



THE EVOLVING RISK OF IDEOLOGICAL VIOLENCE IN THE HEALTHCARE SECTOR

Presented by the

New Jersey Department of Human Services
Division of Mental Health & Addiction Services
Disaster & Terrorism Branch



**Disaster & Terrorism
Branch**

NJ DHS Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services

ADVISORY

- This program contains discussions of violence
- If you have experienced trauma related to this topic, please be aware that this program may potentially be disturbing
- You are encouraged to prioritize your well-being and safety, and to reach out if you need support



ABOUT YOUR INSTRUCTOR

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INTRODUCTION

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- We are possibly experiencing the most fractured social and political landscape in living memory
- Increasingly divisive politics and cultural conflicts, sometimes fueled by misinformation and disinformation, have kindled the rise of extremist movements and belief systems around the world
- While government agencies, the healthcare sector, educational institutions, law enforcement and Big Tech have perhaps been most affected by hostilities, threats and violence motivated by extremism, no industry is immune
- This program will explain the phenomenon of extreme beliefs leading to behaviors of concern in the healthcare workplace, including public health setting, and will describe approaches for recognizing and preventing ideologically-driven security and safety issues

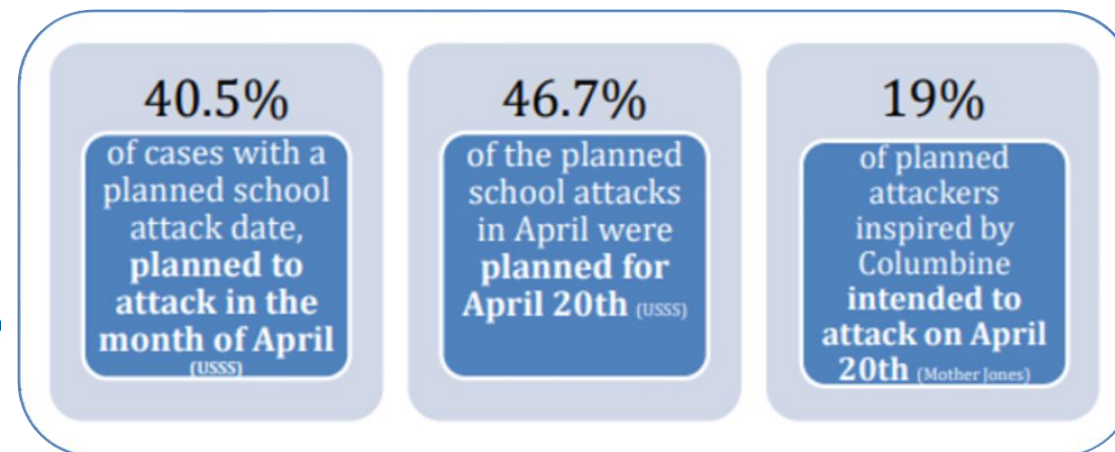
APRIL IS WORKPLACE VIOLENCE AWARENESS MONTH

- Every April, organizations across the United States recognize **Workplace Violence Awareness Month**, an important time to highlight the risks of workplace violence and the steps necessary to prevent it
- Organizations can leverage this national event to raise awareness and help promote violence prevention programs, but also must be increasingly vigilant of the threat landscape
- **Another important fact is that April has been the most active month for mass violence and serves as a potential trigger for copycat attacks**



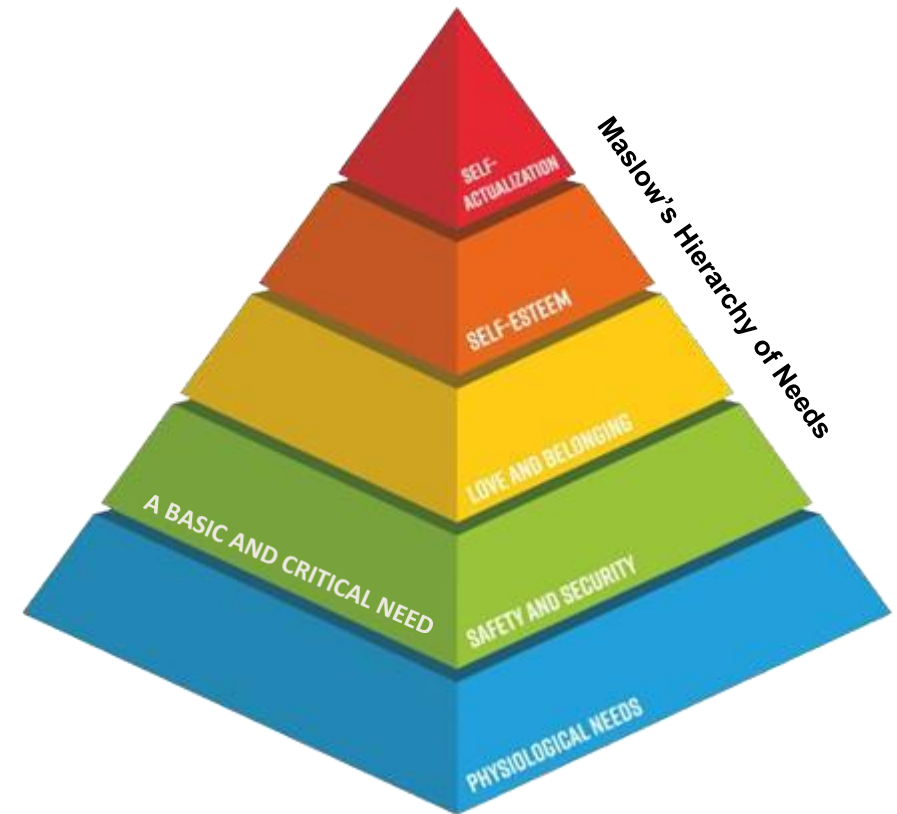
NOTABLE APRIL ANNIVERSARIES

- April 15 | Boston, MA | Boston Marathon Bombing
- April 16 | Blacksburg, VA | Virginia Tech shooting
- April 18 | Beirut, LB | Bombing of U.S. Embassy
- April 19 | Lexington & Concord, MA | Start of the American Revolution
- April 19 | Waco, TX | Fire ending the siege at the Branch Davidian compound
- April 19 | Oklahoma City, OK | Bombing of the Murrah Federal Building
- April 20 | Hitler's birthday
- April 20 | Littleton, CO | Columbine High School attack

