

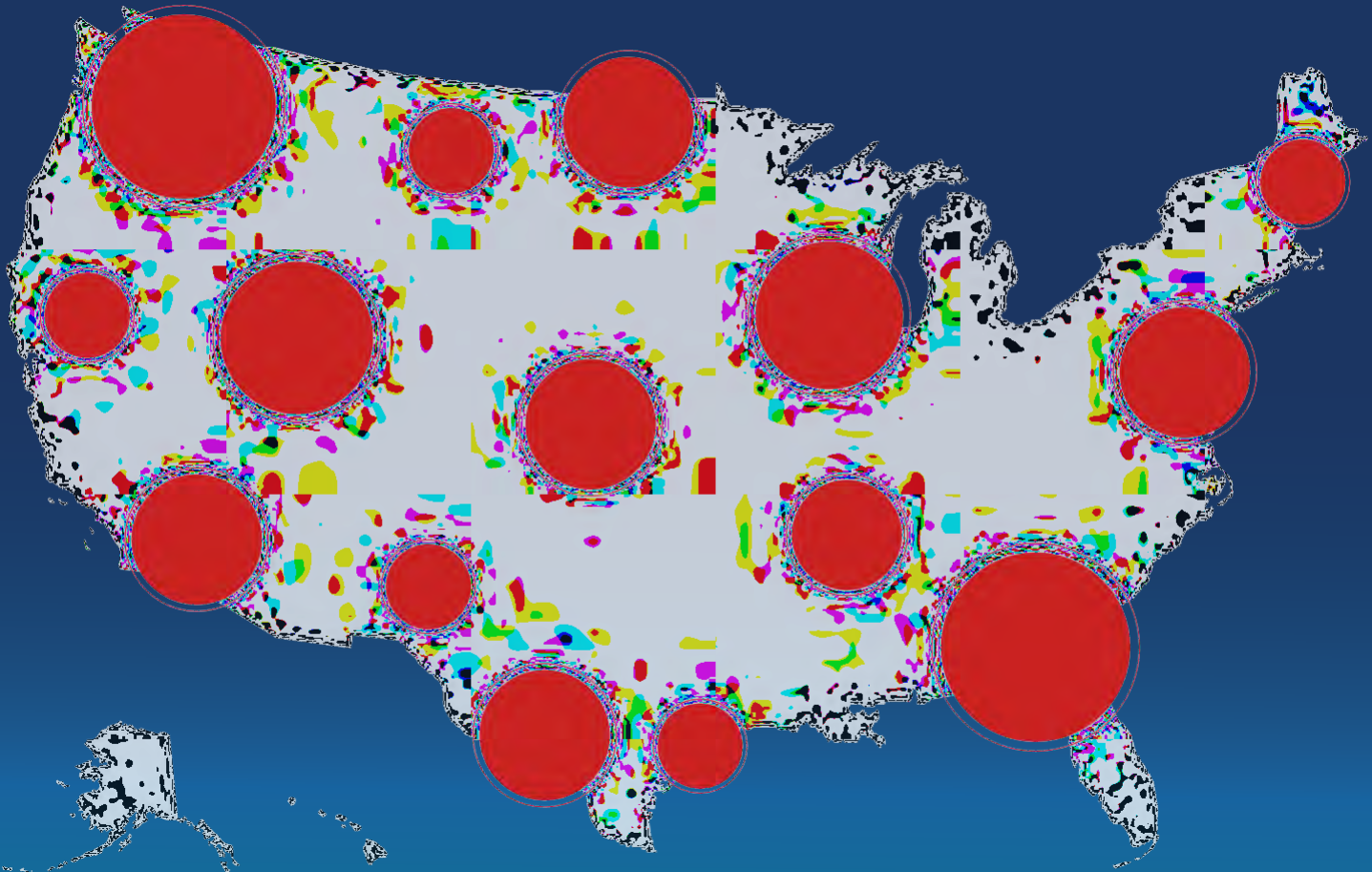


DECEMBER 2023

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE

SPECIAL REPORT

Public Mass Shootings Research



Study Guide 1

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DECEMBER 2023 NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE

SPECIAL REPORT

PUBLIC MASS SHOOTINGS RESEARCH

RACHEL A. KANE, BASIA E. LOPEZ, AND PAUL A. HASKINS

About This Report

This Special Report of the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) presents a synthesis of select findings from over 60 publications on 18 NIJ-supported research projects on public mass shootings, including school mass shootings, since 2014. It also identifies areas of need and interest for future research and recommendations.

