Preventing Mass Violence

A Whole Community Approach

Mark S. Warnick

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Mark S. Warnick
Lecturer, Tennessee Tech University
Illinois, USA

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Dedication

There are many who have helped me along the journey of writing this book. Among them was my home church (Fame Evangelical Church); numerous public safety and nonprofit friends, faculty and staff at my workplace; the folks at Longhorn Coffee in Cookeville TN; and many more. While many of them have assisted me in large and small ways, there is one person not yet mentioned who has been of more help than anyone else. That person is my wife of 21 years, Dr. Cleo Warnick.

My darling wife provided support, insight, physical work, and more, trying to help me complete this research and the book project as a whole. When I needed to research acts of mass violence, she identified multitudes of mass killers and sent links or provided books with bookmarks so that I did not have to spend as much time searching for the sources. She spent more than a month providing me this level of support all while still working on her dissertation for her doctorate in psychology.

Cleo was always ready to help me find the right words and to act as a sounding board whenever I was not quite sure about something. When I finished the rough draft of the manuscript, she went through and edited it for me so that I could get it to the public quicker. We also spent many hours talking about the psychological makeup of these killers. In some instances, we both watched videos together about some of the stories we researched, or we went as a team on a deep dive looking for more information. Her insights and her willingness to help proved invaluable to me.

The love of my life is a life partner, and a soulmate. We complete each other, and we have worked closely together, both at home and in our work, since we got married. Oftentimes, we spent day and night together for years on end. We were (and still are) meant for each other. I could not imagine life without her, nor would I want a life without her. She is a dedicated, selfless, caring, and intelligent person, who has made my life better and completed my life. I thank God every day for her, and for that reason, I dedicate this book to her.

I love you with all my heart Dr. Cleo.

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Foreword

In my 32 years working in EMS, Law Enforcement and Emergency Management, I have been fortunate to interact with a number of people who I consider pioneers in the field of public safety. Dr. Mark Warnick is one of those individuals whom I met when I started my graduate degree at Tennessee Tech. It quickly became apparent that Mark Warnick was not my typical college professor. In fact, we often joke that I was almost his shortest grad students since I called him the first week of class to tell him I was quitting the program. Perhaps I was a bit naïve to the structure of an online program that included discussion postings with APA formatting, especially after being out of college for 20 years. Nonetheless, he talked me down and helped me refocus on how to accomplish my first week's assignment. He had a gift for expecting the quality of work to increase from week to week, and years after graduating, he still challenges me to think outside the box. I now consider him a colleague and a friend.

When Mark Warnick told me that he was writing a book on mass violence, I knew the end product would be detailed and thorough. However, his extensive emergency management background allowed for a unique perspective on addressing mass violence in our communities. By incorporating a whole community approach, he recognizes that effective communication and collaboration on the local level can build security and resilience within a community. Although we may feel hopeless when we look at the issue of mass violence on a national, state, or even metropolitan level, we know that commonsense solutions are better implemented on the local level. This book discusses the current crisis of mass violence, details historical events, and follows with an extensive breakdown on how communities can prevent, protect against, mitigate, respond to, and recover from the threat of mass violence.

I wish I could feel optimistic that our world is becoming a safer place; however based on our current level of law enforcement and emergency management training, the threat of mass violence continues to exist as we prepare and plan to respond.

Those of us in emergency management know that mitigation reduces the risk by proactively addressing vulnerabilities. This book identifies those mitigation strategies and while some may be controversial, it is important for us to keep an open mind as we all play an important role in making our communities safer.

Joe Campbell, MPS

Preface

Somewhere around 2007, I was having a conversation with others in the field of public safety about all of the mass violence we were seeing. Having been someone who could never stomach the words "It cannot be done," when I was told that there was no way to stop mass violence before it happened. Well, let us just say that it did not sit well with me. I began thinking and researching the subject diligently, and I began to see trends, and I heard a lot of falsehoods that I could prove were wrong because of mine and others' research. These are the circumstances that led me down this path of trying to stop or prevent mass violence, and this book will provide real-life instances where these strategies have saved lives, even when it was a family member or a neighbor who spotted the issue and made the tough call that prevented mass violence.

