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## Experiences of Law Enforcement in Workplace Violence Threat Investigations

Heather Folkestad  
*Walden University*

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Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

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Heather Folkestad

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Review Committee

Dr. Jessica Millimen, Committee Chairperson, Psychology Faculty

Dr. Chris Kladopoulos, Committee Member, Psychology Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost

Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University

2025

Abstract

Experiences of Law Enforcement in Workplace Violence Threat Investigation

by

Heather Folkestad

MA, Bethel University 2016

BS, University of North Dakota, 2009

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Forensic Psychology

Walden University

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## Abstract

A significant social problem affecting law enforcement investigations into workplace violence is the lack of threat assessments and threat management programs performed in workplace investigations. Collaboration with law enforcement early in workplace violence investigations has significant benefits within the corporate sector. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the experiences of law enforcement officers/agents involved in targeted violence workplace investigations. Areas of focus were the collective perspectives of participants regarding the use of threat assessments, inclusion of law enforcement, and the barriers to an effective investigation within the workplace and by community law enforcement. This study utilized the conceptual framework of self-efficacy and idiographic theory to explain the experiences of law enforcement during threat investigations into targeted violence in the workplace. Ten participants volunteered and completed the interview for study participation. Key findings of this study included the identification of the importance for threat assessment programs, the importance of threat assessment training and the importance of early engagement of law enforcement. These findings demonstrated the need for strong collaboration and communication between law enforcement and community workplaces, to ensure societal safety and early violence mitigation strategies. The results of the study help provide positive contributions in behavioral threat assessment and targeted workplace violence investigations.

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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to those in law enforcement agents and officers. Thank you for the bravery, courage and selflessness you show each day you choose to protect our communities.

To my girls, who remind me every day to smile and be happy. To my oldest, never give up when it gets hard. You are smart and incredibly talented, and I am always in your corner to remind you of that. To my youngest, always be your inquisitive and sassy self. Keep learning and sharing your smile. The world is a better place because of you both and I love you beyond words.

To my family, thank you for being my people and my home. To my brother, you are my lifelong best friend and the best brother I could have ever asked for in my life. To my mother, you are more than what any mom could aspire to be for her kids and a greater friend to me. To my father, thank you for the moments of fun, truth and learnings that made me proud to be your daughter. To Joel Folkestad, thank you for the patience while I navigated this journey of my education and career.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Recent decades have seen an increase in threat assessment needs regarding targeted violence in schools, hospitals, criminal justice, and workplaces (Occupational Safety and Health Administration [OSHA], n.d.). Threat assessment and threat management is the investigation into the identification, assessment, and management of risks of targeted violence by potential offenders (Fein et al., 1995). Fein et al. (1995) sought to gather information related to the targeted violence an individual poses. In forensic psychology, the risk of targeted violence assessments has been critical in the early mitigation and monitoring threats (Rousseau et al., 2023). Threat assessments can be utilized in expert testimony, research, creation of workplace violence prevention policies and legislation, and psychological evaluations. In the assessment of clinical hospital or criminal hospitalizations, threat assessments have consistently been utilized to make informed decisions regarding incarceration and release of offenders (Bergkamp et al., 2023), determining level of recidivism, support in mitigation planning and assisting in the knowledge of violent pathway behaviors. Incorporating aspects of psychology and law enforcement, targeted violence assessments are aimed at recognizing the reactive and proactive strategies associated with targeted violence attacks (Simons & Melroy, 2017).

Targeted violence in the workplace has become the second highest reason for workplace fatalities and nonfatal injuries in the United States in recent decades (OSHA, n.d.). Therefore, targeted violence investigations in the workplace will require the

collaborative effort of many key stakeholders within the organizations and professionals trained in threat assessment. The decades-old practice of being reactionary instead of proactive in response to targeted violence has been under scrutiny after the uptick in workplace violence instances (Capellan & Lewandowski, 2019). Threat assessment research began with the significant contributions by the U.S Secret Service and has now developed into a large behavioral science field of study. With structured professional judgement (SPJ) tools such as the Workplace Assessment of Violence Risk (WAVR-21; White & Meloy, 2016), Communications Threat Assessment Protocol (CTAP-25; James et al., 2023), and others, these investigative resources should be utilized in providing law enforcement a holistic picture of where the offender is on the violent behavior pathway and understand more about risks to the community.