For the purpose of this report, we define public mass shooting as a shooting event in a public setting that causes at least four fatalities in a single event. Excluded from our definition are events that occur in the course of a separate felony or domestic incident. However, the definition of a mass shooting varies among sources; for more information see “The Challenges of Defining ‘Mass Shooting’” in Part I of this report.

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Director's Message



The public mass shooting crisis in the United States stands out in terms of both the frequency of mass casualty events involving firearms and our perceived powerlessness to prevent them. Although mass shootings represent a small percentage of total U.S. firearms violence, they nonetheless evoke considerable fear on the part of the public.

Scientific research gives us a reason for hope, however. We know that these events are not random. Rather, perpetrators engage in notable patterns of preparation, often accompanied by warning signs. These findings point to actionable policy and practice solutions to advance prevention of public mass shooting events and mitigate the harms associated with those that transpire.

In the past decade, the National Institute of Justice has been a leader in funding research on mass shootings, sponsoring 18 studies on the subject that generated dozens of scientific papers and practitioner publications. Research findings have been used to inform training programs specific to schools and workplaces, and to inform policy at the highest levels. Together, these efforts inform ways that we can strengthen our prevention of and response to mass shootings.

This special report distills what we have learned from NIJ-sponsored research on mass shootings since 2014. It is our hope that this report will help law enforcement, communities, and researchers build more, and more effective, defenses against public mass shootings across the nation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nancy La Vigne', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Nancy La Vigne, Ph.D.
Director, National Institute of Justice



$1+1=2$

$2+2=4$

$3+6=9$

$2+4=6$

PART I. WHAT WE'VE LEARNED FROM NIJ-SUPPORTED RESEARCH ON PUBLIC MASS SHOOTINGS

Although recent scientific advances on public mass shootings fall short of enabling us to reliably predict them, key findings point to policy-relevant risk patterns.

Overview

The sharp report of gunfire fades soon enough, but the shockwaves from mass shootings keep reverberating, in targeted communities and across our nation.

Few events in American life shatter the public's sense of well-being or shock the national conscience as much as someone repeatedly firing into a crowd. Scientific research supported by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) confirms the profound negative impact of public mass shootings on the average citizen's sense of safety.¹

The volume of media coverage of public mass shootings greatly exceeds their frequency. These acts of extreme violence account for only a small portion of U.S. gunshot deaths and injuries every year, yet they attract extensive media coverage.² This coverage often skews toward particular qualities of the victims and those who perpetrate mass shootings, as well as toward details of the shooting, which further distorts public perception of safety.

Specifically, media coverage of public mass shootings places disproportionate emphasis on hate-motivated and mental-health-related incidents.³ The media spotlight is also drawn to younger individuals who commit mass shootings, incidents with high victim counts, those with victims who are white females and children, and those with victims who are unknown to the shooter.⁴

Data analyses of social media in the weeks that follow public mass shootings that received high media interest confirm that these events trigger powerful negative emotions among the public.⁵ Intense public concern is undoubtedly due in part to the difficulty of preventing mass shootings, which seem to occur relentlessly in the United States, like battering waves in a stalled storm. Over time, these violent acts also appear to be worsening, in terms of both incidence and severity.⁶

Certain aspects of the mass shooting crisis stand out as barriers to abatement:

- Despite promising research, mass shootings remain highly resistant to advance detection and intervention.
- Criminal justice agencies and the research community do not agree on a standard definition of the term “mass shooting,” including public mass shootings. This creates an apples-to-oranges problem that further complicates the search for scientific answers.
- Firearms are abundant in the United States and readily available to most individuals who harbor thoughts of shooting multiple victims.

Despite these issues, science has made significant progress in some areas, such as:

- Isolating fact patterns that may foreshadow mass shootings and, specifically, public mass shootings.
- Devising interventions to use when shooting plans are detected.
- Understanding some of the mental well-being challenges faced by people who plan and commit mass shootings.