The premise of this textbook is not to reinvent the wheel, but rather to use that wheel, with excellent tread and a strong rim, and then use it on another vehicle that it has never been used on before. A whole community approach is a well-known strategy in the emergency management realm, and it has been used in some of the largest disasters we have ever seen. When you look at the concept of using the whole community to prevent mass violence, it is common sense that this would work and it is generalizable. Think about it this way: If a town has 175 law enforcement officers for 150,000 residents, when a whole community approach is implemented, the agency goes from 175 people trying to identify those with a potential to become a mass shooter to potentially as many as 80,000 people looking for warning signs. Let us face it because the police cannot be everywhere all the time; they are already overworked and usually underpaid, and there are way too few officers.

In order to improve and move forward, it was apparent that as a nation, we needed to turn from being reactive to being proactive when it comes to stopping mass violence. It made sense that we needed to learn from the past to protect the future. Between being a fan of history and wanting to learn from past incidents, I felt that it was important to include a thorough historical review. This historical

review was also extensive so that you (the reader) could see with your own eyes that mass violence is not a new phenomenon but an old problem that has gotten worse over the years. This is important because we are fed untruths that it only started recently or that the problem was the guns that people own. This is why some incidents of stabbings, assaults with cars, and similar types of mass violence were included. Also, I felt that it was important to include a type of mass violence rarely reported on (or studied) such as familicide. If someone kills six members of their family, is not that also mass violence? I think so, and that is why it was included.

As I applied a whole community approach to preventing mass violence, it became clear that every community was unique, so they would need options and ideas, not a boilerplate template. Not every community has a proactive police force or emergency management agency. In fact, some agencies are only reactive at best, so it might be up to community members to be the proactive force for preventing mass violence. This was the reason for including the two coalition building chapters. This way, when a public safety agency cannot or will not undertake this type of project, the community members can take it upon themselves to make a difference. Included was ways that the community coalition could find resources in their local area that were inexpensive or free. This was done to give them the best chance of finding the experts needed to protect their community.

Finally, it would be impossible to name every industry and to provide all of the mitigation measures that would be needed in one book. As I said throughout this manuscript, every community has unique aspects, and that uniqueness needs specific plans that are not general strategies. For that reason, I included a number of industries and some generic ideas to inspire the reader to think critically. While some of the mitigation measures make work for various industries, it is important to make sure they fit and work in your unique community.

It is my hope that this manuscript and the book itself will provide inspiration and a cultural change of how we approach and try to reduce (or eliminate) mass violence. As a country, we should not want to sit around and do nothing, then expect different results, yet for the most part, this is what we are doing. In order to stop these senseless killings, we need to be proactive in stopping them before they happen, not reactive and waiting until an incident happens before something is done. Will you do your part in your community to help prevent mass violence?

1

Introduction

Over the last 20 years, Americans have seen mass violence occur again and again. It seems that rarely a week goes by before we hear about another mass shooting or random act of mass violence. The number of such incidents appears to have grown during the coronavirus pandemic and beyond. We have heard about a car running over a crowd of people, a teenager shooting classmates at school, and a disgruntled former employee randomly shooting people. There have also been reports of an entire family being slain before the perpetrator turns the weapon on themself and other acts of mass violence. We also have witnessed riots that destroyed businesses and taken over parts of major cities. We have even seen the United States Capitol penetrated by perpetrators. The nightly news reports these stories regularly: if it happens in your geographical location, you are left to deal with the aftermath. Unfortunately, the public, future victims, and the perpetrators of mass violence also watch the news, some of which describe every gory detail, thus burning images into the public's mind.

