

Review of Factors and Considerations for Decision-Making

Full Disclosure of Excerpts from

Making Prevention a Reality: Identifying, Assessing, and Managing the Threat of Targeted Attacks. 2017. FBI Behavioral Analysis Unit—National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime.

RISK FACTORS¹

Risk factors are existing realities about the person of concern that may increase the risk of violence he poses in a given situation. They are already in place at the time of assessment. Risk factors, as opposed to the *behaviors* a person may demonstrate (discussed later), can either be static or dynamic. Static risk factors are historical or dispositional, will not change over time or will change very slowly, and are not amenable to intervention (e.g., gender, history of prior violent acts). Dynamic risk factors are situational or clinical, and can and do change, often rapidly (e.g., weapons possession, illegal drug abuse). Some risk factors are highly interrelated with behaviors (e.g., current access to a gun (risk factor) and actively attempting to acquire more guns (behavior)).

¹ Making Prevention a Reality: Identifying, Assessing, and Managing the Threat of Targeted Attacks. 2017. FBI Behavioral Analysis Unit—National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime

FACTOR	SIGNIFICANT DESCRIPTORS	CASE NOTES
Personality disturbance or disorder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paranoia, narcissism, borderline personality, psychopathic or significant antisocial tendencies, or significant and sustained anger manifestations, can all increase risk of targeted violence. • Can cause a person of concern to believe violence is justified/acceptable. • Facets may include: low empathy for others, abdication of personal responsibility, habitual projection of blame onto others, persistent belief that others are malevolent, or chronic belief in one's own superiority over others. 	
Severe mental illness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Severe mental illness slightly increases the risk of general violence. • Major depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia or other psychotic disorders can all feature psychotic symptoms which may elevate risk. • Symptoms of special concern include command hallucinations, delusional beliefs of persecution or control, hostility, and grandiosity. 	
History of suicidality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person of concern has threatened/attempted suicide in the past. • Evidence of suicidal thoughts is reflective of lost hope. May be accompanied by acceptance of the consequences for behaving violently toward others. • Suicide often contemplated by targeted violence offenders before they decide to attack; instead, they choose to punish those they feel drove them to their plight. 	
Organized	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persons of concern that have a demonstrated ability to organize behavior, regardless of any superficial appearance of illogical or incoherent speech or personal presentation, then they are potentially able to plan and carry out an act of violence. 	

Firearms and edged weapons	<p>Possession of, access to, experience or familiarity with weapons are all risk factors because they improve one's ability to carry out the act.</p> <p>Edged weapons and stabbing instruments have been successfully used in attacks as well; they are often more accessible than firearms.</p>	
History of stalking, harassing, threatening, or menacing behavior	<p>This spectrum of behavior may indicate low empathy, general disregard for rules and limits, or defiance of authority. These behaviors could also represent attempts to or actual breaches of security. If demonstrated as a pattern, it may also indicate the person has become habituated to engaging the world in an aggressive manner, potentially lowering inhibitions about escalating to violence.</p>	
History of non-compliance with limits and boundaries	<p>Violations of protective orders or terms of probation, flouting of private property lines (in furtherance of harassing activities, for example), and disregard for rules at school or work, all fall within this category of behavior.</p>	
Isolation	<p>Living in physical or emotional isolation from others, particularly from family and friends,</p>	

	deprives the person of concern of emotional support often needed to work through life's difficulties and challenges. The person has no one to rely upon.	
Instability	Financial, residential, professional, familial and/or social instability all potentially interfere with the person of concern's ability to become and remain grounded and to feel emotionally safe and secure. Instability in these spheres of life can lead to grievance formation, serve as stressors, and erode coping mechanisms.	
Others are concerned	When behaviors exhibited by the person of concern cause fear in others, stakeholders should take notice. They may not be able to precisely articulate all of the behaviors which concern them; they just know they are troubled.	

Warning Behaviors

Unlike risk factors, warning behaviors are dynamic and represent changes in patterns of behavior that may be evidence of increasing or accelerating risk. When warning behaviors are evident, they require a threat management strategy and operational response. They are, for the most part, proximal behaviors, occurring more closely in time to a potential act of targeted violence.

The body of knowledge about warning behaviors is based upon research of and experience with attackers and assassins of celebrities, politicians, and other public figures; psychiatric patients who have engaged in violence; adolescent mass murderers and school shooters; adult mass murderers; spousal homicide perpetrators;

workplace violence offenders; and federal judicial threateners and attackers. For each “successful” targeted violence offender with any given behavioral past, there are likely many more who exhibited similar behaviors, but never attacked. Warning behaviors cannot *predict* targeted violence, but are useful in identifying accelerating risk which should elevate concern.