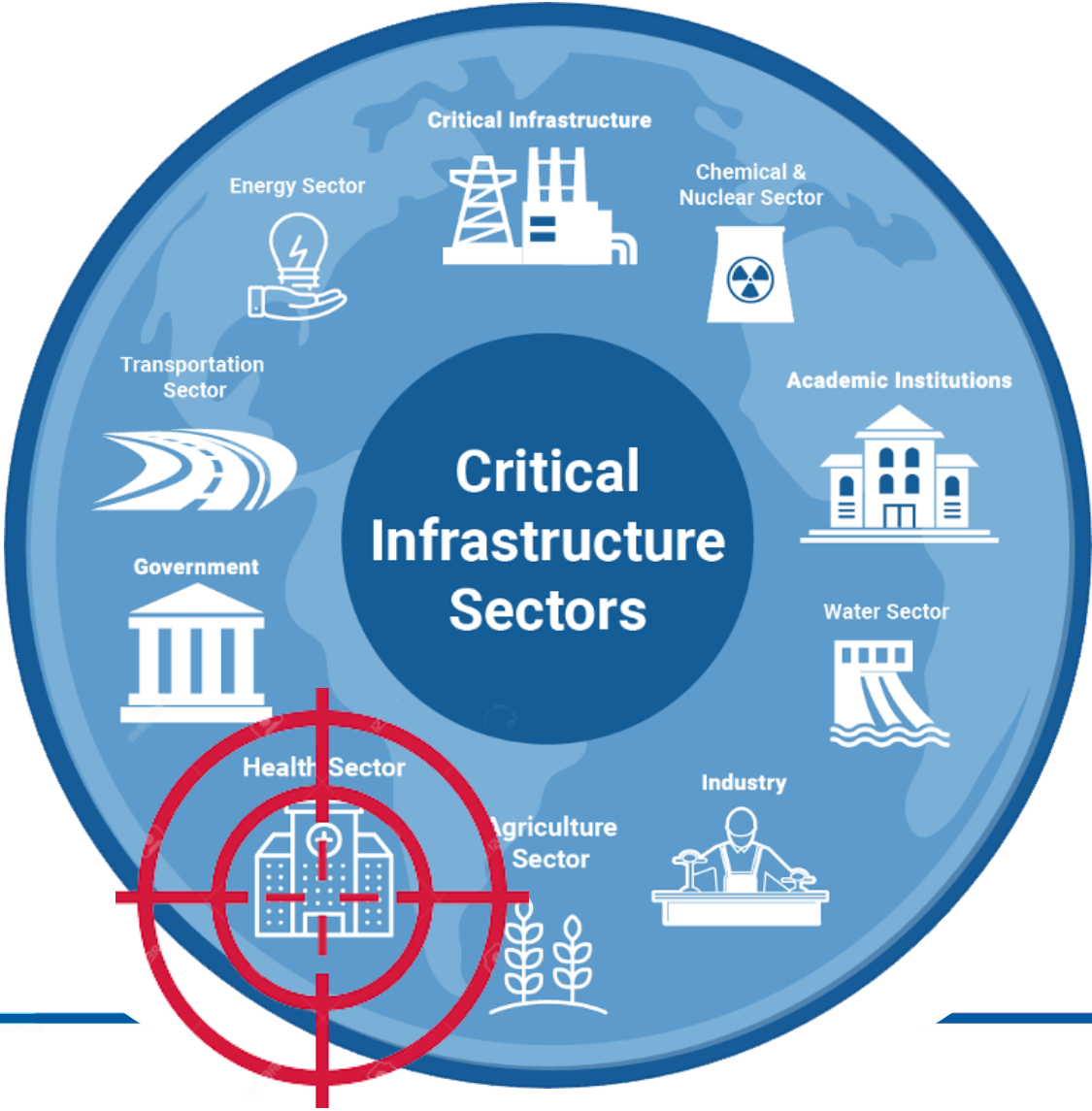


SAFETY & SECURITY ARE BASIC NEEDS

- After our most immediate physiological needs (air, water, food, warmth, rest) are our safety and security needs
- Safety and security are basic human needs for our physical and psychological survival
- Without safety and security, we cannot build upwards to achieve our psychological needs or need for self-fulfillment
- In our personal and professional lives, safety and security form the foundation of nearly everything else we do or hope to do



A VULNERABLE SECTOR



VIOLENCE IN THE HEALTHCARE SECTOR

- Health care providers and many others who dedicate their lives to caring for those in need – continue to suffer workplace violence injuries at far higher rates than other professions
- The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reported that **health care and social service workers were nearly five times as likely to suffer a serious workplace violence** injury than workers in other sectors
- Workplace violence often causes both physical and emotional harm. Victims of these incidents often suffer career-ending injuries and traumatic stress disorders that take away their livelihoods and weaken an already stretched health care/social service workforce

A UNIQUE MOMENT IN TIME

The current environment is dynamic and complex and has many people on edge

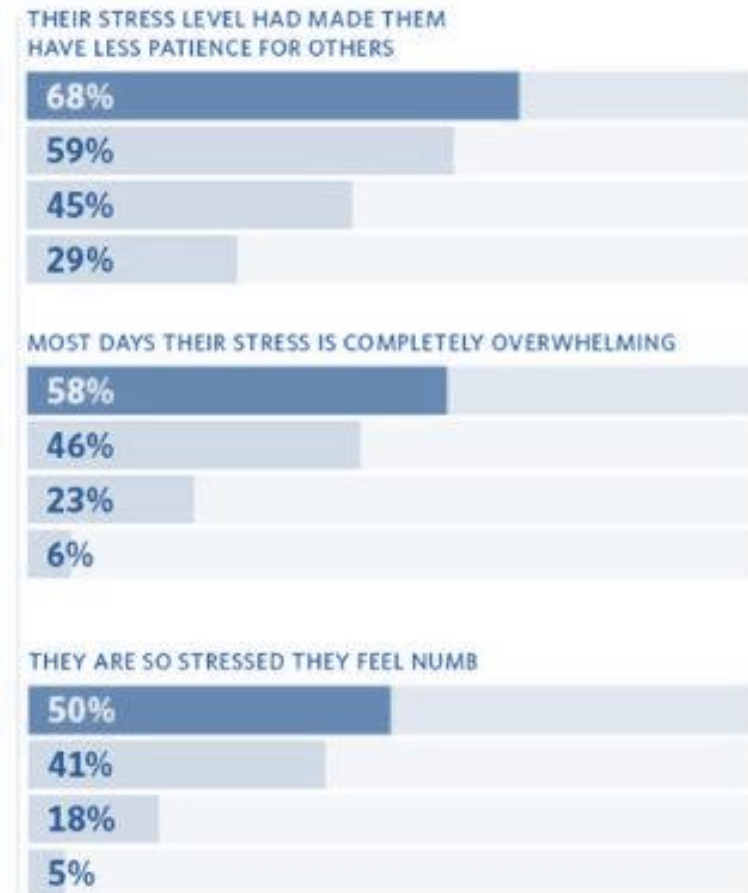
Consider the sources of stress:

- Ongoing health concerns: Covid surges, bird flu, other
- Military conflicts in the Middle East, Eastern Europe and Latin America
- Hot-button social issues
- Higher prices
- Political tensions
- Climate anxiety



PEOPLE ARE ON EDGE

- Americans say that they feel more anxious about the economy, political tensions and global uncertainty, than they have reported feeling about other issue in recent years, according to the latest survey released from the American Psychological Association
- The survey findings make clear that **U.S. adults appear to be emotionally overwhelmed** and showing signs of fatigue
- 58% of U.S. adults surveyed said they felt completely overwhelmed by stress on most days**



LET'S START HERE

Lewin's Equation

Behavior (Individual and group)



$$B = f(P, E)$$



Person



Environment

EVERYWHERE WE WORK

- Most workplace violence prevention efforts in health care are based on hospital settings
- Minimal literature has been published on violence prevention for public health and other workers in areas such as home care, schools, medical mobile vans, or in-home/community care
- Due to an aging population, economic forces, and mobile technology, health care will increasingly be delivered away from traditional facilities and by lone workers
- **The risk of violence changes with the delivery setting**

As the range of potential service delivery sites continues to expand, it will be necessary to conduct violence-specific hazard vulnerability assessments of each type of setting

TYPE I | CRIMINAL INTENT

- The perpetrator has no legitimate business relationship with the organization
- The primary motive is typically theft, robbery, or trespassing
- Serious injury or death is more likely if a deadly weapon used
- Workers who exchange cash, work late hours, or work alone are often at the greatest risk



TYPE II | CLIENT-PATIENT

- The perpetrator is a customer, client or patient of the worker or employer
- Violence can occur in conjunction with worker's normal duties
- Some jobs have an increased level of risk (e.g., healthcare, human services, law enforcement)
- The violence is often motivated anger or frustration related perceptions about how care or services were provided



TYPE III | CURRENT OR FORMER COWORKER



- The perpetrator is a someone known to the organization as a current or former employee
- The motivating factor is often interpersonal or work-related conflicts, losses or traumas, and may involve a sense of injustice or unfairness
- Managers and Supervisors can be at greater risk of being victimized

TYPE IV | INTIMATE PARTNER – DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

- Domestic or Intimate Partner Violence that follows an employee from the home to the workplace
- The perpetrators are not employees or former employees
- Women more often targets; men more often perpetrators
- Risk of violence increases when one party attempts to separate from the other
- Others who have nothing to do with the couple involved can find themselves in harms way



TYPE V | IDEOLOGICAL VIOLENCE

- Violence directed at an organization, its employees, and/or properties for ideological, religious or political reasons
- Violence perpetrated by extremists or terrorists
- Violence is driven by rage against what the targeted organization does or represents
- **Type V violence is the intersection of workplace violence and terrorism/extremism**