When the news reports these incidents, they often delve deep into the life of those committing mass violence. Often, uninformed general public or public safety entities allow nefarious individuals to conduct these acts without being caught until after killing, maiming, or destruction. Had the warning signs been recognized and acted upon, for example, understanding what to do and whom to contact, it is conceivable that the whole incident could have been averted. Many years of research have revealed that more proactive communities and increased awareness of warning signs may have entirely prevented a large portion of incidents.

Let us look at the responses to these acts of violence. We see that some individuals in America want to claim that the American gun culture is to blame. Yet, in contrast, others want to blame the lack of mental health care. In most instances, nefarious acts may be considered nothing more than domestic or international terrorism. Sometimes these acts are perpetrated by someone with a mental

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breakdown or having a massive pity party. In some instances, it is an act of suicide, but they want the world to know their name. Some perpetrators believe that a particular group of people, a certain religion, or a specific race of people are the enemy. These types of incidents are "hate crimes," and more often, they should be classified as such. Equally, some blame almost anything on hate crimes and do not fit the criteria. Dumping the data from these crimes into other classifications adds to the difficulty of classifying acts of mass violence and researching any underlying factors.

One key factor often overlooked by public safety agencies and the community is the mindset regarding the potential for mass violence within their community. Many have trouble comprehending that an incident of mass violence could happen in just about any jurisdiction, including theirs, at any time. It may be due to having an abundance of faith in the community or feeling that the community is too small to have such an incident. Vital warning signs that there is the potential for an act of mass violence can be missed. Public safety leaders might stick their heads in the sand while the world around them moves on. When these crimes occur, they often look for a scapegoat or someone (or something) to blame it on.

In the world we now live in, it is essential to realize that mass violence can occur anywhere and at any time. It was not that long ago that people believed that an act of mass violence could not happen in a community of 600, let alone a mass shooting. Even so, on November 5, 2017, 26 people were killed while attending church in Sutherland Springs, Texas, with a population of 600. Similarly, many people did not think they had to worry about a vehicle ramming into a crowd and then the driver stabbing multiple people on a college campus. Yet on November 28, 2016, the driver of a car rammed a group of people, jumped out, and then stabbed numerous victims on the campus of Ohio State University. These incidents, and hundreds like them, should force the public and public safety agencies to realize that there are vulnerabilities everywhere. These might include using almost any type of conceivable (and some inconceivable) weapons. Before September 11, 2001, very few people thought a jumbo jet could be used as a weapon of mass destruction.

Many in the public safety field might deal with mass violence incidents only through reactive measures (rather than proactive ones), some prayers, and a little luck. If public safety agencies have a piecemeal approach to preventing mass violence, it is less likely to avoid larger-scale violence. Public safety agencies overlook one key point: they are not lone wolves because the perpetrators are in a community to. If we strategically use their local businesses and citizens in their community and teach them what to look for (situational awareness), the potential for a mass violence incident would be substantially less.

The text in this book is not here to play Monday morning quarterback. It does not intend to lay the blame at any individual or agency's feet. It provides strategies

that can, and will, help to prevent future death and destruction. To do this, we should first reflect on (and understand) past mistakes. When we look at the Columbine School Shooting, we can see that the tactics used during a mass shooting (at that time) were to create a perimeter around the incident and to wait on Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT). After the death and destruction perpetrated at Columbine High School in Colorado, it was time to understand what went wrong and create new strategies and actions. While police officers were waiting for the SWAT Team, more violence was committed. Instead of waiting while those with nefarious intentions continue killing and injuring innocent victims, law enforcement after Columbine will hastily put together a contact team to engage the shooter, potentially saving more lives. Why did we change strategies? Because we learned from our mistakes of the past!

Public Safety is often slow to change, especially with new and emerging issues. Many do not like change, and some will not even consider change unless forced by some other entity. We only need to look at the attacks that took place on September 11, 2001, and the National Incident Management System (NIMS) requirements to see how resistant and hard many public safety agencies will fight change. There were many instances of outright refusal to accept using the NIMS method of incident management, even leading to the federal government making it a requirement and tying federal funding to being NIMS compliant (Warnick, 2020). There is a saying among the fire service that would hold true in most public safety disciplines; "250 years of tradition, unimpeded by progress" (author unknown). Essentially, this saying tells us that tradition often seems more important than progress to some public safety agencies.