For over two decades, NIJ has supported scientific studies that examine the public mass shooting problem from multiple angles.⁷ Since 2014, NIJ has invested in numerous research projects that study mass shootings and, specifically, public mass shootings. This effort to build basic knowledge and advance our understanding has resulted in more than 60 distinct research publications.

Prominent insights to emerge from this research include:⁸

- *Time of personal crisis.* Most people who commit mass shootings (80%) are in a state of personal crisis at the time. Almost all who commit or plan mass shootings in schools (92%-100%) are suicidal, as are a majority of those who plan or commit mass shootings in settings other than a school (69%).⁹
- *Leakage of mass shooting plans.* Nearly half (48%) of all individuals who commit mass shootings leak their plans to family, friends, or others or they disclose their plans on social media.¹⁰ In most instances, the leaks appear to be associated with mental well-being challenges of the person planning a mass shooting rather than a search for notoriety. This suggests that leakage may be a cry for help and creates an opportunity for interventions that incorporate mental health treatment, where appropriate.¹¹ Leakage is more often present in averted mass attacks.¹² Thus, leaks of mass shooting plans create, perhaps, the best chance for intervention and prevention; however, that opportunity is often missed.¹³
- *Targeted victims.* Mass shootings often appear to be random, with no rational connection between the shooter and the victims. In fact, most are not random. Among those who commit mass shootings, 70% had some connection to at least one victim.¹⁴
- *Weapons of choice.* Eighty percent of individuals who carried out K-12 school shootings take the firearm used in the shooting from a family member. By comparison, more than three-quarters (77%) of people who committed non-school mass shootings acquired their weapons lawfully.

Handguns are the most common weapon in both K-12 school shootings and incidents that occur elsewhere (non-school shootings). More than half (52%) of mass shootings involve the use of multiple firearms, falling into different firearm subcategories. Handguns were the firearm of choice in most school and non-school mass shootings, while semiautomatic assault weapons were used more often in K-12 shootings (38%) than in other categories of mass shootings (25%).¹⁵

- *Mental well-being.* The majority of individuals who commit mass shootings have suspected or documented histories of struggles with mental well-being (65%). Suicidal thoughts, plans, gestures, or attempts (in other words, suicidality) are also prevalent (69%). Another common mental wellness struggle is childhood exposure to potentially traumatic events (35%). In addition, a study of 20 school mass shootings found that antisocial behavior was present in 13 of the individuals' histories.¹⁶ As previously discussed, leaking mass shooting plans also appears to be associated with a cry for mental health help.¹⁷ Despite the prevalence of mental health struggles among individuals who commit mass shootings, profiling people based solely on their mental health will not help prevent mass shootings, as mental health struggles are common in the general population and do not necessarily indicate a predisposition toward committing a mass shooting.

- *Threat assessment as a promising prevention strategy.* Some schools adopt formal threat assessment protocols that can help school communities assess and respond to threats of mass shootings and other forms of school violence. A challenge for schools, however, is implementing threat assessments in ways that avoid or minimize unintended negative consequences.¹⁸

Learn more:

Five Facts About Mass Shootings in K-12 Schools

Public Interest in Public Mass Shootings

Intense media interest can obscure the fact that public mass shootings collectively represent a very small percentage of total firearm deaths and injuries.¹⁹ Some scholars and other observers have asserted that the intense attention paid to these incidents would be better devoted to firearm violence more broadly. Despite their relatively small contribution to the overall number of firearm violence deaths, NIJ-sponsored research shows that public mass shootings have a powerful, negative emotional effect on the public.²⁰ They also have a strong negative effect on the public perception of safety.²¹

NIJ-sponsored research documents that public mass shootings have a powerful, negative emotional effect on the public. They also have a strong negative effect on the public perception of safety.

