THE VIOLENCE PROJECT

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COMPREHENSIVE DATABASE OF MASS SHOOTERS RELEASED FOR PUBLIC USE

Researchers call for data-driven public policy

[**SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA, 11/19/19**] – The Violence Project, a nonpartisan think tank, has publicly released the largest, most comprehensive database of mass shooters in the United States.

This new database, funded by the National Institute of Justice, the research arm of the U.S. Department of Justice, was developed by professors Jillian Peterson and James Densley and a team of students at Hamline University in St. Paul, Minnesota. It includes 171 mass shooters from 1966 to 2019, each coded on 100 pieces of life history information. The entire database is downloadable for free at **www.theviolenceproject.org**.

"Mass shootings are a complex issue, requiring multiple avenues of prevention," says psychologist Dr. Jillian Peterson, "The goal of this project is to ground our public policy discussions in data and develop evidence-based policies to prevent these tragedies."

The mass shooters in the database each shot and killed four or more people in a public space, including schools and houses of worship. They were 98% male and 52% white, with an average age of 34.

Most mass shooters were in crisis prior to the shooting and suicidal, and almost half of them leaked their plans in advance. 62% of mass shooters had a criminal record and 57% had a violent history. 70% of mass shooters knew at least some of their victims.

This database is the first to look closely at the mental health histories of mass shooters. Among the 171 mass shooters, two thirds had a mental health diagnosis or presented mental health concerns. This is only slightly higher than the 50% of people in the general population who will meet criteria for a mental illness in their lifetime. However, a mental health diagnosis does not mean that the actions of mass shooters are directly motivated by their symptoms. The database shows that 16% of mass shootings are at least partly motivated by psychosis – which is less than the percentage that of shootings motivated by domestic issues, employment changes, interpersonal issues, and hate.

This is also the first database to look closely at how many shooters obtained their guns. The majority of mass shooters use handguns (77%) and 25% used assault rifles. Of the known data, 77% of shooters purchased at least some of their guns legally, 13% made illegal purchases, and 19% stole guns.

"Mass shootings have increased in recent years, both in the number of incidents and the number of people killed", sociologist Dr. James Densley explained. "Mass shootings are rare but routine events. We now have the data to understand that routine and disrupt it before it's too late."

The Violence Project is a nonpartisan think tank dedicated to reducing violence through research and analysis. Visit **www.theviolenceproject.org**.