



From Red Flags to Warning Signs: Perceptions of School and Mass Shootings

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Abstract

Two studies examined people's perceptions of school and mass shootings, with a particular focus on factors perceived to influence the perpetration of school and mass shootings (e.g., mental health, interpersonal rejection, disregard) as well as warning signs exhibited prior to the shootings. In Study 1, focusing on mass shootings, 395 Prolific workers completed a Qualtrics survey. Participants in Study 2, examining perceptions of school shooters, were 150 undergraduate or graduate students. Respondents in both studies perceived mental illness/psychological problems and lack of empathy as key influences on a mass/school shooter's motivation to engage in the behavior. Additionally, posting violent content on social media was the behavior identified as the top warning sign for both school and mass shooters. Although respondents in both studies perceived the reporting of warning signs to be very important, of those who had witnessed suspicious behavior, 70.5% in Study 1 and 62.1% in Study 2 did not report it. This could stem from the lack of training in identifying warning signs reported by participants in Study 1 (82.0%) and Study 2 (38.7%).

Keywords: disregard; intervention; prevention; training; warning signs