FACTORS	DESCRIPTORS	CASE NOTES
Preparation	The person of concern may acquire the equipment, skills, and/or any other resources necessary to conduct the attack. This can include obtaining weapons and gear as well as familiarization of and practice with the weapons. The person may conduct an actual or virtual rehearsal of any aspect of the attack. It can also include farewell writings or other end of life planning, or creation of artifacts meant to be left behind to claim credit and explain motive.	
Breach	This step involves circumvention of security measures or boundaries at the target location. Breach activities can include conducting dry runs, engaging in approach behaviors to include stalking, and testing security at the target location. This definition to include cyber intrusion behaviors where these breaches may be intended to identify security plans and weaknesses, gain protected information about a target, or otherwise further an attack plan via unauthorized access to systems. Breach behavior may occur immediately prior to an attack, or earlier.	
Attack	An offense may involve violence against both preplanned and opportunistically chosen targets. Both practical and symbolic acts may occur. The violent offense is the culmination of a highly personalized quest for justice which may, ultimately, only be fully understandable to the offender.	

<p>Fixation warning behavior</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any behavior that indicates an increasing preoccupation with a person or a cause may be fixation warning behavior. • It can be demonstrated by an increased focus on the person or cause, and/or an increasingly negative characterization of the same. • Frequency and duration of the person of concern’s communications about the fixation may significantly increase. • Opinions may become more rigid, and speech and actions may appear angrier. Social or occupational deterioration can occur as the person loses interest or ability to focus on these aspects of his life. 	
<p>Identification warning behavior</p>	<p>The person may adopt a “pseudo-commando” identity or warrior mentality, A preoccupation with firearms and a desire to use them for revenge may be evident.</p> <p>The person may view himself as an agent to advance a particular cause or belief system.</p> <p>The practical aspect of identification warning behavior may feature an unusual fascination with weapons or other military or law enforcement paraphernalia. This can be demonstrated through actual weapons, ammunition or paraphernalia purchases, or through virtual activities such as intense preoccupation with and practice on first-person shooter games, or in-depth on- line research of weapons</p> <p>A psychological aspect of identification may involve physical costuming, immersion in aggressive or violent materials, or fantasizing about offending violently.</p>	

<p>Novel aggression warning behavior</p>	<p>Act of violence which appears unrelated to any “pathway” behavior <i>and</i> which is committed for the first time. The person of concern may be engaging in this behavior in order to test his ability to actually engage in a violent act and it could be thought of as experimental aggression.</p>	
<p>Energy burst warning behavior</p>	<p>Increased pace, duration, or range of any noted activities related to a potential target, even if the activities themselves seem harmless. Can be overt or stealthy behaviors and have been noted to occur usually in the hours, days, or weeks before a targeted violence incident.</p>	
<p>Leakage</p>	<p>Communication <i>to a third party</i> of intent to do harm to a target through an attack. The leaked information to the third party could be overt: “I am going to kill my classmates tomorrow;” or it may be less direct: “Don’t come to school tomorrow, but watch the news.”</p> <p>BAU broader view: expressions, whether or not they are communicated to others, which seem to convey thoughts, feelings or intentions to do harm, are all considered leakage. For example, creating an animated video depicting a mass shooting would be concerning behavior, regardless of whether it is posted or shared with others.</p> <p>Leakage can be readily identifiable, self-contained messaging, or more of an accidental or a gradual release of information that reveals clues related to the person’s thoughts, planning, or intentions.</p> <p>When leakage in any form is discovered, it should be recognized as such and not dismissed as fantasy writing or mere venting; it may be fantasy or it may be an indication of something more serious.</p>	

<p>Directly communicated threat warning behavior</p>	<p>Statement of intended violence made to the target or to others before the act is implemented.</p> <p>The threat may be implicit or explicit, and communicates a wish to harm or kill the target or another person(s). This is often the least common among the warning behaviors.</p>	
<p>Approach behavior</p>	<p>A person of concern's attempt to gain proximity to a target is considered an approach.</p> <p>an approach may be intended for nefarious purposes such as pre-attack surveillance. The method and means of how an approach is made may be indicative of final acts of preparation, level of energy expended, or escalation. Having protective measures in place may not limit, prohibit, or prevent approach behavior. Approach behaviors can be exhibited in activities such as trespass, stalking, burglaries, and criminal mischief.</p>	
<p>End of life planning</p>	<p>Terminal behaviors which may or may not be closely associated with the desperation of last resort thinking.</p> <p>Examples include making a will or documenting last wishes, giving away one's possessions, getting one's "house in order," or any other behavior indicating the person of concern may be making arrangements to accommodate the end of their life in the near future.</p>	

Last resort warning behavior

This behavior includes communications or actions indicating increasing desperation or distress, or indicating that the person of concern perceives no alternatives to violence.

It may include a time or violent action imperative. A time imperative is an expressed sense that time is running out or a deadline is looming. A violent action imperative is an expressed sense that nonviolent options have evaporated or that violent action is justified.

Drastic changes in appearance or personal caretaking may be present, potentially indicating either preparation to act or mental decompensation, or both.

Examples have included dramatic weight loss, shaving head hair, cessation of hygiene or suddenly appearing unkempt, or a significant disruption in sleeping or eating patterns. Additional last resort behaviors demonstrating a sense of desperation might include sudden onset of reckless sexual, financial, or other acts that suggest a lack of concern for future consequences.