A BALANCED PERSPECTIVE

The threat landscape has shifted for both insider and outsider threats



HOT-BUTTON ISSUES IN PUBLIC HEALTH

- **Public Health Mandates and "Bodily Autonomy"**
 - Vaccination Requirements
 - Masking and Social Distancing
 - Health Surveillance
 - Resource Scarcity and "Triaging"
- **Reproductive and Gender-Affirming Care**
 - Access to care
 - Gender-affirming therapies
- **Climate Change/Attribution and Health Impacts**
- **Misinformation and "Coded" Online Movements**
 - Stochastic Terrorism
 - Alternative Medicine Narratives



May 2025 | Bombing of a fertility clinic in Palm Springs, CA

NOT JUST GUN VIOLENCE

July 4, 2019—Petersburg, VA

- A man stabbed three people at a Virginia plasma center while patrons were donating blood
- The 20-year-old Virginia man walked into a plasma donation center during a Fourth of July community cookout, asked to use the restroom, then began randomly stabbing people with a long knife. Several people were injured
- Nurses and customers hid in a restroom inside that plasma center until police arrived



NOT JUST GUN VIOLENCE

February 23, 2018—Middlesex, CT

- A man deliberately crashed his car into the Middlesex Hospital Emergency Department entrance and set himself on fire
- Several cans containing flammable liquid were found inside the vehicle
- Several buildings in the area were reportedly evacuated for a bomb squad's search. The move was a *"precautionary measure"*



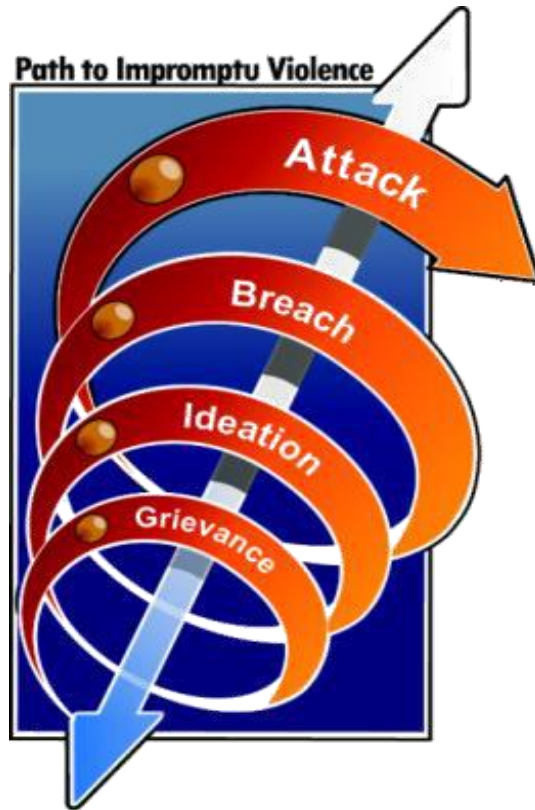
Crimando, S. (2018). Planning for Vehicular Attacks on Hospitals. *The Journal of Healthcare Protection Management*. Vol. 34, No. 2, 10-22.

DEFINING TARGETED VIOLENCE

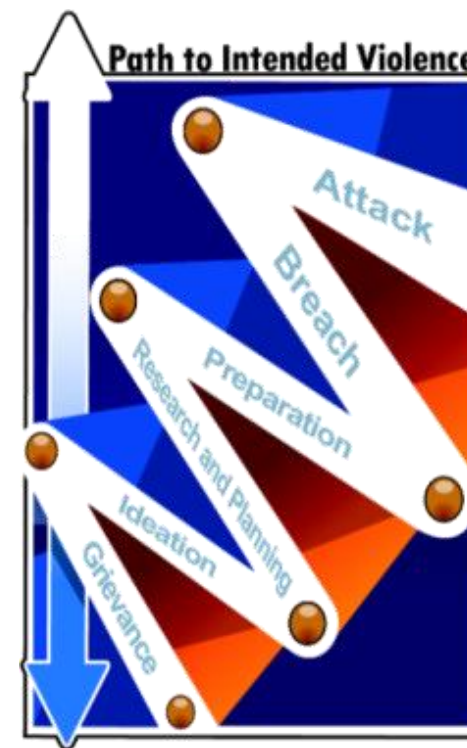
*"Generally, any **premeditated act of violence** directed at a specific individual, group, or location, regardless of motivation, that violates the criminal laws of the United States or of any State or subdivision of the United States"* - U.S. DHS National Threat Evaluation & Reporting (NTER) program



TARGETED VIOLENCE IS PREDATORY VIOLENCE



Affective violence – reactive, impulsive, emotional; response to perceived threat; evolutionary basis is self-defense or self-protection

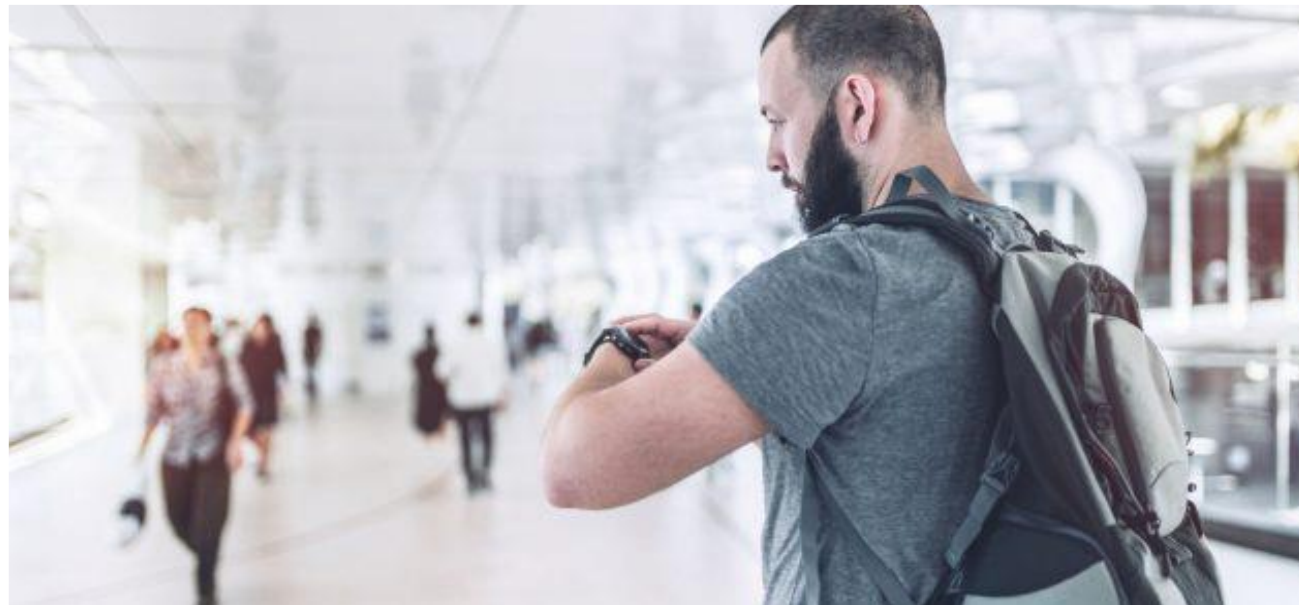


Predatory violence – premeditated; absence of autonomic arousal and emotion; planning and preparation