When public safety entities decide to progress on an issue, they will often approach the problem in a piecemeal fashion. For example, they may only focus on mass shootings involving guns rather than looking at the bigger picture of mass violence. By not implementing a holistic approach, they fail to recognize that mass violence incidents can include many weapons. While many of the same preventative and response measures would be similar, they rarely consider the bigger picture. Some agencies put their primary focus on responding to acts of mass violence, but they do not identify prevention strategies, mitigation strategies, or recovery strategies. Again, they take a piecemeal approach rather than a comprehensive strategy and plan that builds resilience in their community.

This book will guide how to begin the implementation process using the holistic tactic of a Whole Community Approach. While the text may not cover everything the local community may face due to each community's uniqueness, it will provide the foundation and a thorough understanding of how to organize to create resiliency against mass violence. One central issue that will be addressed is that leaving mass violence prevention in the hands of one local agency opens the door to missing key warning signs.

Involving the community increases the likelihood of the number of individuals who know what they should be looking for and how to report it. A city with 50 police officers could realize that they now have 10,000 stakeholders trained to spot warning signs and are willing to work with law enforcement collaboratively and cooperatively. Rather than 50 sets of eyes looking for individuals who may be a threat, there could be 10,000 sets of eyes. This increases community safety exponentially.

Actively staying informed and reporting not only those with the potential to commit mass violence but almost every type of threat helps keep the community safe. Law enforcement strategies are useless unless community members play their part in keeping the community safe. If community members do not report crimes, threats, and suspected threats, law enforcement is essentially flying blind. Law enforcement cannot take actions to prevent or even respond to criminals or suspected criminals if they do not receive reports. Face it; law enforcement cannot be everywhere at any time. They need tips and information from the public.

As we navigate this book, there should be no confusion. There are standard definitions that everyone understands, and some definitions are open to interpretation. We must all be on the same page, so to improve the reader's understanding of these concepts described and presented will be explained. For that reason, key concepts must be defined, especially those that will play a critical role in preventing mass violence.

1.1 Definitions

Fundamental understandings must be defined to provide a baseline for the discussed constructs. To fully understand the concepts you will learn, it is essential to make sure that you thoroughly understand what is meant when specific words are used. These definitions will also be necessary to the local government and the community when they are involved in preventing mass violence—many in the media, the public, and even public safety misuse many of these words. Definitions alter according to the agency that uses them, whether federal, state, local, media, or social media causing a lack of universal definitive agreement or "misuse" of the terms and their definitions. Using multiple definitions means that regional and state governments must identify which description fits their community. It is essential to understand what is being discussed when (a) describing an incident, (b) describing actions that should be taken, or (c) reporting occurrences within your jurisdiction.

1.2 Mass Violence

The first term that will need to be defined is "mass violence." Perhaps the most unclear portion of understanding an act of mass violence is in identifying what it is and what it entails. Depending on whom you talk to, the term mass violence

(including mass shooters, active shooters, and rioters) is entangled in a subjective mess that lacks a conclusive definition. Essentially, it depends on who you are and your motivations, which helps to provide the explanation that will be used. To better understand why there is no authoritative definition, we should explain why it is so confusing. Please know that any loss of life is a tragedy; however, mass violence is even more heinous because of the higher loss of life.

While the federal government has created bills and laws that deal with mass violence, they have never officially defined mass violence. The absence of a precise definition by United States lawmakers means there is no standard. Not only are lawmakers absent in defining it, but there is no universally accepted definition of the term among researchers, the media, or the public. The use of the term is up to the user of the word to determine if it fits the criteria for the incident they want to describe. This often leads to confusion and, in some cases, false claims.

