

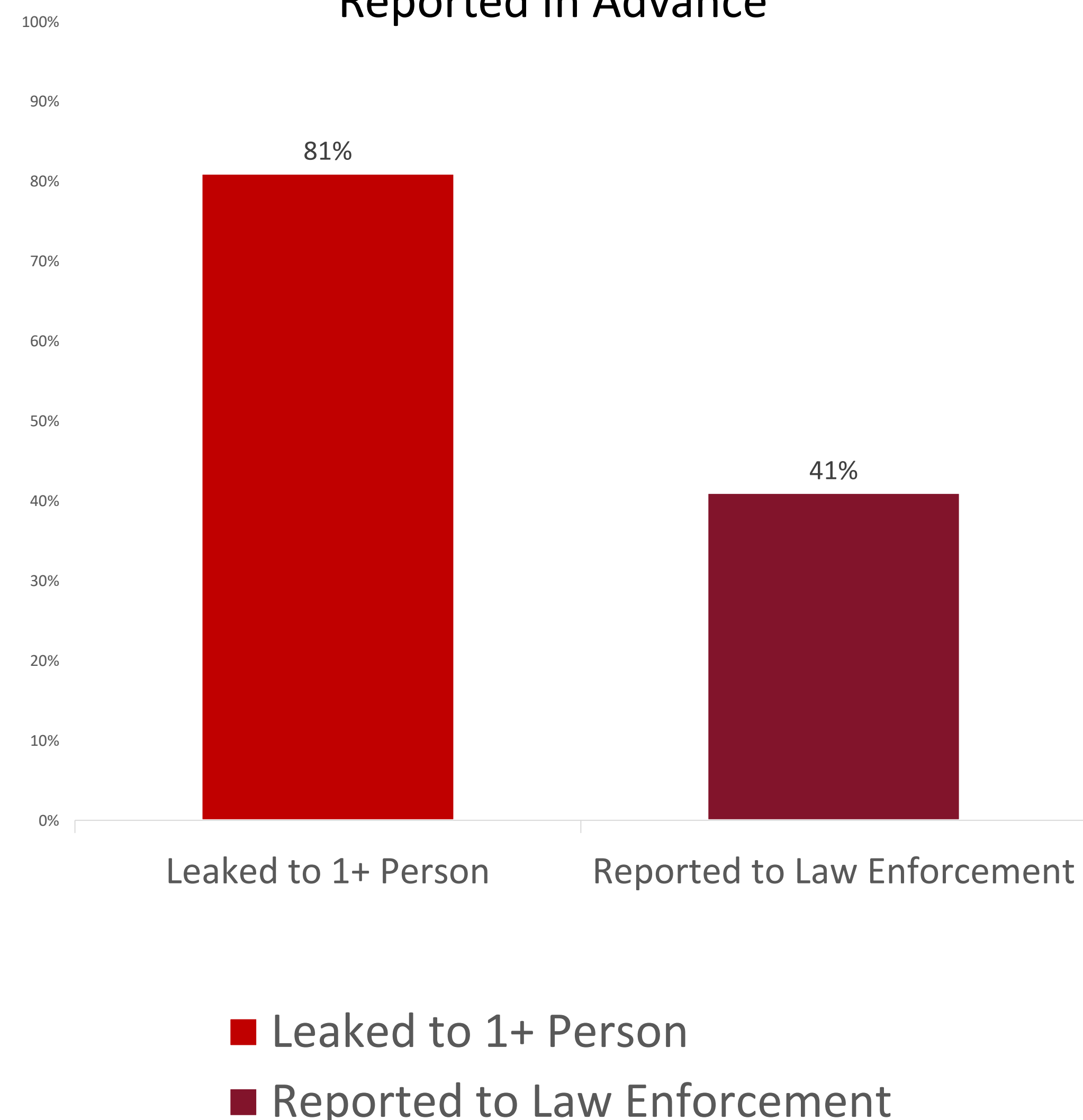
# Access to Specialized Threat Assessment Teams to Prevent Mass Shootings

Julie N. Dismang, B.S., & Kristine M. Jacquin, Ph.D.

## SUMMARY

- Many school shootings can be prevented by recognizing warning signs and knowing the individual (Lankford et al., 2019; Silver et al., 2018b).
- In the deadliest shootings, there has been an increase in warning signs and higher likelihood of being reported to law enforcement before the shooting (Lankford et al., 2019).
- Policies should be implemented at various levels to identify and intercept potential school shooters before shootings are carried out.