The public has a compelling interest in understanding the nature of public mass shootings and what might be done to enhance prevention, intervention, and response.²²

The Challenges of Defining “Mass Shooting”

Public agencies and research entities have devised a variety of ways to describe “mass shooting,” all of which try to capture the essence of something that has proven difficult to define. Different definitions adopt different criteria for the number of people killed and injured, whether the shooting occurred in a public or private setting (or both), whether the shooting occurred in a single place, the duration of the incident, and other variables. As noted in an op-ed by NIJ Director Nancy La Vigne, resolving that definitional ambiguity is an important first step in guiding public policy research on mass shootings.²³

Major NIJ-sponsored studies of mass shootings adopted the following definition of a “public mass shooting” from the Congressional Research Service:

A multiple homicide incident in which four or more victims are murdered with firearms — not including the offender(s) — within one event, and at least some of the murders occurred in a public location or locations in close geographical proximity (e.g., a workplace, school, restaurant, or other public settings), and the murders are not attributable to any other underlying criminal activity or commonplace circumstance (armed robbery, criminal competition, insurance fraud, argument, or romantic triangle).²⁴

The Congressional Research Service derived this definition of *public* mass shootings from the broader definition of mass shootings, which includes other crime-related mass shootings (for example, drive-by shootings) and domestic shooting incidents with at least four victims killed by firearm (not including the shooter). Although the term “mass shooting” is often used to describe public and other mass shootings (for example, those that occur within the home or in relation to another crime), it is important that research distinguish between these categories.

The differences in definitions of mass shootings likely stem from different research emphases and policy priorities. Researchers focused on firearm violence may favor definitions that focus on weapon type. Those focused on mass attacks more broadly may use definitions that cover a range of attack methods. Definitions also may vary depending on the shooter's motives and targets.

Many researchers focus on public mass shootings. Others use the definition of mass shootings that includes multiple-victim shootings that occur in private locations, such as familicides (a multiple-victim homicide in which the shooter's intimate partner or family members are specifically targeted). Inclusion of private-setting shootings covers more victims.²⁵ NIJ has sponsored research compiling databases that include public mass shootings and mass shootings in private settings, as well as those that occur in connection with another crime.

Statistics on the background of individuals who commit mass shootings, the settings of mass shootings, and the frequency of incidents over time vary across NIJ-sponsored research studies. Such variations can be explained by different timeframes used to identify cases and the fact that public mass shootings make up less than a fifth (18%) of all mass shootings, including private shootings and those related to other crimes.²⁶ Synthesis of research findings between multiple NIJ-sponsored databases that use different definitions may provide insights into how specific types of mass shooting crimes may be prevented. The most appropriate definition of mass shooting in any given context may depend on the research question being asked and the policy implications of interest.

Inconsistent definitions of the term "mass shooting" complicate the search for a clear understanding of its causes and effects. Multiple independent groups of NIJ researchers have found an increase in both incidence and severity of public mass shootings when sharing a similar definition. In contrast, mass shootings defined more broadly are not increasing overall despite an increased incidence of family-related private mass shootings. Mass shootings associated with other felonies are decreasing.²⁷

Disparities in trends by mass shooting type underscore the need for comprehensive research on factors relevant to prevention that are the same or different between shooting incident categories.²⁸

In a recent survey of studies on mass shootings, NIJ staff scientists found that the most common definition of public mass shootings was "an incident in which four or more victims are killed with a firearm in a public place." That definition of public mass shootings is adopted for this article, unless otherwise noted.