Additionally, there is no widely accepted stance on ancillary injuries that may occur during these acts of mass violence. For example, if someone broke their arm, tripping over someone while running away from mass violence, should this be considered part of the act of mass violence of a mass shooter? What if the act committed was running over victims with a truck? Should one or both examples be considered a separate injury from mass violence? When someone jumps out of a window to escape a hail of gunfire and sustains an injury, should the injury be considered part of the mass shooting incident? Or was this a choice of someone who may not have suffered a mass shooting injury? Depending on the person collecting the information, this could be part of the crime or an accident that occurred during the crime. Most law enforcement agencies rightfully list these as injuries that would not have happened had the offense not been committed. However, the public or media may not concur with that perspective.

The term mass violence is often interchanged and defined in the eye of the user, at least in the initial use while describing an incident. When the media uses these terms, but the law enforcement agency believes that the crime does not meet the threshold, and conflict sometimes arises between the two. This definition often suffers misuse by being centered more on the agenda behind the description than a specified meaning.

When we speak about agenda, it is usually believed that anyone having an agenda will use it for an adverse action. It should be realized that pursuing an agenda is not always for nefarious reasons. If the media outlet believes it meets its threshold and will raise viewership and potentially increase advertising, they use the definition that fits the need. This holds especially true when undefined phrases, such as that of mass violence, have no concrete, definitive description of what constitutes such an act.

Equally, a law enforcement agency may somewhat push the definition for multiple reasons. Law enforcement agencies must report crime statistics to the Federal

Bureau of Investigation (FBI)'s Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) system. The UCR is the official national repository of crime data. Unfortunately, crime reporting through the UCR system is subjective, so what may be reported as an act of mass violence in one city may be something else in another. Depending on the guidance from a mayor or the top law enforcement official in a community, the same act of mass violence could potentially be reported differently by two different law enforcement agencies. Some of the information may not even make it into the UCR report.

Historically, the FBI defined a mass murderer as someone who committed an act of violence that killed four (or more) people in a single incident, and the count did not include the murderer or shooter (Krouse & Richardson, 2015). While this definition is helpful, it does not account for other similar acts of violence in a gray area or distinct types of violence.

An example may be a turf war between gangs and a drive-by shooting: two individuals committing a drive-by shooting spray a dozen rival gang members with bullets, killing four of them. When reporting the incident statistics, it must be determined whether this should be listed as an act of mass violence (murder), a gang war, or some other type of incident. Another example might be a domestic terrorism event that was a hate crime. Would it be classified as mass murder, a hate crime, domestic terrorism, or something else? Because of many descriptions for the UCR and various other reported agencies, these reports can be classified as better or worse than they are. They are also often subjective because they are classified in the eye of the beholder.

In using the FBI's criteria for a mass murderer, it is essential to realize it is set as a casualty threshold of four fatalities, excluding the offender or offenders. What happens when there are only one or two deaths but many injuries? Does this not meet the definition of mass violence because only one person died, even though 18 were shot and injured? To be consistent in our definition, we need to consider incidents when less than four individuals were killed, but others suffered injuries. Since there is no universal definition for mass violence, other entities have developed their definitions, which, with divergent interpretations, help confuse what mass violence is.

A website known as the mass shooting Tracker states, "We define a 'mass shooting' as a single outburst of violence in which four or more people are shot. This is different from mass murder as defined by the FBI" (Mass Shooting Tracker, n.d., para. 1). An in-depth review of this website reveals that the organization is in favor of gun control. Among the mass shooting data, there is at least one instance where the listed individuals had been shot with a BB gun but were listed as victims of a mass shooting. Further research into the website revealed that four victims included the shooter's death or injury (Mass Shooting Tracker, n.d.). While this book does not (and will not) take any side in the gun control debate, it does

show how having no clear definition of mass shootings and other forms of mass violence leads to subjective definitions that may make it appear as more (or less) acts of mass violence have occurred, dependent on the person or organization providing the data.

