



# LAY PROFILES OF MASS AND SERIAL KILLERS

Kelli Terrell & Dr. Narina Nunez

# Introduction

- Per the latest FBI analysis, mass shootings in the United States have increased three-fold in the last fifteen years (Blair & Schweit, 2014).
- There have been 78 mass shootings in the United States since 1978, killing a total of 547 people and injuring an additional 476 individuals, this number is rapidly growing and has drawn widespread coverage from the media (Bjelopera, 2013).
- A recent study found that as mass shootings rose so did media coverage of the shootings, honing in specifically on the shooter(s) themselves, rather than the victims, creating both contagion and copycat effects (Johnston & Joy, 2016) (Mills, 2016).
- Mass shootings induce fear in individuals, due to the seemingly random nature of the events and the inability to predict and prevent incidents (Fox & Delateur, 2013).
- One explanation as to why mass shootings occur is the assumption by the public and media that the perpetrator has a mental illness (Knoll & Annas, 2016).

# Mass Killer vs. Serial Killer

- No generally accepted definition of a mass killer exists.
- The United States' Congressional Research Services defines mass shooting “incidents occurring in relatively public places, involving four or more deaths- not including the shooter(s)- and gunmen who select victims somewhat indiscriminately” (Bjelopera, 2013).
- Public Law 112-265 as three or more killings in a single incident (United States Congress, 2013)
- The unlawful killing of two or more victims by the same offender(s), in separate events (FBI, 2005)

# Hypothesis

- It was hypothesized that society profiles mass murderers in a very specific way that contradicts the reality of who the offenders are statistically shown to be.
- It was correspondingly hypothesized that a mass murderer is labeled more commonly as mentally ill and socially isolated than a serial killer, regardless of the death toll.

# Materials

- Informed Consent
- Serial or Mass Killing Condition
  - Brief crime scenario
  - A note about weapon consistency
- Extended Response Questions
  - Assess profile of offender before multiple choice questions, motive, and any other defining characteristics of the offender.
- 12 Multiple-Choice questions
  - Race
  - Age
  - Gender
  - Religion
  - Mental Health
  - Likelihood to engage in domestic violence
  - Likelihood of abuse in childhood
  - Education
  - Relational status
  - Sexual orientation
  - Income
  - Country of offense

# Procedures

- Consent to participate
- Randomly assigned to mass killing or serial killing condition
- Read a brief crime scenario- 9 deaths in each
- Answer extended response question of characteristics that may encompass the profile of the killer.
- Answer multiple choice questions in randomized order
- Extended response questions of motive of the offender and any other defining characteristics

# Data Analysis

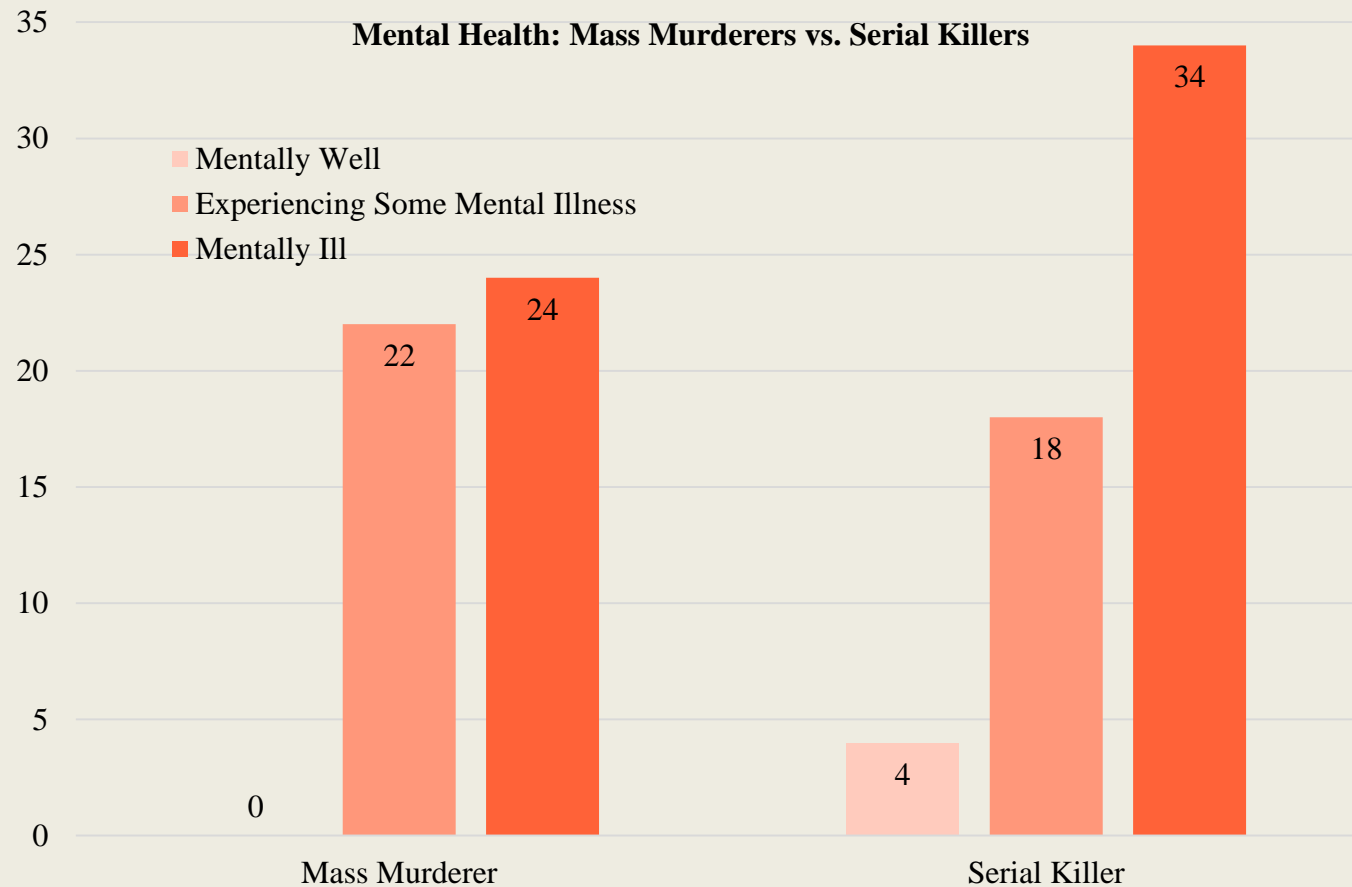
- Multiple Choice Questions
  - Chi-square for mental health
  - Table for remainder of data
- Extended Response Questions
  - Coding scheme that focused on five categories: physical characteristics, cognitive processes, offense behaviors, social history and habits, and emotional characteristics
  - Coding scheme was derived from Richard Kocsis's study Psychological Profiling of Arson Offenses: An Assessment of Skills and Accuracy (2004)
  - Undergraduate lab research assistants read participants answers and entered a 0 if the participant did not mention or another number indicating that they did mention that specific characteristic in their response