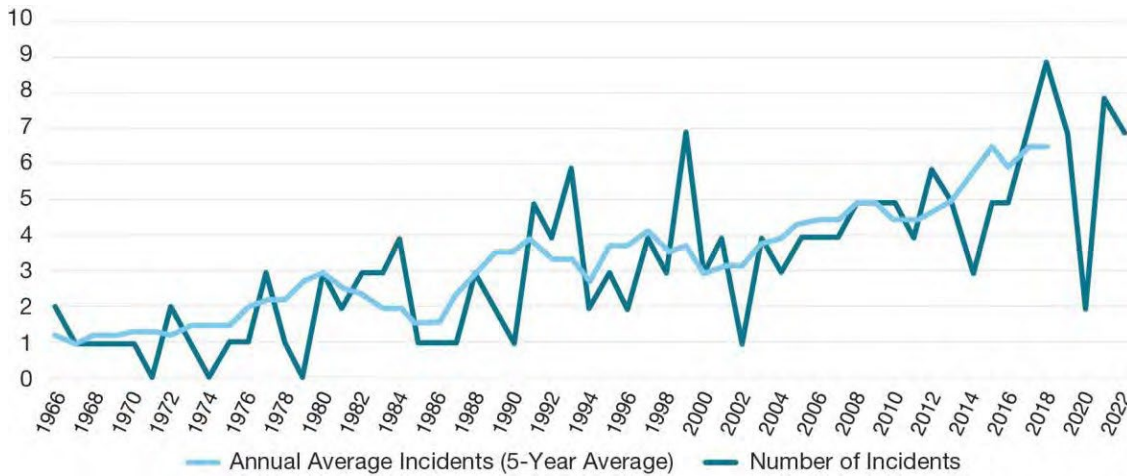
Frequency and Severity

The widespread impression that public mass shootings are getting worse is generally well-founded in the data. Over the time periods analyzed in NIJ-sponsored research projects, public mass shootings have increased in both frequency (count of incidents per year) and severity (count of victims killed or injured per year or per incident).²⁹

The widespread impression that public mass shootings are only getting worse is generally well founded in the data.

Results from several studies reflect a distinct upward trend in the occurrence of mass shooting events, although the statistics supporting that trend can be presented in different ways. One study analyzed open-source data on public mass shooting incidents and found that the incidence of public mass shootings has steadily increased, with average yearly public mass shooting incidents increasing over five-fold from 1966 to 2022 (see Exhibit 1).³⁰ Another study that examined public mass shootings between 2000 and 2018 found increased incidence rates (up 24%) per capita in the post-2012 period.³¹

Exhibit 1. Public Mass Shooting Incidents by Year



Evidence from another NIJ-sponsored study confirms that public mass shootings are increasing, but it does not appear to support a conclusion that mass shooting incidents under that broader definition — including private-setting and felony-related shootings — are increasing.³² However, research does confirm that the number of victims killed is increasing, regardless of the definition of mass shootings used.³³ Increased mass shooting victimization is amplified by increased severity. Victimization rates per capita from mass public shootings increased 110% post-2010 in the study covering 2000-2018.³⁴ In the most recent data available, of the 21 mass public shootings with the highest victim counts, nearly half (48%) occurred in the last 10 years (from 2013-present).³⁵

Severity of mass shootings is a nuanced concept. It is often measured by the number of victims killed during the shooting. However, this assessment of severity does not fully account for other factors, such as the number of people injured (as opposed to killed); the duration of the shooting event; the number of shots fired; and the seriousness of injuries. Seriousness or severity of injuries may be related to the type of weapon used, particularly the caliber and number of available rounds of ammunition used by the person who commits a mass shooting. High-capacity magazines, which can be used with assault weapons and some other firearms, increase the number of bullets that can be fired without interruption.³⁶

The public and media focus on semiautomatic assault weapons can make it easy to overlook the fact that handguns remain the most common weapon used in all mass shootings, even public mass shootings. Sometimes semiautomatic assault weapons are used together with a handgun or handguns. In those incidents where semiautomatic assault weapons were used, handguns were also used 73% of the time.³⁷ For more discussion on the types of firearms used, see “Choice of Weapons” below.

An analysis of state firearm laws found that bans on high-capacity magazines were significantly associated with

An analysis of state firearm laws found that bans on high-capacity magazines were significantly associated with reduced severity in public mass shootings. In addition, state gun licensing laws were associated with a reduced number of public mass shooting incidents.

reduced severity in public mass shootings (38% fewer fatalities and 77% fewer nonfatal injuries).³⁸ In addition, state gun licensing laws were associated with a reduced number of public mass shooting incidents.



PART II. PUBLIC MASS SHOOTINGS: WHY, WHERE, HOW, AND WHAT WEAPONS

Why Public Mass Shootings Occur

Careful analysis of the relationships, circumstances, pre-attack behaviors, and psychological backgrounds of those who commit mass shootings can help explain what factors lay a foundation for and motivate a mass shooting, especially in public places.

