

Researchers Discuss How To Prevent Mass Shootings

By [Sarah Boden](#) • Feb 9, 2018



At Friday's symposium "[Responsible Reporting of Gun Violence](#)" at the University of Pittsburgh, researchers discussed how to prevent mass shootings.

[Russell Palarea](#), an operational psychologist who works in Bethesda, Maryland, works to thwart intentional and targeted acts of violence. He said that it's a myth that people snap and then commit mass violence.

"People make decisions to commit violence," he said. "In targeted violence situations, that decision often is a burning grievance that builds over time, or seeking notoriety or infamy that builds over time."

Palarea said that it's important to help a person resolve these grievances

and then monitor that individual as their desire to commit violence can ebb and flow. He said that in some instances, people might need to be monitored for years, such as one case he's been involved with since 2014.

"Our concern for violence risk is lower than it used to be because of where the subject is in their life right now," said Palarea. "But I know, based on that person's issues—psychopathy—that this person is at risk for committing violence again, and my client is one of the potential targets. So I'm still monitoring that case."

Monitoring might include watching someone's social media, speaking with family and neighbors about the threat, and also talking with the subject and maybe helping them resolve their problems. In extreme instances, a dangerous person might be hospitalized or incarcerated.

Some people carry out mass shootings not due to a grievance, but because they crave attention. Criminologist [Adam Lankford](#) of the University of Alabama said these murderers know media coverage of them will be negative and they still find it validating.

Lankford suggested to stop this cycle, journalists should stop publishing a mass shooter's photo and name. But he says other details, like an offender's background or behavior, or how the attack was carried out, aren't as motivating to potential copycats.

"Perpetrators are often worshiped as gods, heroes, kindred spirits and sex symbols," he said. "So when you think about what type of media coverage is most dangerous, it's not necessarily the details about how something happened. It's about who did it."

Lankford said, however, that a suspect's name and photo should be made public during an ongoing law enforcement search for that individual.