# Participants

- 102 Participants from the University of Wyoming
  - 36 Males
  - 66 Females
- 17-36 Years Old
- Ethnicity
  - 90 Caucasian
  - 7 Hispanic
  - 3 Asian American
  - 1 African American
  - 1 Classifying as Other



# Results- Offender Mental Health



- Serial killer: Real-world data shows 67.4% to be classified as mentally well
- Mass killer: Statistics show 89% of mass killers are in fact labeled mentally well
- For this study, mentally well was classified as having no previous diagnosis of a psychological disorder

# Results- Multiple Choice

		Serial Killer		Mass Killer	
		Student Participant Profiles	Real World Statistics	Student Participant Profiles	Real World Statistics
Offender Gender	Male	56(100)	92(100)	44(95.7)	154(96)
	Female	0	0	2(4.3)	6(4)
Offender Age	18 or younger	0	37(40.2)	0	-
	18 to 30	38(67.9)		46(100)	(29)
	30 to 50	17(30.4)	52(56.5)	0	-
	50 or older	1(1.8)	3(3.3)	0	-
Offender Ethnicity	Caucasian	49(87.5)	(52.2)	43(93.5)	(64)
	African American	2(3.6)	(38)	0	(16)
	American Indian	0	--	0	-
	Hispanic/Latino	0	(7.6)	0	-
	Asian/Asian-American	0	--	0	(9)
	Other	5(8.9)	(2.2)	3(6.5)	-
Offender Religious Beliefs	Christian	13(23.2)	--	5(10.9)	(94)
	Islam	1(1.8)	--	3(6.5)	(6)
	Hindu	0	--	0	-
	Non-Religious	42(75.0)	--	37(80.4)	-
	Other	0	--	1(2.2)	-
Offender Mental Health	Mentally Well	4(7.1)	62(67.4)	0	-
	Experiencing Some Mental Illness	18(32.1)	30(32.6)	22(47.8)	-
	Mentally Ill	34(60.7)		24(52.2)	-
Offender Likelihood to Engage in Domestic Violence	Regularly	32(57.1)	--	8(17.4)	76(57)
	Occasionally	16(28.6)	--	23(50.0)	-
	Rarely	8(14.3)	--	12(26.1)	-
	Never	0	--	3(6.5)	57(43)