A Connection to One or More Victims

A common misconception is that mass shootings are random and that the individual planning the shooting selects the target location and victims for no reason. In fact, a majority (70%) of mass shooters know at least one victim.³⁹

The most common setting for mass shootings is the workplace, although the share of public mass shootings motivated by employment issues has declined since the 1990s.⁴⁰ Mass shootings at workplaces and in K-12 schools share a common characteristic: The individual planning a shooting is likely to be an insider with some real or perceived relationship to either the location or one or more victims.⁴¹ An awareness of those relationships, as well as mental well-being factors, can shed light on the shooters' motivations for those crimes.

Individuals in Crisis

NIJ-sponsored research has revealed that most individuals who commit mass shootings (80%) are in crisis, defined as a situation that overwhelms an individual's ability to cope, a condition communicated to others by a noticeable change in behavior before the shooting incident. Such crises may include acute struggles with relationships, work, or mental health.

Further, research shows that most individuals who commit public mass shootings (69%), regardless of the target location, are suicidal before or during their attack.⁴² Percentages of suicidality among those individuals who commit K-12 school mass shootings are even higher (92%-100%). Most individuals who commit mass shootings die on the scene, either at their own hands or at the hands of law enforcement.⁴³ Suicidality in averted public mass shooting attacks appears to be lower than for completed shootings.⁴⁴

A History of Struggles With Mental Well-Being

Decades of research have made it clear that no specific mental health diagnosis or psychological profile can predict a mass shooting. Yet evidence continues to support the important role of mental health in the pathways to such violent acts.

For those who commit public mass shootings, a long history of struggles with mental well-being often precedes personal crisis and suicidality in the time leading up to the shooting incident. More than half (59%) of individuals who commit public mass shootings had a confirmed history of struggles with mental health.⁴⁵ Importantly, those struggles were not specific to particular diagnoses or symptoms, many of which are common in the broader population and not otherwise associated with any risk of violence.⁴⁶

For those who commit public mass shootings, a long history of struggles with mental well-being often precedes personal crisis and suicidality in the time leading up to the shooting incident.

Another prominent mental well-being issue that affects those who commit public mass shootings is antisocial behavior, including a history of or a fixation on violence.⁴⁷ Sometimes those who commit mass shootings also study others who have committed mass shootings. In general, documented struggles with mental health encompass a broad range of diagnoses, but no particular diagnosis applies to the majority of the individuals who commit mass shootings.⁴⁸

The Limited Role of Psychosis

As mentioned, documented mental health struggles in those who commit mass shootings are complex and cannot be reduced to any particular diagnosis. Of all motivations identified for public mass shootings, psychosis is the single most common; however, it was only present in a minority (30%) of cases.⁴⁹ Additionally, for most of these cases, that diagnosis only played a limited role. Using mental health diagnoses alone to identify prospective mass shooters is neither feasible nor ethical. But evaluating mental well-being may help prevent future mass shootings by providing additional context for other warning signs and informing intervention where appropriate.

Childhood Hardship

Childhood hardship and past experiences of traumatic events are common contributors to mental well-being struggles that affect those who commit public mass shootings. NIJ-sponsored research found childhood hardship to be common in the histories of those who commit mass shootings. Individuals who commit school mass shootings often report childhood hardship (including abuse and neglect), social rejection, and bullying.^{50,51} The research found that 31% of individuals who commit mass shootings had documented evidence of a childhood trauma.⁵²

Taken together, the backgrounds of those who engage in mass shootings suggest a common, though not exclusive, pathway to mass shootings. People who struggle with trauma, mental well-being, and behavioral disorders reach a breaking point as they experience a personal crisis, which often leads to suicidality. In addition, antisocial behaviors, a fixation on violence, psychosis, or hate-based ideology in tandem with suicidality can also motivate a person to commit violence.⁵³

All elements of the common pathways described here are not present in every public mass shooting, yet they are often present. Importantly, they illuminate opportunities for further research that may inform future policy intervention and criminal justice practice improvement.