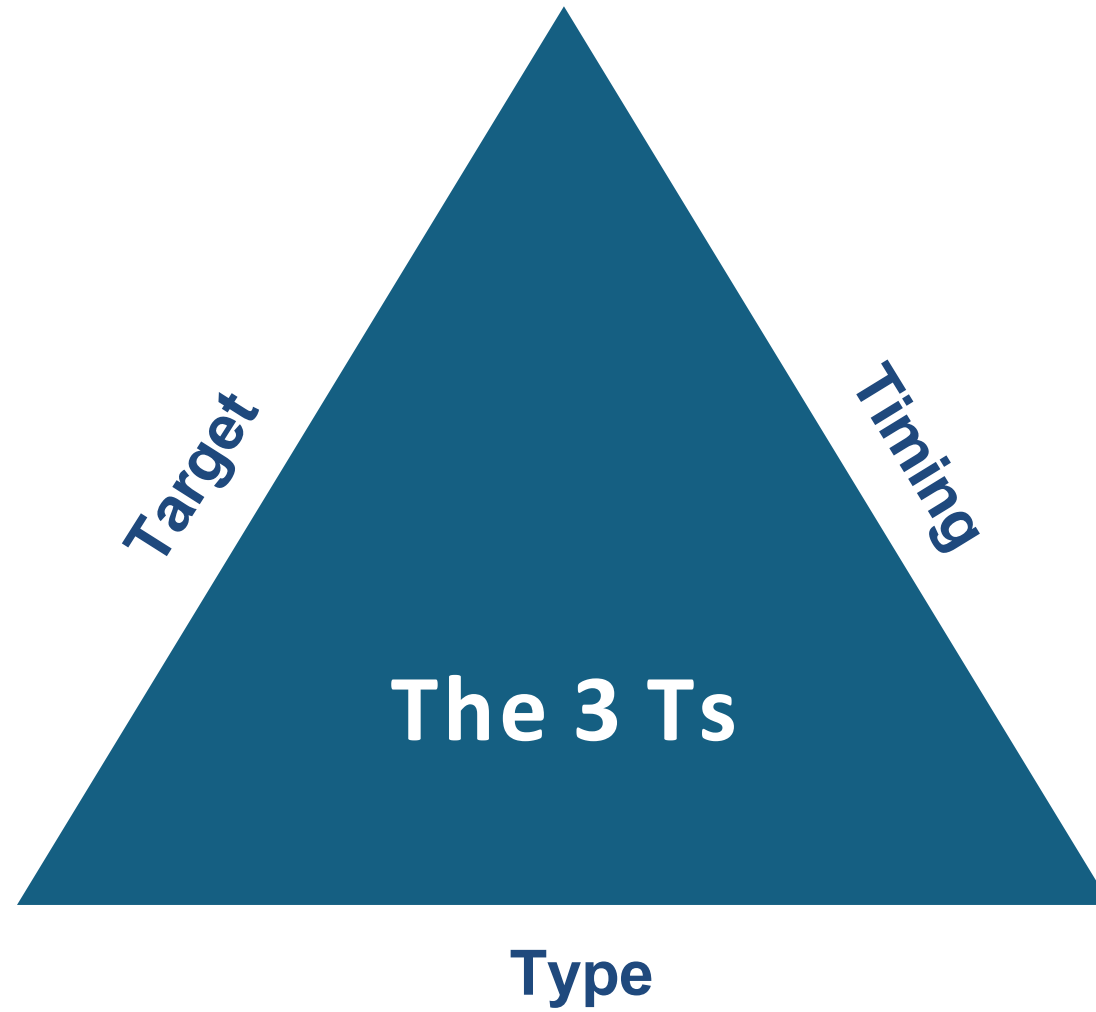
IS THIS A THREAT?

Robert is overheard by a coworker while making a call on his cell phone. The co-worker reported to a supervisor that Robert clearly stated:

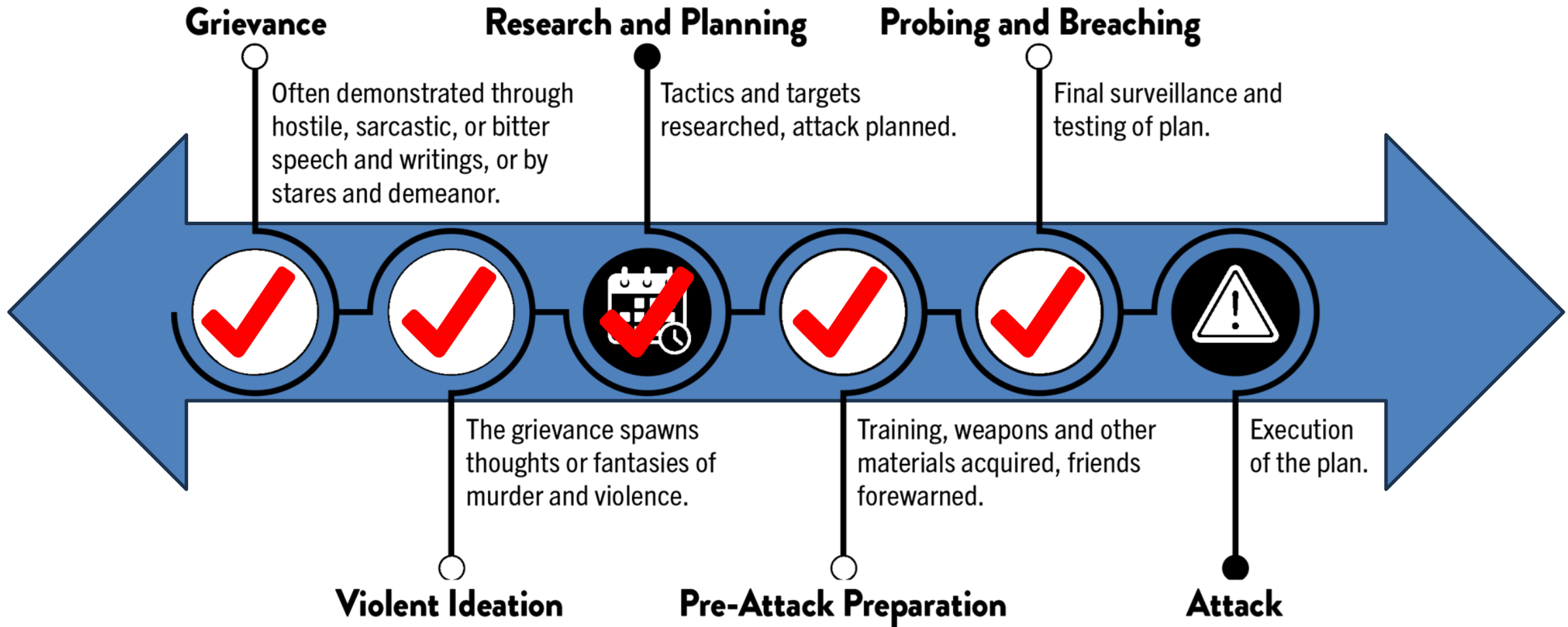
“I’ve had it with the department. They are so misguided! They are ruining our community! Tonight is the night—I have that device ready, and I am going to put a stop to this once and for all. I’m leaving that package at the main office just before everyone leaves for the day!”



THREAT OR PLAN?



