subsequent breakout session could be offered to students who are being bullied to provide them with tools to cope with the maltreatment. In addition, as dictated by information gleaned during the sessions, firefighters could develop a mentoring program modeled after Big Brothers Big Sisters.

The committee will need to establish metrics to determine if the program is working and where improvements are needed. This will require the Virginia Beach school system to provide statistical information about the current bullying problem—and other socialization problems—in schools. To do so, the school will need to employ an Olweus-inspired survey for students, parents, and school staff members; the survey will provide direction for program delivery and help determine what additional resources may be needed to make the program successful. The survey will need to be iterative: it should first be delivered before the program begins, again after one week of the program to look for changes, again two months after the program has been delivered, and then twice to follow up at six months and one year after the program. The school system will also need to issue a pretest on common bullying themes and perceptions, as well as socialization themes and concepts, to determine the baseline knowledge of students and staff members. After program completion, a posttest to evaluate the knowledge changes can help determine the effectiveness of the program. Finally, the initial group of students should be tracked throughout their time in elementary and middle school to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of the program.

Tables 3, 4, and 5 detail the phases of the program implementation, pilot launch, and full launch. Overall program evaluation could take two to three years; change takes time, and it may take a few years for the statistics to demonstrate the value of the program. In addition to the previously mentioned surveys, a follow-up survey should be provided to staff, students, and parents to assess program effectiveness.

Table 3. Program Implementation

Phase One	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Meet with committee members from the City of Virginia Beach School Board, the Virginia Beach schools superintendent, elementary and middle school leadership, school guidance counselors, school resource officers, the Virginia Beach Fire Department senior staff and the Fire Life Safety Education Division.2. Discuss the project, brainstorm ideas, develop surveys, and acquire statistical data.3. Determine project budget and source of funding.
Phase Two	<ol style="list-style-type: none">4. Identify an elementary or middle school to use for the pilot program.5. Meet with school administration to provide a project overview and obtain approval for the project.
Phase Three	<ol style="list-style-type: none">6. Work with identified committee members to develop curriculum and delivery materials.7. Identify potential partners for project delivery.

Table 4. Program Launch (Pilot)

Phase One	8. Deliver program to the designated school.
	9. Deliver pretests to students, staff, and parents, and review and interpret the results.
Phase Two	10. Use information received from test data to make revisions to the program.

Table 5. Program Launch Full Implementation: 90 Elementary and 15 Middle Schools

Phase One	<p>* The following steps will be followed at three elementary and two middle schools per month</p> <p>11. Deliver pretests to students, staff, and parents.</p> <p>12. Deliver surveys modeled after the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program. This anonymous student questionnaire is designed to assess bullying problems in the school.</p> <p>13. Use the information from the pretests and surveys to design interventions that address the school’s specific bullying problems.</p>
Phase Two	<p>Deliver the programs to the surveyed schools.</p> <p>Evaluate the program (2–3 years) by compiling data on violence in the schools from before the program implementation and after.</p> <p>14. Develop and administer a survey to measure the final goals of the program.</p>

There will be a number of challenges to overcome in taking the program from theory to practice. For instance, schools administrators, staff members, and teachers already have busy schedules and curriculum requirements; they may be hard-pressed to commit the time needed to implement this program. One way to work within time constraints for elementary schools is to revamp the programs already being delivered to the schools by the Virginia Beach Life Safety Division to include the anti-bullying curriculum

within the same allotted time. The middle school program, however, would need to be granted additional time. Additional fire personnel will also be needed for program implementation and instruction. A final challenge will be determining a potential budget for project startup and establishing a long-term funding stream.

C. CONCLUSIONS

1. Homegrown Extremists Are More Serious Than Group Jihadists

Billions of dollars have been spent on group-based jihadist terrorism since September 11, 2001. Excluding the data from that day, however, there have been more right-wing attacks and school shootings than jihadist attacks on U.S. soil. Social, cultural, and group dynamic factors account for these differences.²²⁸

2. Extremist and Mental Health Markers

Although there is no cookie-cutter pattern that explains why a person radicalizes to violence, there are characteristics and precursors that many lone-actor extremists share. For example, family and friends of past extremists tended to suspect the possibility of an attack, and extremists have tended to be socially isolated.²²⁹ Research has also found that many extremists were either single or divorced, and many were white males.²³⁰ Additionally, the overwhelming majority of past school attackers suffered from depression and showed a past of suicidal thoughts or suicide attempts.²³¹ Attackers were also frequently bullied, persecuted, or injured by others.²³² Additionally, studies show that, in the year before their attacks, extremists experienced stressful events, to include civil and criminal charges and family or romantic issues; many also exhibited changes in physical, social, or interpersonal functioning, or behavior related to work.²³³

²²⁸ Ranstorp, "Root Causes of Violent Extremism."

²²⁹ Gill, Horgan, and Deckert, "Bombing Alone."

²³⁰ FBI, "Active Shooter Incidents in 2016 and 2017."

²³¹ Corner and Gill, "A False Dichotomy."

²³² Vossekul et al., "Safe School Initiative."

²³³ National Threat Assessment Center, "Attacks on Federal Targets."

3. Prevention Works at an Early Age

Evidence-based programs and community practice show that violence is preventable, and that the benefits of early prevention and intervention programs outweigh the costs. The National Threat Assessment Center maintains the importance of intervening during the initial indicators of malevolent behaviors.²³⁴ Social service and school agencies can be proactive by “working with others to understand more about the behaviors they see in various settings and to identify those behaviors that should be reported to law enforcement for appropriate investigation and action.”²³⁵ Likewise, school prevention and intervention programs have proven results in reducing violence in young people. The same solutions used to respond to community safety issues are equally as useful in identifying prevention and intervention programs for schools, as well as in saving taxpayer money down the road.

4. VBFD Has a Way

This thesis has identified several prevention and intervention programs that could be used to model a program for the Virginia Beach Fire Department Life Safety Division to reduce violent extremism in adolescents. The Life Safety Division has been working within the Virginia Beach school system for over forty years, making it a trusted group throughout the city. The staff members are uniquely positioned to develop programming and mentor students with the goal of improving their social skills. Because the Life Safety Division is already steeped in a rich tradition of education around health and fire safety, it would be natural for its programming to include intervention and prevention aimed at reducing the likelihood of violent extremism.

²³⁴ National Threat Assessment Center.

²³⁵ National Threat Assessment Center.

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