Percentage of Mass Shootings Leaked or Reported In Advance



## IDENTIFICATION OF RISKS

- Key warning signs for targeted violence: pathways, fixations, identifications, novel aggression, energy burst, leakage, last resort, and directly communicated threats (Lankford et al., 2019; Meloy et al., 2015; Silver et al., 2018a)
- Leakage: displays of emotions or thoughts of future violence (Lankford et al., 2019; Meloy et al., 2015)
- Leakage occurred over 50% of the time (Lankford et al., 2019; Silver et al., 2018a; Silver et al., 2018b; Vossekuil et al., 2004)
- Secret Service study reported in 81% of school shootings, one person or more knew of the possible attack (Vossekuil et al., 2004). See Figure.



- 2000 to 2013: 41% of U.S. mass shooters were reported to law enforcement before the shooting because of warning signs (Lankford et al., 2019). See Figure.
- School shooters have a different profile than other offenders, making typical police techniques – e.g., examining criminal history and associates, and interviewing potential shooters – less effective (Lankford et al., 2019).
- Law enforcement training is on the response to shootings, not on the ability to identify them (Lankford et al., 2019).

## POLICY APPLICATIONS

- Knowledge of an at-risk individual combined with knowledge of the psychology of school shooters could improve identification of valid threats.
- Ensure all schools have access to a threat assessment team
  - State-level clinical psychologist
  - District-level school psychologists
  - District-level police (ex. resource officer)
- The team should be trained specifically on school shooters.
- Policy should require team investigation: Individual's psychological and social background; warning signs; and interviews with the individual and their family, friends, and teachers (Goodrum et al., 2018; Silver, 2020).
- If sufficient warning signs are found, mandatory psychotherapy should be required for at-risk individuals by a clinical psychologist specialized in school shooters.
- Integrate current and future research on best practices for monitoring the individual during and after treatment.



Police SWAT team at Columbine High School shooting on April 20, 1999. Source: coloradopolitics.com

## REFERENCES

- Capellan, J. A., & Gomez, S. P. (2018). Change and stability in offender, behaviours, and incident-level characteristics of mass public shootings in the United States, 1984–2015. *Journal of Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling, 15*(1), 51–72. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jip.1491>
- Goodrum, S., Thompson, A. J., Ward, K. C., & Woodward, W. (2018). A case study on threat assessment: Learning critical lessons to prevent school violence. *Association, 5*(3), 121–136. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tam000104.supp>
- Lankford, A., Adkins, K. G., & Madfis, E. (2019). Are the deadliest mass shootings preventable? An assessment of leakage, information reported to law enforcement, and firearms acquisition prior to attacks in the United States. *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice, 35*(3), 315–341. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1043986219840231>
- Lin, P., Fei, L., Barzman, D., & Hossain, M. (2018). What have we learned from the time trend of mass shootings in the U.S.? *PLoS ONE 13*(10). <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0204722>
- Meloy, J. R., Mohandie, K., Knoll, J. L., & Hoffmann, J. (2015). The concept of identification in threat assessment. *Behavioral Sciences and the Law, 33*(2–3), 213–237. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bsl.2166>
- Silva, J. R., & Greene-Colozzi, E. A. (2019). Fame-seeking mass shooters in America: Severity, characteristics, and media coverage. In *Aggression and Violent Behavior* (Vol. 48, pp. 24–35). Elsevier Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2019.07.005>
- Silver, J. (2020). Space between concern and crime. *Criminology & Public Policy, 19*(1), 253–270. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9133.12474>
- Silver, J., Horgan, J., & Gill, P. (2018a). Foreshadowing targeted violence: Assessing leakage of intent by public mass murderers. In *Aggression and Violent Behavior* (Vol. 38, pp. 94–100). Elsevier Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2017.12.002>
- Silver, J., Simons, A., & Craun, S. (2018b). *A study of the pre-attack behaviors of active shooters in the United States between 2000 and 2013*. The Federal Bureau of Investigation. <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/pre-attack-behaviors-of-active-shooters-in-us-2000-2013.pdf/view>
- Vossekuil, B., Fein, R. A., Reddy, M., Borum, R., & Modzeleski, W. (2004). *The final report and findings of the safe school initiative: Implications for the prevention of school attacks in the United States*. United States Secret Service. [https://www.secretservice.gov/sites/default/files/2020-04/ssi\\_final\\_report.pdf](https://www.secretservice.gov/sites/default/files/2020-04/ssi_final_report.pdf)