THE PATHWAY TO VIOLENCE



Source | US DHS; Calhoun & Weston

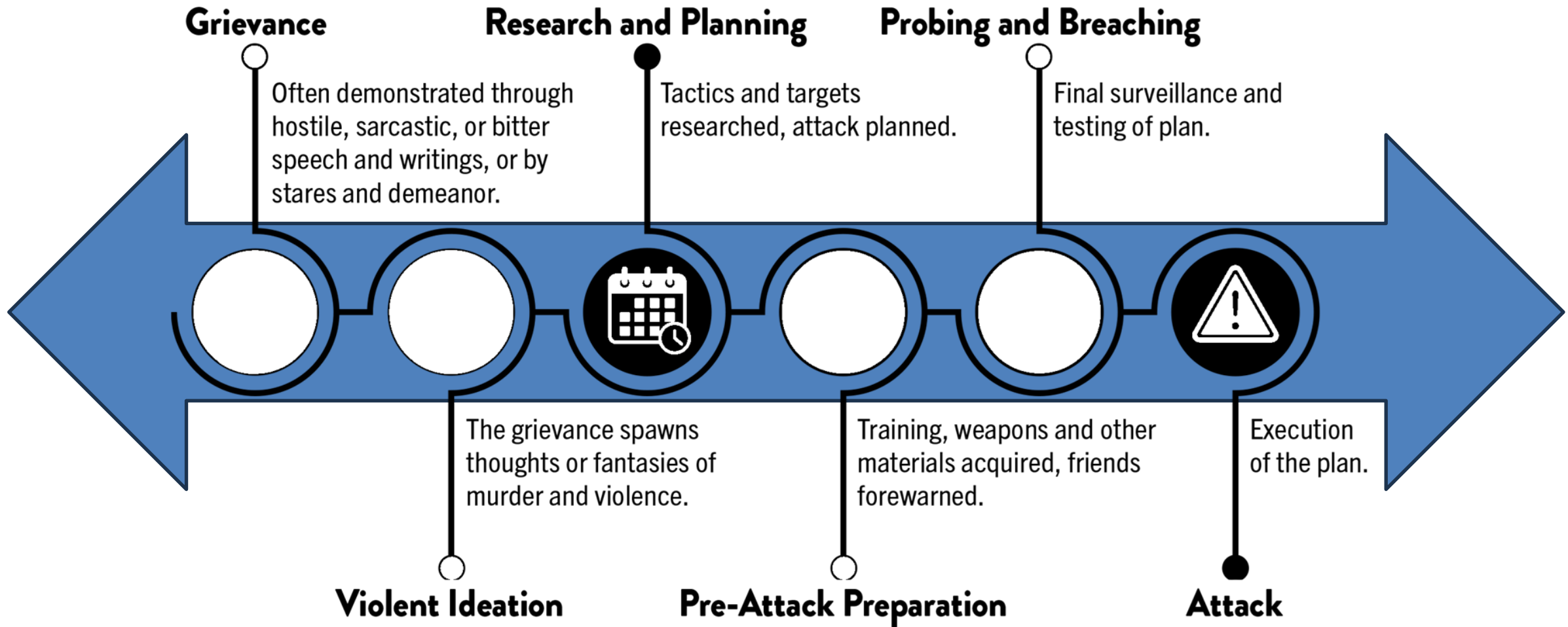
AN IMPORTANT DISTINCTION

Making a Threat vs. Posing a Threat

- Individuals can make threats with no intention or ability to act on them
- Individuals can pose a threat without ever making a threat
- Individuals can both make threats and pose threats to safety

**Our concern is with those who pose a threat,
not just those who make a threat**

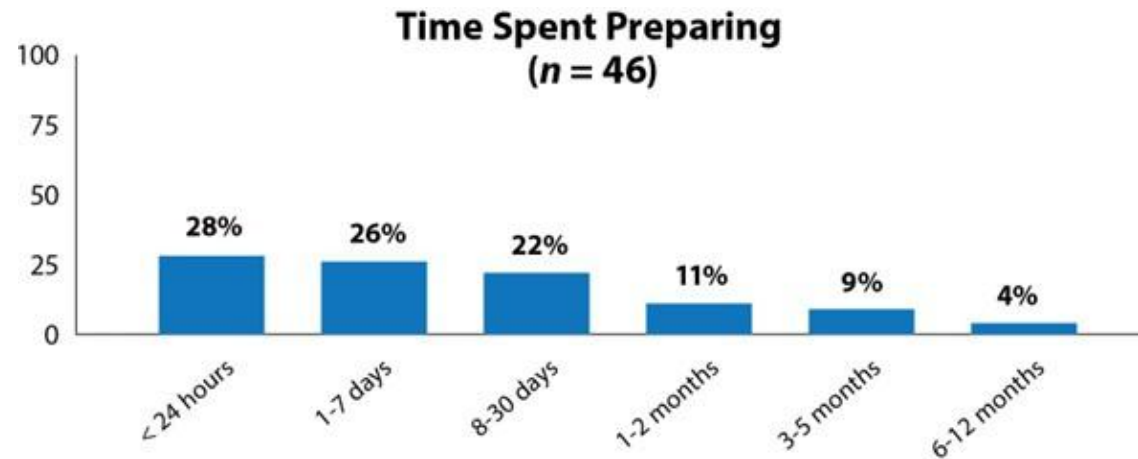
THE PATHWAY TO VIOLENCE



Source | US DHS; Calhoun & Weston

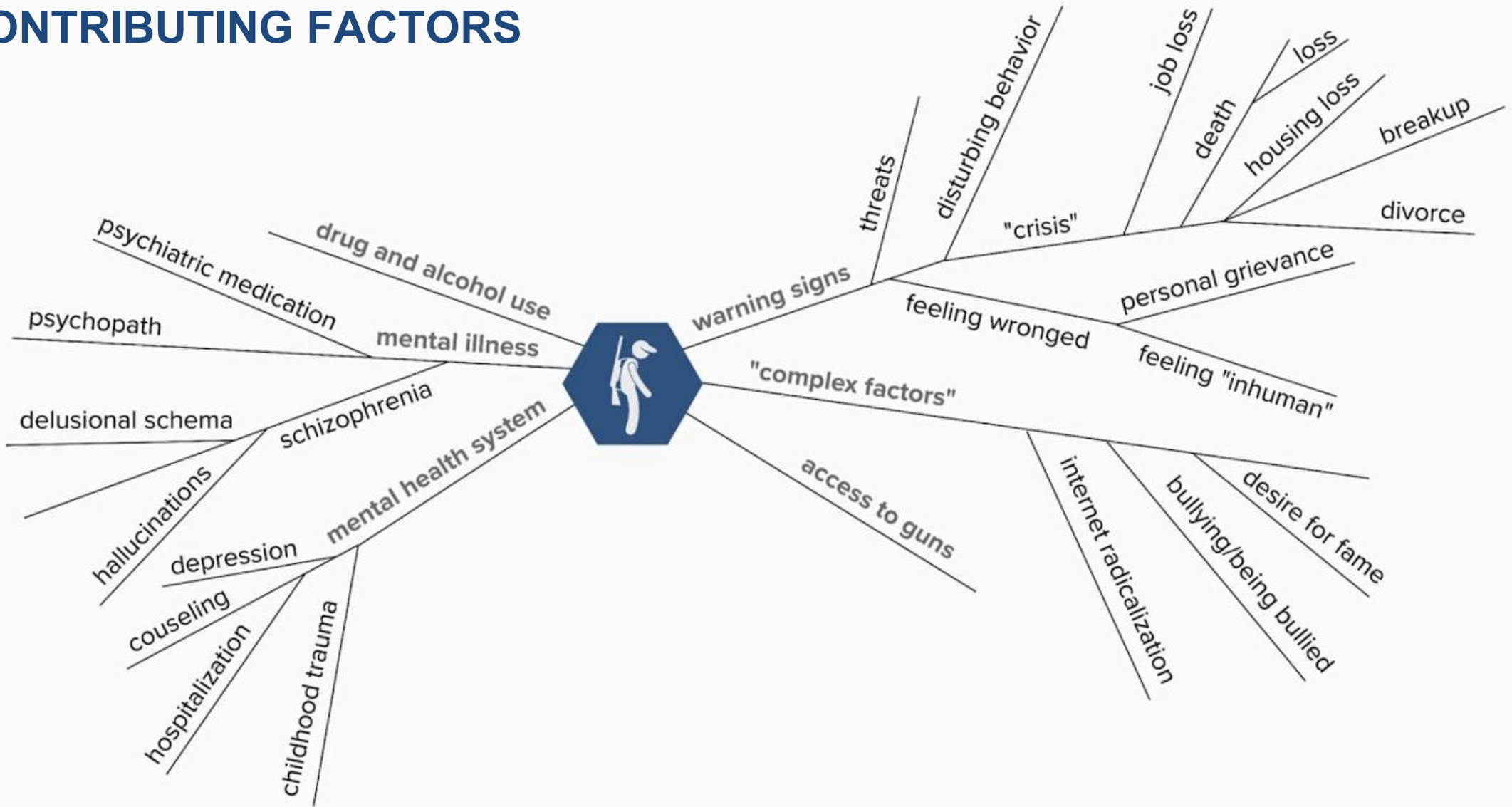
A PROCESS, NOT AN EVENT

- Targeted Violence is not a singular event
- Act in the early stages; it often escalates over time
- Control interactive factors; the process is dynamic
- Instances of workplace violence most often arise from **smoldering** crises, not **sudden** crises
- **People do not just snap, they decide**

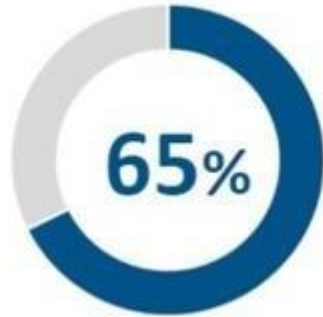


Source | FBI Pre-attack Behaviors Study

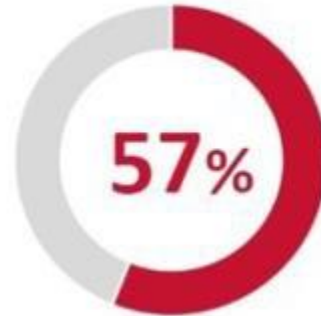
CONTRIBUTING FACTORS



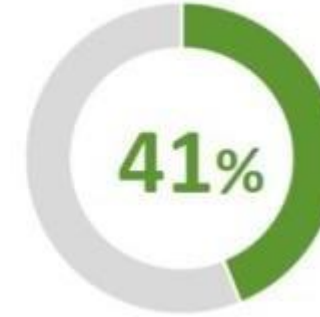
OTHERS ARE CONCERNED



Two-thirds of the offenders exhibited observable behaviors that concerned in others