Another definition disagreement is the inclusion of shooting incidents involving multiple victims in connection with another crime or a domestic dispute. This refers to mass shootings that stem from domestic and gang violence, which are often not indiscriminate killings, even in public locations. This has caused contention in some individuals believing they should be treated separately. In research conducted in 2000, Lott and Landes excluded any felony-related shooting. Similarly, in 2002, Duwe, Kovandzic, and Moody excluded incidents where victims and perpetrators were involved in illegal activities. In a more recent study, Gius (2015) identified only incidents in a relatively public area where victims were randomly chosen.

Even more confusing is whether to count domestic violence mass shootings. If a spouse decides to kill their family and themselves, should this be considered a mass killer, a mass shooter, or domestic violence? Does it fit into both categories? If mass shootings in public places are being discussed, then domestic violence that includes four victims in a home should most likely not be counted as mass violence, or should it? What about the domestic violence that spills over into the spouse's work and includes at least four victims? Should that be declared a mass shooting?

There is a vast discrepancy between what is believed should be included in a mass shooting and what should not. When looking at the numbers from various sources, the Rand Corporation (2018) stated that "Depending on which data source is referenced, there were seven, 65,332, or 371 mass shootings in the United States in 2015" (p. 267). As can be seen, by the vast differences between numbers, the number of mass shooting incidents can be a source of contention. This makes it difficult for the American population to determine the real numbers. Without extensive research, most people, including public safety, will not know the proper depth and magnitude of the problem.

If we look at the Investigative Assistance for Violent Crimes Act of 2012 (which was signed into law in January 2013), it provides a unique and narrow definition of mass violence. This law defines mass violence as a single act resulting in at least three victims, not including the perpetrator (H.R. 2076). While most likely well-intentioned, it allowed particular organizations and individuals to skew mass violence results to meet their agenda. While the name of the popular database will not be mentioned, it was found that there were acts of self-defense labeled as mass shootings. In a self-defense incident, a man was in his home when three men entered his house brandishing handguns. The man protected his life with his personally owned firearm. This incident technically met the criteria of mass violence;

however, it was not a preconceived act of violence, nor was it technically a crime that met mass shooting or mass violence standards by most definitions.

A similar incident that involved a barroom brawl where a victim was brutally beaten but was able to stop the assault by shooting his attackers was also counted as an act of mass violence (mass shooting) by some who gathered data. One question that should be asked is whether self-defense should be counted as a mass shooting or not. In the case of this manuscript, self-defense will not be counted as an act of mass violence or a mass shooter.

Let us look at the FBI verbiage for a mass shooter. The FBI and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) define mass murder as murdering four or more people during an event with no cooling-off period between the murders (Department of Homeland Security, 2008). A mass murder typically occurs in a specific location where one or more people kill several others (DeFoster & Swalve, 2018; Fox & Fridel, 2016).

For this book, the author will define mass violence as:

> *An act of violence using any weapon, with no discontinuation of an intent to harm (cooling-off period) that results in physical, emotional, or psychological injury affecting four or more people (not including the perpetrator).*

It is also essential for local and state governments to find their acceptable definition, teach that definition, and write it into their policy. Writing it into policy will assist in documenting and reporting crime based on a consistent definition rather than leaning toward what political powers want. All it would take is one person within your agency to under or over-report mass violence (or any other term), which would skew the crime data results. Of course, to make good decisions, we must have good data.

1.2.1 Mass Shooting

Using much of the same knowledge used to determine mass violence, we can see that the definition should be specific to avoid confusion. While there is no widespread official consensus for a death or injury threshold, many use the FBI and DHS criteria for a mass shooter. In many instances, they will also provide a victim threshold of four fatalities by firearm, excluding the offender or offenders (Duwe et al., 2002; Gius, 2015; Krouse & Richardson, 2015). While this may seem logical, it also leads to other controversies. This definition does not incorporate incidents where fewer than four victims were killed, but multiple victims were injured. It does not include when multiple victims die, but fewer than four victims' deaths resulted from gunshots, even though this act had more deaths.

