



National Threat Evaluation and Reporting

Q U A R T E R L Y B U L L E T I N



Quarter 4 – 2022

Research in Focus

September is National Suicide Prevention Month and, to help increase awareness and provide relevant information and resources, the National Threat Evaluation and Reporting Office is highlighting some pertinent research and factors to consider when assessing an individual's totality of circumstances for potential threats to self and others—which are all threats of targeted violence. Identifying these contributing factors—risk factors, triggers and stressors, and warning behaviors—and assessing how they may impact an individual's behaviors can help shape the threat assessment and management approach. Family members, friends, and community members serve as vital support systems to help identify and underscore protective factors for an individual who may be experiencing a mental health crisis.

Our Mission

The National Threat Evaluation and Reporting (NTER) Office equips Homeland Security partners with tools and resources to assist in identifying and mitigating threats of terrorism and targeted violence.¹ The NTER Quarterly Bulletin is designed to inform Department of Homeland Security customers of research developments and resources to examine Homeland threats through a threat assessment and management perspective.



Did you know?

According to the United States Secret Service 2021 publication on *Averting Targeted School Violence: A US Secret Service Analysis of Plots Against Schools*, 70 percent of targeted violence plotters exhibited behaviors indicating the presence of some type of mental health symptom in the time leading up to, or around, the discovery of their plots.² Two prominent psychological symptoms exhibited by plotters were depression and suicidal thoughts. While the vast majority of individuals who display these two symptoms do not commit acts of targeted violence, depression and suicidal thoughts constitute potential contributing factors along with a constellation of other risk factors.

Hot Topics

Suicide Risk as an Outcome Measure in Violence Prevention Programs

As threat assessment programs are increasingly being established throughout the United States to prevent targeted violence, establishing rigorous evaluation methods is essential to validate the success of these programs. The DHS Science and Technology Directorate, in concert with the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health, University of Illinois at Chicago and the University of California at Los Angeles, conducted a study evaluating the effectiveness of their School



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Threat Assessment Response Team (START).³ START incorporates training and program consultation, early identification, assessment, intervention, case management, and monitoring. Outcome measures were determined by *violence risk* and *suicide risk* levels, before and after 76 individuals completed START from July to December 2017.^{4,5} The results of the study suggest that individuals engaged with START decreased their risk of violence as well as suicide. In addition, the study found that the change in suicide risk was moderately, directly correlated with a change in violence risk. This result is particularly significant, and it could indicate the importance of incorporating suicide risk assessment in current behavioral threat assessment programs, both as a tool and an outcome measure. Although threat assessment programs like START were not designed to focus on ideologically motivated violence, the study indicates that they may be effective in doing so. Read the entire study at [Evaluation of a Targeted Violence Prevention Program in Los Angeles County, California](#).

Mental Health Awareness on College Campuses

The number of students seeking mental health services on college campuses continues to increase, according to the [National Association of Student Personnel Administrators](#). In response to the overwhelming increase in demand for services, institutions have explored a variety of approaches to ensure students receive care. For example, triaging services have proven to be an effective strategy for identifying students who need immediate services and support and tailoring resources to their specific needs. Some campuses have implemented interdisciplinary intervention or case management teams that share information and coordinate a response plan for a student in distress. These teams, similar to behavioral threat teams, are multidisciplinary in nature and ensure all avenues of intervention are explored. Establishing these teams and working with local public health resources, social support systems, family members, schools, and other community organizations is beneficial to maintain the physical and emotional safety of individuals and college campuses.

Public Health Approach to Violence Prevention

More than 30 years ago, the American Public Health Association deemed violence a public health crisis.⁶ In a 2019 report on [Mass Violence in America: Causes, Impacts, and Solutions](#) by the National Council for Mental Wellbeing, the role of public health was once again in the spotlight.⁷ The report recommends Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management as a primary strategy in targeted violence prevention.⁸ It also calls for additional types of violence prevention models, such as “See something, Say something”; Mental Health First Aid;⁹ and Co-responder models.¹⁰ These prevention models are fundamentally based on the public health principle that violent behaviors arise from “contextual, biological, environmental, systemic, and social stressors” (APHA, 2018). Therefore, it would be beneficial for current violence prevention and intervention strategies to adopt a public health model of prevention that examines the multitude of underlying risk factors for violence. Such efforts should not stigmatize those with mental illness or those seeking counseling, but they should raise awareness that mental health issues may be one of many risk factors for potential targeted violence when an individual displays observable behaviors that may concern others. You can learn more about various types of public health approaches to targeted violence prevention and how to work with different sectors [here](#).



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Community-Based Intervention to Suicide Prevention

The US Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention released the [National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report](#) in 2021, reflecting a decrease in the overall veteran suicide count in 2019 from 2018 and 2017, while remaining mindful that 6,261 Veterans died by suicide in 2019. The report identifies a 10-year strategy for prevention that was implemented in 2018. One prominent aspect of this strategy is to apply a community-based suicide prevention model that addresses veteran suicide on the state and local level. On the local level, Veterans Affairs focuses on community coalition-building combined with targeted outreach and education. On the state level, Veterans Affairs partners with other federal agencies and state-level policymakers to implement suicide prevention programs (e.g., 988/Veterans Crisis Line). This approach has a wide reach, extending to veterans inside and outside of Veterans Affairs. A similar community-based intervention model in violence prevention could be applicable at the local level to increase awareness and knowledge about threats and behaviors that may concern others; on the state level, this model could build partnerships among agencies to develop state-level intervention strategies.

Resources

Targeted violence prevention strategies practice a multidisciplinary approach that promotes emotional and mental wellness for oneself and others to prevent potential acts of violence before it occurs. Below are resources that provide information and assistance related to violence against oneself and others, as well as emerging trends in mental health as a result of the pandemic.