For over half of the offenders, their behaviors resulted in others fearing for their safety



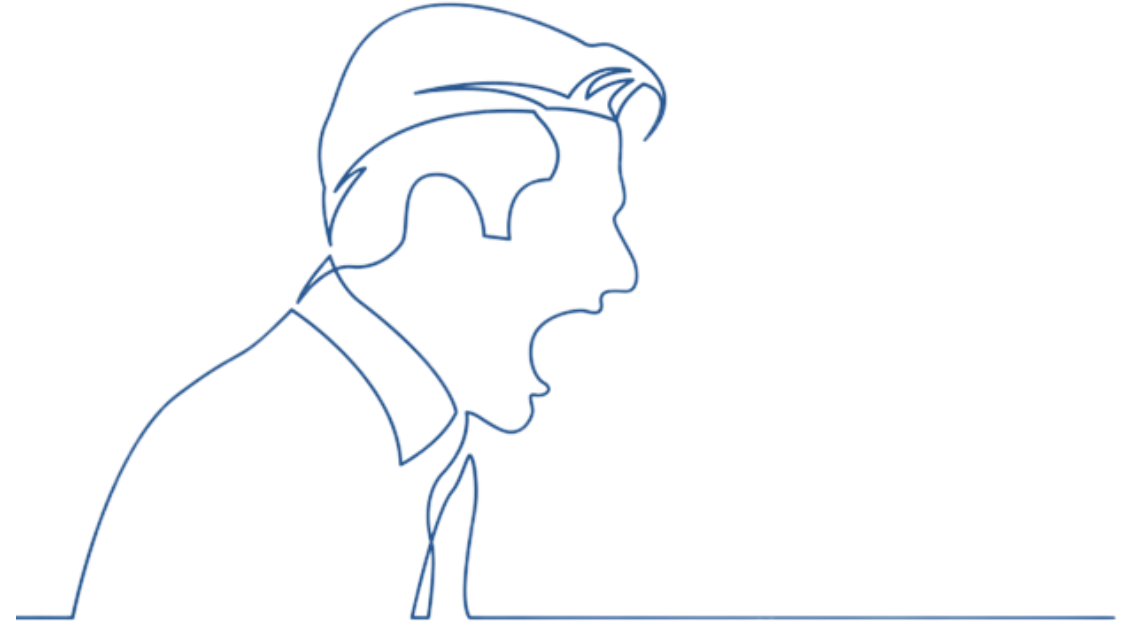
Two-fifths of the offenders exhibited changes in behavior that were observable to others

Source | USSS NTAC

OBSERVABLE BEHAVIORAL INDICATORS

- For example, on average, active shooters displayed 4 to 5 concerning behaviors over time that were observable to others around the shooter
- The most frequently occurring concerning behaviors were related to the active shooter's mental health, problematic interpersonal interactions, and leakage of violent intent

Source | FBI Pre-attack Behaviors Study

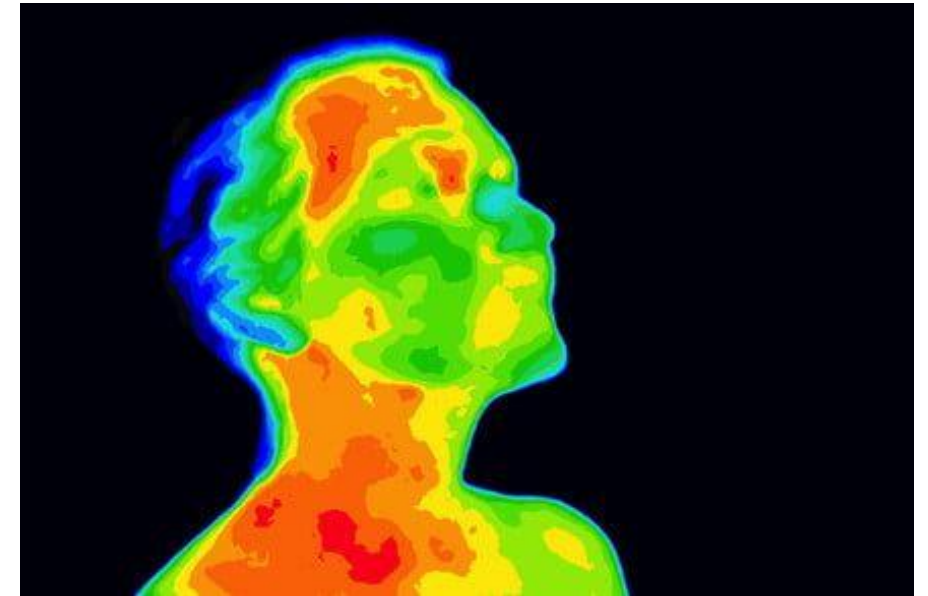




EMERGING TRENDS

CLIMATE & COGNITION

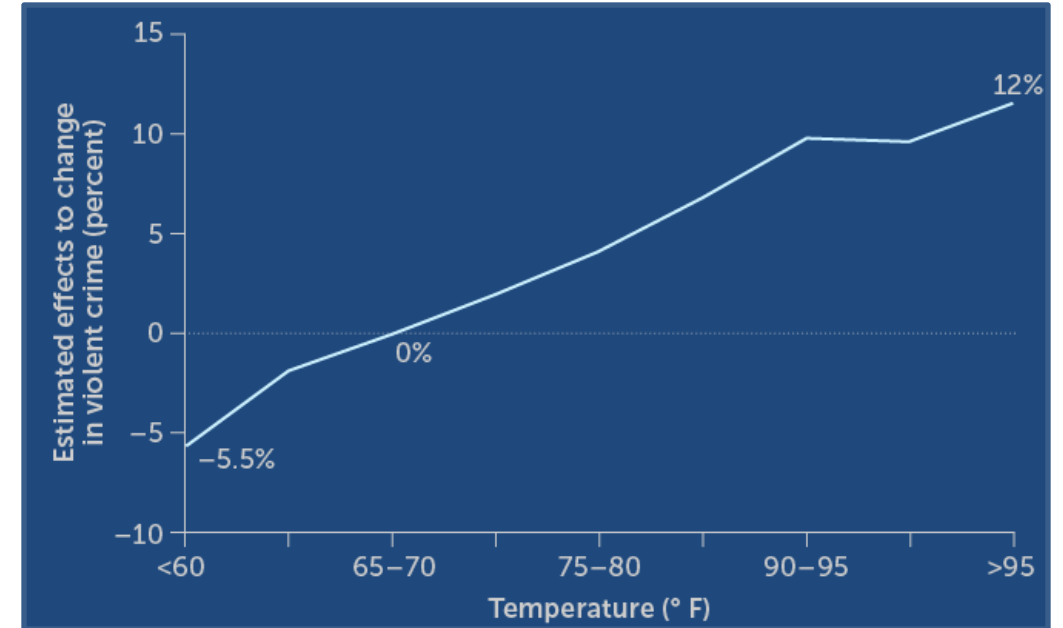
- High temperatures cause the brain to divert resources to other parts of the body to cool down
- When people are overheated, they simply have trouble thinking **straight**; there is notable cognitive disruption and distortion that can lead to poor problem-solving and over-reactions to perceived threats
- When this happens, areas of the brain are not running at full capacity, making it harder for someone to process new information, manage emotions, and control impulses
- People who are hot also perceive other people as behaving aggressively, which increases the odds of hostile confrontations



Miles-Novelo, A., & Anderson, C. (2022). *Climate Change and Human Behavior: Impacts of a Rapidly Changing Climate on Human Aggression and Violence* (Elements in Applied Social Psychology). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/9781108953078