# Results- Multiple Choice Continued

		Serial Killer		Mass Killer		
Offender Abused in Childhood	Regularly	22(39.3)	(68)	15(32.6)	--	
	Occasionally	19(33.9)		21(45.7)	--	
	Rarely	10(17.9)	(32)	7(15.2)	--	
	Never	5(8.9)		3(6.5)	--	
Offender Highest Level of Education	Post-Graduate School	5(8.9)	65(70.2)	0	-	
	Bachelors	9(16.1)		9(19.6)	-	
	Associates	6(10.7)		7(15.2)	-	
	High School Diploma	26(46.4)		28(60.9)	-	
	GED	2(3.6)		27(29.8)	2(4.3)	-
	Less than High School	8(14.3)			0	-
Offender Sexual Orientation	Homosexual	1(1.8)	(66)	0	-	
	Heterosexual	48(85.7)		(44)	43(93.5)	-
	Bisexual	4(7.1)	1(2.2)		-	
	Asexual	3(5.4)	2(4.3)		-	
Offender Socioeconomic Status	Rich	0	--	0	--	
	Upper	1(1.8)	--	2(4.3)	--	
	Middle	32(57.1)	--	4(8.7)	--	
	Low	18(32.1)	--	38(82.6)	--	
	Not Applicable	5(8.9)	--	2(4.3)	--	
Offender Relational Status	Married	3(5.4)	28(30.4)	0	-	
	Engaged	0		65(70.6)	0	-
	In a Relationship	3(5.4)	2(4.3)		--	
	Single	50(89.3)	44(95.7)		--	
Country in which Offense Occurred	United States	52(92.9)	--	42(91.3)	-	
	France	0	--	1(2.2)	-	
	Russia	1(1.8)	--	0	-	
	Not Applicable	3(5.4)	--	3(6.5)	-	

# Results- Extended Response

			Serial Killing Condition	Mass Killing Condition
Physical Characteristics	Gender	Not Mentioned	17	13
		Male	10	33
	Age	Not Mentioned	22	19
		18-25	4	27
		36-45	1	0
	Ethnicity	Not Mentioned	25	35
		White	1	11
	Build	Not Mentioned	17	36
		Thin	0	5
		Average	1	2
		Solid/Muscular	8	3
	Height	Fat	1	0
		Not Mentioned	23	40
		Short	0	2
		Average	2	1
	Hair Color	Tall	2	3
		Not Mentioned	26	43
		Blonde	0	2
Brown		0	1	
Hair Style	Black	1	0	
	Not Mentioned	27	42	
	Short/Straight	0	1	
Facial Hair	Long/Straight	0	3	
	Not Mentioned	27	45	
	Long/Full Beard	0	1	
Cognitive Processes	Familiarity with Offense Location	Not Mentioned	25	42
		Familiar with area where the offense took place	2	4
	Comfort with Offence Location	Not Mentioned	26	42
		Comfortable with area where the offense took place	1	4
	Relation/Familiarity with Victims	Not Mentioned	24	42
		Prior relation or familiarity with victims	3	3
No prior relation or familiarity with victims		0	1	

# Results- Extended Response Continued

Cognitive Processes	Motive 1	Not Mentioned	3	4
		Revenge	19	26
		Excitement	5	5
		Political Agenda	0	2
		Mental Condition	0	9
	Motive 2	Not Mentioned	22	33
		Revenge	0	1
		Excitement	2	0
		Mental Condition	3	12
	Planning	Not Mentioned	22	45
		Some planning	4	0
		Carefully planned	1	1
	Sexual Motive	No remorse	1	1
Not Mentioned		25	46	
Weapon	Sexual motive	1	0	
	Not Mentioned	12	31	
	Weapon specified	9	7	
Social Habits and History	Relational Status	Weapon not specified	6	8
		Not Mentioned	26	46
		Single	1	0
	Level of Education	Not Mentioned	25	23
		Completed High School	0	23
		Completed University Degree	2	0
	Employment Status	Not Mentioned	22	23
		Student, not yet employed	1	23
		Full-time	4	0
	Religion	Not Mentioned	27	43
		Religious	0	3
		Non-Religious	0	0
	Friendship	Not Mentioned	25	32
No Friends		2	13	
Casual Relationships		0	1	
Emotional Characteristics	Violence	Not Mentioned	23	43
		Mentioned violent tendencies of the offender	2	2
	Anger	Not Mentioned	21	32
		Mentioned anger of the offender	4	13
	Aggression	Not Mentioned	21	44
		Mentioned Aggressive tendencies of the offender	4	1

# Discussion

- Implications include safety, prevention, and better understanding of mental illness.
- If there was a more wide-spread knowledge of who the individuals are committing these crimes, prevention efforts would be more effective in both early identification and averting future casualties.
- After each mass shooting incident, the following four assumptions generally arise: mental illness causes gun violence, a psychiatric diagnosis can predict gun crime, shooting represent the deranged acts of mentally ill loners, and gun control won't prevent another shooting (Metzl and MacLeish, 2015).
- Student's as participants

# Limitations

- Only assessing college students be both a strength and a limitation.
- No inter-rater reliability checks were performed on the extended response coding which may affect results as several research assistants coded the data and may not have coded it identically.
- Another limitation was the lack of data available for comparison in the mass shooting condition.
  - This does however highlight the importance of this research and necessitates further research of this population to provide a more complete profile.

# Follow-up Studies

- Assessing different ages of the population
  - Media Exposure
- Shooter suicidality
  - May be the cause of limited real-world statistics on profile of a mass killer
- Multi-location shootings
- Disparities between wounding and killing victims



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QUESTIONS?