According to Ressler et al. (1988), the FBI classification of "mass shooter" was established to clarify criminal profiling practices, and little to no thought was put into data collection or statistical analysis. Due to the lack of guidance from a federal entity, a wide section of law enforcement agencies, the media, and researchers have each created their definitions of how many individuals were injured or killed.

To qualify for a mass shooting, some researchers have provided various definitions with varying thresholds for inclusion in their research. This range can include two to four victims that died. In calculating the total number of deaths, some report figures include the shooter, while others do not. In some instances, there is also a specific number of injuries or deaths and injuries that must be suffered to qualify for their research, television broadcast, or some other form of record keeping.

Just like defining mass violence, there is no consensus on including shooting incidents with multiple victims linked to other crimes. For example, should gang violence, organized crime, drug wars, and various other crimes (that can lead to numerous deaths or injuries) be included in mass shooting data? We need to determine whether to include these types of mass shootings or whether they are distinct types of crime that lead to mass shootings. We also need to distinguish them in our policies for clarification purposes.

Like the definition of mass violence, there is no consensus on whether domestic violence should be considered a mass shooting. This becomes more challenging to discern in some cases, especially when it happens outside the home or develops into familicide. For example, there could be a spouse that takes a firearm and shoots their partner and other immediate family members, or there could also be a spouse who goes to a place of employment and kills their significant other and shoots multiple individuals in the process. We would then need to ask ourselves if this was a mass shooting in both cases, one case, or neither case. Should we use the term "indiscriminate killing" to identify the acts of a mass shooter, or should we include the statistics of those with whom the perpetrator is familiar or has a familial connection?

Because so many define this term utilizing many variables, a specific definition should be defined so that everyone reading this book knows and understands what is being discussed. For this book, a mass shooting will be defined as:

> *An act of violence using a firearm, with no discontinuation of an intent to harm (cooling-off period) that results in physical injury affecting four or more people (not including the perpetrator).*

As mentioned in the definition of mass violence, local and state governments must identify their description of a mass shooter by writing it into their policy.

Defining it in policy will assist in documenting and reporting crime statistics based on a consistent definition. It will help prevent skewing the results to fit a specific agenda.

1.2.2 Active Shooter

The definition of an active shooter is perhaps the most misused term regarding mass violence. We often see media outlets using the term "Active Shooter" for days and weeks after an incident is over. This does not coincide with any definition of the word. Utilizing this word for an incident that is over has confused the general public, which will, in turn, use it to describe mass shootings or mass violence.

One key thing to remember about "active shooters" is that the term refers to a dynamic situation. It is not an incident that occurred two hours or two weeks earlier. The word active in this context means that individuals are still busy wreaking havoc with their weapons. They are aggressively and actively trying to harm or kill others at that exact moment. When describing a past event, the word active should not be used unless it is in the past tense (e.g., "We had an Active Shooter, and they are now in custody").

Another critical attribute to remember is that there is no consensus on the weapon used. The term active shooter, defined by the FBI and the DHS, does not include only firearm use. The FBI and DHS define an Active Shooter as an individual "actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area" (Department of Homeland Security, 2008).

The FBI and DHS definition does not mention or identify a type of weapon, thereby leaving the definition open to interpretation when there is the use of a weapon other than firearms. This means that defining the term could include (but not be limited to) knives, swords, explosives, automobiles, and more. Also, note that it does not identify a specific number of victims, nor does it identify someone engaged in other criminal activity or domestic violence. As previously mentioned, this allows inconsistent data to be published. Without a specific definition with controlled parameters, data can be skewed.

Using much of the same knowledge discussed in mass violence and mass shooting, we can see that the definition should be specific to avoid confusion. While there is no widespread official consensus for a death or injury threshold, many use the FBI and DHS criteria for an active shooter. We see discrepancies in the threshold of how many fatalities using firearms versus nonfirearms. It might include whether multiple victims were injured and whether the figures were inclusive of the perpetrator.

Just like defining mass violence and mass shooter, there is no consensus on whether to include shooting incidents with multiple victims connected to crimes.