CLIMATE CHANGE & VIOLENCE

- There is demonstrated causal relationship between heat and interpersonal aggression — as the temperature goes up, people’s behavior becomes more aggressive toward others
- Heat affects arousal and irritability, with decreases in attention and self-regulation, as well as to an increase in the availability of negative and hostile thoughts
- Heat can also have a negative effect on cognitive function, which may reduce the ability to resolve a conflict without violence
- It has been calculated that between 2010 and 2099, climate change will cause an estimated additional 30,000 murders, 200,000 cases of rape, and 3.2 million burglaries due to increased average temperatures (Ranson, 2012)



Source | APA, 2021

CLIMATE CHANGE & VIOLENCE

- One of the best-known studies conducted at Florida State University (Cohn, E. & Rotton, J., 2000) established the general idea that violence rose with temperature
- **Other studies demonstrated a linear relationship that directly tied escalating temperatures to escalating violence (Anderson, C., 2000) with assault rates peaking at the highest temperatures**
- Other studies yet have shown that in hot weather people are more likely to misread neutral signals as signs of hostility and less likely to avoid or condemn violence



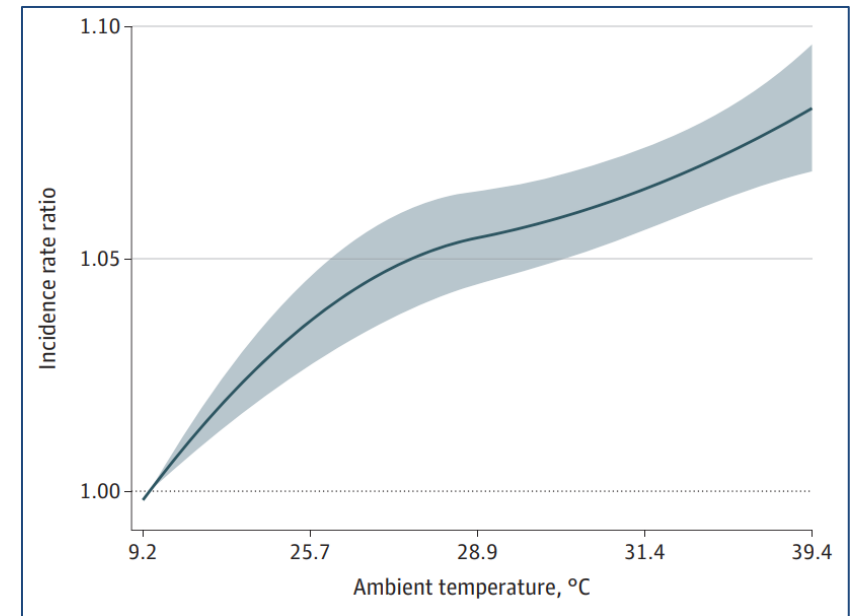
CLIMATE CHANGE & MENTAL HEALTH EMERGENCIES

In a study published in JAMA in February, researchers at Boston University found that **days of extreme heat were associated with higher rates of mental health–related Emergency Department visits**

The numbers of mental health emergencies were highest on the day of extreme heat events, and there was some evidence that the rates remained high for 2 to 4 days after

The types of mental health conditions that seemed most affected were:

- Anxiety, stress-related, and somatoform disorders
- Mood disorders
- Schizophrenia, schizotypal, and delusional disorders
- Substance abuse disorders
- Self-harm
- Rate of Psych Emergency Department visits on extreme heat days was **higher for men** the women.
- The were also higher in the U.S. Northeast, Northwest and Midwest regions.



EMERGING TRENDS - VIOLENT IDEOLOGICAL NIHILISM

misanthropic adjective

mis-an-throp-ic (mi-sən-ˈthrä-pik)

Synonyms of *misanthropic* >

- 1 : of, relating to, or characteristic of a [misanthrope](#)
| He was shunned because of his miserable *misanthropic* nature.
- 2 : marked by a hatred or contempt for [humankind](#)
| The moral corruption he saw around him made him *misanthropic*.

<https://www.asisonline.org/security-management-magazine/latest-news/today-in-security/2025/march/nonideological-extremism/>

- The rise in ideological nihilism – or the absolute embrace of apocalyptic thinking has come hand in hand with the rapid emergence of dozens if not hundreds of online antisocial subcultures which **actively promote the aesthetic of nihilism and violence**
- An inherently antisocial and nihilistic subset has grown significantly, likely encouraged by the political turmoil, social upheaval, and general apocalypticism of the past two years
- **Within the most extreme elements of this subcultural milieu, mass violence itself is also often encouraged—often for the sole purpose of violence and destruction**

NVEs AS A NEW CATEGORY OF EXTREMISM

- In 2025, the **FBI formally recognized NVEs as a category of extremism**, reflecting an increase in violent incidents linked to this worldview. This phenomenon is closely tied to toxic online subcultures that glorify violence and prey on vulnerable young people
- **In 2025, the FBI announced that they have over 250 open investigations across all fifty states into individuals affiliated with Nihilistic Violent Extremism (NVE)**
- The rise of NVEs challenges traditional definitions of terrorism, as the line between ideologically motivated terrorists and non-ideological killers becomes increasingly blurred





News

PRESS RELEASE

All News

Blogs

New Jersey Man Charged with Cyberstalking in Connection with Violent Network '764'

Marek Cherkaoui, 21, of Egg Harbor Township, New Jersey, was arrested today on cyberstalking offenses in connection with a Nihilistic Violent Extremist (NVE) network known as 764. He made his initial appearance today in the District of New Jersey and was ordered detained.

According to court documents, Cherkaoui has a lengthy history of making online comments involving threats and advocating for and supporting violence. From December 2024 through May 2025, Cherkaoui allegedly used the internet to threaten a minor female and told her to cut herself. On two occasions, the minor female cut her arms after being threatened by Cherkaoui.

According to the complaint, Cherkaoui has a history of making online comments espousing ideology related to the NVE network known as 764. Cherkaoui has expressed support for mass shooters, solicited child sex abuse materials from minors, and encouraged other individuals to harm themselves and others. Cherkaoui previously purchased books regarding the manufacture of explosives, body armor, zip ties, a trench coat, ski masks, and tactical gear. Many of these items were seized from his home in a June 2025 search by law enforcement agents. During the search of Cherkaoui's home today, FBI agents found writings in which Cherkaoui discussed and planned murder and terroristic acts, including a multi-step plan that involving joining ISIS and returning to the United States to commit acts of terrorism.



NON-ALIGNED THREAT ACTORS

- Violence is committed not for a political cause, but for the inherent **spectacle** and **notoriety** it provides.
- Perpetrators often seek fame within a narrow online community that venerates mass killers.



NVE VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES

- **Online radicalization:** NVEs operate largely in decentralized online spaces, using memes and other disturbing aesthetics to spread misanthropic worldviews and normalize violence
- **Online communities connected to NVEs have been linked to school shootings and other violent attacks**



ALONE TOGETHER

- Those in online communities are **alone and lonely, but online they are alone together**, and sharing a hateful message attractive to many who harbor fantasies of revenge or retaliation
- Idolization of past acts of violence provides notoriety and likely motivates like-minded attackers to engage in violence
- Members of the community support each other and often stoke a culture of impotent bitterness and rage at the wider world
- The messages are hateful, self-loathing, and can promote feelings of hopelessness
- **Across the entire spectrum of ideological nihilists, the most common emotion experienced is profound, painful loneliness and pathological envy of others who seem happy**



NOTABLE NVE COMMUNITIES

- **True Crime Community (TCC):** This is one of the most prominent online subcultures that contributes to nihilistic violence. It promotes a misanthropic worldview and glorifies mass murderers, offering a sense of status and belonging to disaffected young people
- **764 Network and No Lives Matter (NLM):** This online network engages in sextortion and glorifies violence. Its offshoot, NLM, specifically focuses on real-world violence. Members are often motivated by the desire for control, status, or sexual gratification
- **The Order of the Nine Angles (ONA or O9A):** A Satanic and terrorist network that originated in the United Kingdom but has since branched out into other parts of the world. This decentralized network uses sextortion and intimidation to coerce minors into committing acts of self-harm and violence

NO LIVES



MATTER



NVE TARGET SELECTION

- **Soft targets**, including schools and churches have been targets for NVE threat actors
- These are symbolic, serving **societal- and community-oriented missions**. They may hold ideological importance to individual attackers
- These are also **target-rich environments**
- Attacks on these site garner public attention and spread fear