Military Background

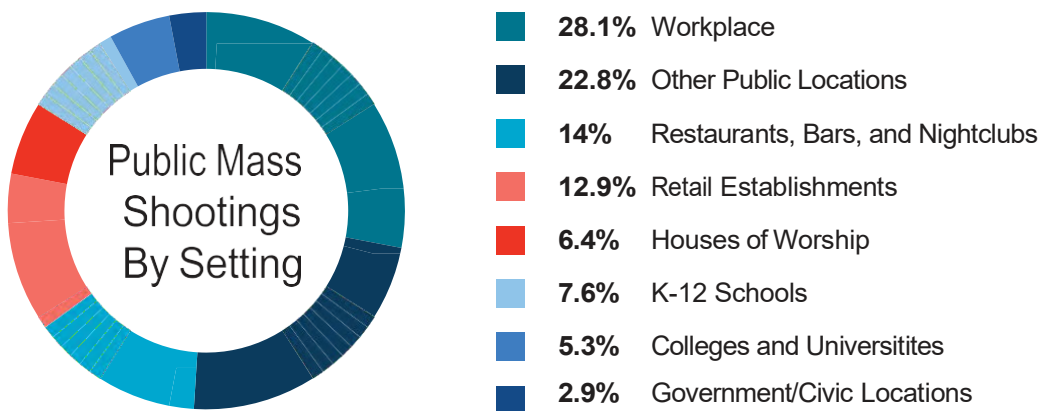
Those who commit public mass shootings are much more likely to be military veterans or to have a strong interest in the military as compared to the general population. One study showed that 29% of those who committed public mass

shootings had a history of military service, which is more than four times the overall population with current or prior military service (approximately 7%).⁵⁴ Notably, additional NIJ-sponsored public mass shootings research found that an interest in the military was common in case studies of individuals who committed school mass shootings, even if they were unable to serve due to age or other factors.⁵⁵

The Mass Shooting Landscape: Places, Demographics, and Weapons

It's important to understand the different common settings of mass shootings in order to develop effective mass shooting prevention and resource-distribution strategies. NIJ-sponsored research has approached this question from several angles. Under a broad definition of mass shootings (including public mass shootings, familicides, and shootings related to other crimes), the majority (65%) take place in private residences.⁵⁶ When the definition is confined to public mass shootings, the workplace remains the most common location of mass shootings in the United States (28%). But mass shootings in employment settings are declining as a percentage of all mass shootings by location. Other common sites of mass shootings are schools; restaurants, bars, and clubs; retail establishments; houses of worship; government buildings; and military facilities (see Exhibit 2).⁵⁷

Exhibit 2. Public Mass Shootings by Setting



Data source: (Peterson, "A Multi-Level, Multi-Method Investigation of the Psycho-Social Life Histories of Mass Shooters", NIJ award number 2018-75-CX-0023).

A minority (3%) of public mass shooting incidents occur at government locations such as military facilities.⁵⁸ Another NIJ-sponsored study found disproportionately high media coverage of shootings at government locations, possibly reflecting heightened public interest but also contributing to a distorted perception of safety as it relates to location.⁵⁹ Still, military facility shootings present distinct challenges, and NIJ-sponsored mass shootings research has expanded to explore that subject. Applying prevention and intervention strategies in military communities requires developing relationships with the community and understanding its culture and organizational structure.⁶⁰

Although public mass shootings occur throughout the United States, more have occurred in the American South and West than in the Northeast and Midwest. Most house of worship shootings have occurred in the South (64%). Mass shootings at K-12 schools occurred disproportionately in suburban and rural areas (46% each) and are relatively rare (8%) in urban areas.⁶¹ Another NIJ-funded study found that general school violence occurs more commonly in rural and suburban environments, though the public often wrongly perceives school violence as a largely urban problem, just as in the case of school mass shootings.⁶²

Demographic Breakdown of Public Mass Shootings

Demographically, those who commit public mass shootings are overwhelmingly male (98%).⁶³ This is consistent both across categories, including K-12 school mass shootings and others, and across data sources, even when using broader definitions of mass shootings.⁶⁴ In terms of race, multiple independently conducted NIJ-sponsored studies consistently found that those who commit mass shootings are a diverse population. The exact percentages by race vary somewhat across databases. In one sample of individuals who committed public mass shootings, a study showed the racial breakdown was closely representative of U.S. population demographics.⁶⁵ The media’s laser focus on school mass shootings may promote an inaccurate stereotype of all persons who commit mass shootings as being younger and exclusively white.⁶⁶

Media coverage analysis by NIJ-sponsored researchers confirmed that white individuals and individuals under 25 years old who commit mass shootings feature more often in media reporting. Researchers concluded that media bias accounted for the disproportionate focus on school mass shootings.⁶⁷

Choice of Firearms

Mass shootings are committed with a variety of types and quantities of firearms obtained in various ways. In general, NIJ-sponsored studies on mass shootings have found the most common firearm in a mass shooting is a handgun (72%-77%).⁶⁸

In general, NIJ-sponsored studies on mass shootings have found the most common firearm in a mass shooting is a handgun.