- [National Council for Mental Wellbeing](#)

The National Council for Mental Wellbeing was founded in 1969 for the purpose of driving policy and social change on behalf of mental health and substance use treatment organizations. It developed the Mental Health First Aid program, which is helping critical populations to identify, understand, and respond to signs and symptoms of mental health and substance use challenges.

- [The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#)

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline is a national network of local crisis centers that provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week in the United States. 988 is committed to improving crisis services and advancing suicide prevention by empowering individuals, advancing professional best practices, and building awareness. This new, shorter phone number will make it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services.

- [The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#)

The CDC developed a communications campaign called How Right Now, which is designed to promote and strengthen the emotional well-being and resiliency of populations adversely affected by COVID-19-related stress, grief, and loss. How Right Now partners are local,



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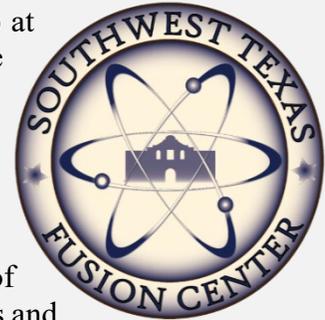


regional, and national organizations that contribute resources and expertise to help people through the COVID-19 pandemic. For more information, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/howrightnow/index.html>.

- [Terrorism and Violence | The National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#)
The National Child Traumatic Stress Network is funded by the Center for Mental Health Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, and US Department of Health and Human Services. Its mission is to raise the standard of care and improve access to services for traumatized children, their families, and communities who have been affected by mass violence, acts of terrorism, or community trauma in the form of shootings, bombings, or other types of attacks.

Threat Assessment Spotlight

The Southwest Texas Fusion Center created the Behavioral Threat Assessment Group (BTAG) in late 2019, anticipating legislation from the State of Texas that required all public school districts in the state to form threat assessment teams. The leadership at the time had the foresight to understand the importance of such teams and the need for a local/regional team that could assist schools with mitigating threats of targeted violence, within the school and throughout the community. The BTAG meets three times a week to discuss persons who may be exhibiting threats of violence and behaviors of concern and develop plans for mitigation and management using a Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management approach. The BTAG is a multidisciplinary team comprised of San Antonio Police Department intelligence detectives, mental health officers and psychologists, Bexar County Sheriff mental health officers, San Antonio Fire Department personnel, Bexar County District Attorney's Office prosecutor and investigators, and multiple federal partners. The team strives to use all resources available, including mental health treatment, to protect the public. BTAG members also participate in a larger, community-based Public Safety Threat Assessment Group that meets monthly; during these meetings, relationships are built, case studies are presented, and silos are broken down. BTAG was recently credited with stopping an actor with intentions of attacking a major distribution center in San Antonio. The BTAG team continues to work with all partners to mitigate the threat to a location and manage the individual to reduce the possibility of an attack. With the NTER Master Trainer Program, the San Antonio Police Department and BTAG have been able to help train and guide Public Safety Threat Assessment Group members in what to look for and how to respond when faced with someone who poses a threat of targeted mass violence in the community.



Program Updates

- The NTER Office has recently updated its public-facing website. Explore it at: <https://www.dhs.gov/nter>.



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- NTER's Master Trainer Program in Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management is accepting applications for future cohorts. For more information and to apply, please visit: <https://www.dhs.gov/mtp>.
- The DHS Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting (SAR) Initiative (NSI) Program Management Office has publicly released a new virtual training on SAR Fundamentals to assist Federal, State, Local, Tribal, Territorial and Private Sector homeland security partners better identify suspicious activity. To access the eLearning training, visit: <https://www.dhs.gov/form/nter>.
- The NTER Office recently and jointly released the guide on Best Practices Leveraging Computer-Aided Dispatch to Enhance Suspicious Activity Reporting. To access the guide, click [here](#).



How Did We Do?

Please take a moment to share your feedback:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/NTERBulletinSurvey>

Contact Information

To learn more about the NSI, Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management, or the NTER Office, please contact NTER@hq.dhs.gov.

¹ DHS defines targeted violence as 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.

² See *Averting Targeted School Violence: A U.S. Secret Service Analysis of Plots Against Schools* for information regarding this study

³ The research in this article was the result of a collaborative effort among Los Angeles Department of Mental Health, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Science and Technology Directorate, University of Illinois at Chicago and the University of California at Los Angeles.



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- ⁴ Violence risk was measured by the SAVRY (Structured assessment of Violence Risk in Youth) for those 17 years and under, and the WAVR-21 (Workplace Assessment of Violence Risk-21 items) was used to assess workplace and campus targeted violence risk for those 18 years and over.
- ⁵ Suicide risk was measured by the Columbia-Suicide Severity Rating Scale.
- ⁶ The American Public Health Association was founded in 1872 to improving the health of all U.S. residents. Through the years, APHA has continued to search for and support those policies and practices that are most likely to improve the health of the public.
- ⁷ The National Council for Mental Wellbeing is the largest organization of mental health and addictions treatment programs in the United States, serving 10 million adults, children and families with mental health and substance use disorders.
- ⁸ Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management (BTAM) is a proactive, evidenced-based method of investigation, analysis, and intervention that focuses on an individual's patterns of thinking and behavior to determine whether, and to what extent, that individual may be moving toward an attack. BTAM utilizes a four-step process: identify, investigate, assess, and manage.
- ⁹ Mental Health First Aid is an eight-hour training that prepares the average person to identify someone in distress from mental illness, provide them with reassurance and get them assistance.
- ¹⁰ In many parts of the country, local, state and federal law enforcement officials are being trained in how to respond to calls that involve people with serious mental illnesses.