TCC, GORE VIDEOS & ONLINE RADICALIZATION

2025 | The perpetrators of mass shootings at:

- September | Evergreen High School, CO
- August | Annunciation School, MN
- January | Antioch High School, TN
- December | Abundant Life

Were all radicalized in the same way, With the same type of content,

- They were engaging with each other, having direct contact
- Using each other's usernames
- Mimicking each other's photos



TCC & GORE

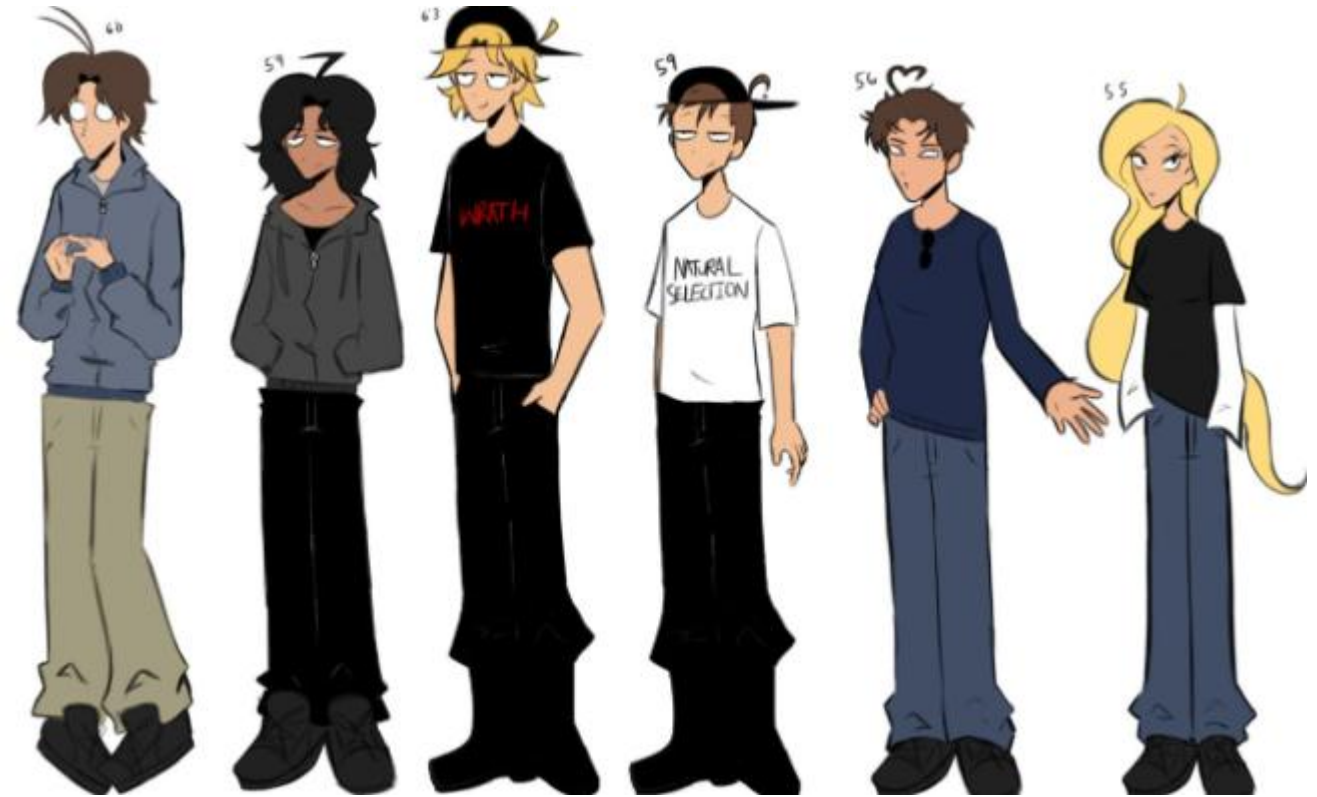
- You do not have to go onto the Dark Web to view gore content
- This content includes beheading, murder and suicide videos
- Like porn addiction, gore content can become addictive and compulsive
- Most have been involved for several years and continually seek more disturbing content
- This is a desensitizing process



TCC INDICATORS



Jewelry with names and images of school shooters.



The text on the shirts (“WRATH” and “NATURAL SELECTION”) are phrases associated with the 1999 Columbine High School shooting, because the perpetrators wore shirts with those exact words on the day of the attack.

NEW JERSEY STATEWIDE THREAT ASSESSMENT TEAM (NJ STAT)



- As part of the national and state Targeted Violence Prevention Strategy, New Jersey has developed new resources
- The NJ STAT is a centralized resource focused on the cooperative sharing of information and knowledge, as well as leveraging the support of law enforcement and mental health professionals
- NJ STAT includes representatives from the law enforcement, intelligence, education, and mental health communities
- NJ STAT's goal is to prevent targeted acts of violence by creating *"off-ramps"* for at-risk individuals into programs for mental health or other services
- NJ STAT also provides case assessment, consultation, and action planning to help mitigate and manage referrals, as well as provides or supports training and education for public and private sector partners, including school-based threat assessment teams



Highly effective teams collaborate, coordinate, and communicate across organizations or communities to address persons of concern and threats of targeted violence.

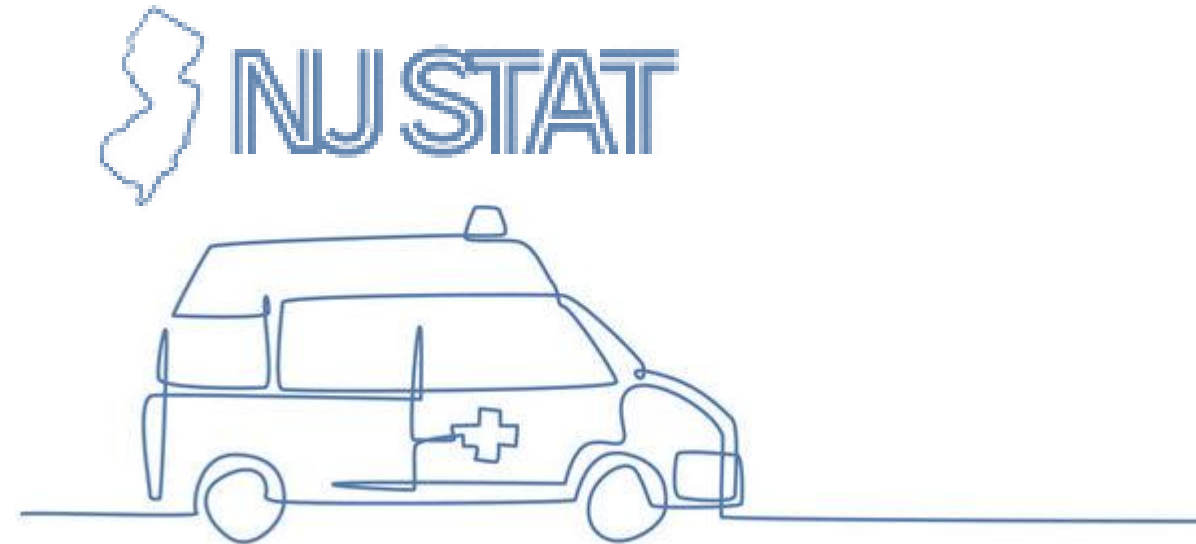


Threat Team Structure in New Jersey

- Level I NJ STAT
- Level II County/Regional Teams
- Level III School-Based Teams/Local Teams

Threat Team Capabilities

- Level I Highest level providing leadership in care, education, prevention, and assessment
- Level II Similar to Level I re capabilities albeit major cases are referred to Level 1



Like the designation of medical trauma centers

OTHER RESOURCES

- Association of Threat Assessment Professionals (ATAP)
- National Threat Evaluation & Reporting Program (NTER)





Thank You!

Stay Safe! Be Well!



FOR MORE INFORMATION

New Jersey Department of Human Services

Division of Mental Health & Addiction Services

Disaster & Terrorism Branch

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Web: www.nj.gov/humanservices/dmhas/home/disaster



**Disaster & Terrorism
Branch**

NJ DHS Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services