The next most common weapon type depends on the type of mass shooting and the way firearm classes are defined. For public mass shootings, firearms categorized as semiautomatic assault weapons are the next most common (28%).⁶⁹ When considering all mass shootings, rifles (20%) and shotguns (15%) are used more frequently than semiautomatic assault weapons (9%). However, semiautomatic assault weapons are associated with a higher fatality rate.⁷⁰

Exhibit 3 shows the breakdown of the number of weapons used as a percentage of public mass shootings in one of the studies.⁷¹

Exhibit 3. Number of Weapons Used as a Percentage of Public Mass Shootings



That study found that, for those covered cases with available data on firearm use, 77% of persons who committed public mass shootings purchased some or all their guns legally, 13% purchased their guns illegally, and 19% had taken their guns [from family members].

Notably, among those who committed a public mass shooting in a K-12 school, 80% take guns from family members, as individuals in that group tended to be too young to obtain firearms lawfully. This suggests that a younger person who is planning a mass shooting may be more prone to acquire a weapon unlawfully.

School Mass Shootings Stand Out

Public mass shootings in K-12 schools stand apart in terms of the level of public outrage and the intensity of media coverage they generate. They differ in the details as well. As previously noted, the demographics of individuals who commit school mass shootings, mental well-being histories before and during the incident, relationships to the target, and pathways to obtaining weapons differ from public mass shootings more broadly.

NIJ-sponsored researchers conducted detailed statistical analyses of existing school mass shooting databases and constructed new public mass shooting databases from scratch. In school mass shootings, the average age of the individual who committed the shooting was 19, which was younger than the average age of all individuals who committed public mass shootings (age 34). The age range spanned from 11-32 for individuals who committed school mass shootings, and from 11-72 for public mass shootings overall.⁷²

In an analysis of 133 school shootings, where one or more persons were intentionally shot in a school building during the school day (including 41% of school mass shootings), more deaths and injuries per incident were associated with the use of handguns or semiautomatic assault weapons, as opposed to rifles or shotguns only.⁷³ Additionally, the presence of armed security during a school shooting was associated with a 2.8-fold higher death rate. The study authors discussed that this finding could possibly be explained by shooter suicidality, considering the high rates of suicidality in this group, or by the weapons effect, wherein the presence of a firearm increases aggression. Either way, this research suggests that armed security may not be an effective mitigation strategy to reduce victimization during school mass shootings.⁷⁴

Another NIJ-sponsored study of completed and averted public mass shootings found that when threats were leaked in schools, they were most commonly reported to police or other authorities. Based on this research, the study concluded that school resource officers (SROs, sworn law enforcement officers responsible for safety and crime prevention in schools)⁷⁵ should focus on relationship-building with students to promote trust and ensure mass shooting threats are reported.⁷⁶ As discussed in the Prevention and Intervention section below, SROs are typically armed and stationed on-site at schools.

Those who engage in school mass shootings are far more likely to be suicidal (92-100%) than those who commit other types of public mass shootings (69%).⁷⁷ Most individuals who commit mass shootings in schools are current or former students (85%).⁷⁸

Other forms of gun violence in schools share some characteristics with mass school shootings. Many who engage in other types of gun violence also exhibit poor emotional regulation and a childhood history of trauma. Apart from mass shootings, most school firearm violence is domestic violence- or gang-related, with fewer victims per incident, and often occurs outside the school building and outside the normal school day.⁷⁹

In K-12 schools, elementary school mass shootings are rare, but they can be more deadly than other types of mass shootings in terms of total fatalities.⁸⁰

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Course 4V - Public Mass Shootings - Clinical Factors, Challenges, and Prevention

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