Law enforcement engagement is typically a reactionary response to an active and immediate threat like an active shooter. The practices and policies of law enforcement have a lot to do with the reactionary approach to targeted violence. Community policing for example is considered a police reform that moves from reactionary to proactive engagement with communities, seeks to problem solve and minimize potential dangers (Fielding, 2018). Community policing is a crucial component to building the trust needed to engage in necessary investigations of potential threats. However, intelligence-led policing, a concept introduced in the post-9/11 era of threat investigations (D. L. Carter & Carter, 2008), has created a new paradigm of law enforcement moving into the intelligence gathering of threat investigations prior to a targeted violence act. Combining

the initiatives of the post-9/11 intelligence-led policing and community policing engagement, law enforcement must navigate a complex society, navigating trust and safety while establishing trust. The aim of this qualitative study was to understand the experiences of law enforcement engaged in threat assessments regarding workplace settings. This introductory chapter will highlight the significance of targeted violence, threat assessments and law enforcement engagement in workplace investigations.

### **Background**

Targeted violence in the workplace is a growing concern within the United States. Rates of targeted violence in 2020 were 173 reported (U.S. Secret Service, 2023), with the concern that this is an under representation due to lack of reporting in some areas. With instances of targeted violence in the workplace having increased in the last decade over previous, the U.S. Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC) has monitored stages of threats (Carlock & Cutler, 2023) and provided law enforcement with data and training around behavioral threats. The NTAC conducts research of threat assessments where they work to identify protective factors, risk factors, warning signs, and assessment data, that can be provided to law enforcement agencies. To further aid in the attention and mitigation of threats in the workplace, OSHA has required organizations with employees to adhere to the definition of workplace violence, provide training programs and have supportive resources.

The approach to threat assessments is that violence against another is not impulsive but rather targeted and often premeditated (Low et al., 2023). The threat

assessment approach in criminal investigations, criminal behavior or judicial proceedings focuses on the subject's behavior and thoughts to assess their progression on the pathway to violent actions (Parfitt, 2022). SPJ tools have assisted in the consistent categorization and assessment of offender behaviors who commit these acts. Interrater reliability and validity of resources such as the CTAP-25 (James et al., 2023), WAVR-21 (White & Meloy, 2016), secret service threat assessment, and a few others have been widely accepted within the community of threat assessments and criminal court proceedings. WAVR-21 is becoming more popular with this focus on workplace assessments. In recent years, a new SPJ tool used to measure behavioral threat assessment in law enforcement settings has been created and shows promising results (Jones et al., 2021). There is little known about the experiences by law enforcement within the threat investigations of corporate violence or threats. Threat assessments help to demonstrate whether warning signs of individuals who committed crimes were seen and ignored or missed and can assist in determining whether behaviors displayed represent warning signs that can disrupt the society's sense of safety and security. The U.S. Secret Service continues to be the largest repository of information and training of threat assessments (Ennis et al., 2015) with respect to lone mass shooters, and new threats such as "involuntary celibates" (i.e., "incels"). In 2018, a gunman went to a local yoga studio in Tallahassee, Florida, and shot six women, killing two of the six before killing himself (NTAC, 2022). Prior to this attack, the gunman engaged in many instances of criminal behavior and communication directed towards women who failed to desire or develop a relationship with him (NTAC,



2022). The gunman lost jobs and was trespassed from many public places for his behaviors before he committed his attack (NTAC, 2022). The increase in research surrounding targeted violence, behavioral threat assessment and workplace violence continues, but understanding law enforcement experiences in workplace threat investigations is still lacking research.

### **Problem Statement**

Targeted workplace violence can and does occur for multiple reasons, such as worker grudges against another or the company, intimate partner violence, hate crimes and many others. Through research of the increase in workplace violence acts, a gap in the collaboration of law enforcement has been identified (LeBlanc & Kelloway, 2002). Also, workplace investigators identify early mitigation and threat assessments before acts of violence are enacted. One of the most significant social problems is the lack of threat assessments performed in workplace investigations that are transitioned to law enforcement, for further investigation or awareness. Investigations that fail to assess the pathway to violence and engage with law enforcement authorities early, can have severe and fatal results. The U.S. Secret Service NTAC is a repository of threat assessment statistics and research. This agency works across the country to identify the risks facing communities and has identified that many of the targeted violence attacks occur in workplace settings (Carlock & Cutler, 2023). Although considerable research has been done on threat assessments, little research has been conducted on the law enforcement official's experience with workplace threat assessment investigations. Efforts for

community-led policing and the integration of intelligence-led policing will require stronger collaboration between employers and law enforcement officials. This study's aim was to understand the experiences of those in law enforcement who have navigated the dynamic of working with employers within investigations.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study explored the experiences and thoughts of law enforcement agents or officers regarding the threat assessment investigations conducted in the workplace. Corporate workplace investigations into targeted violence were examined from the perspective of the law enforcement agent or officer, from their responses during the study.

### **Research Question**

Research question: What are the experiences and thoughts of law enforcement agents or officers regarding threat assessment investigations conducted in the workplace?

### **Conceptual Framework**

Self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997) posits that an individual's personal beliefs have an impact if they can or cannot achieve a desired goal or outcome. According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy is situationally driven and is influenced by an individual's experiences, social perspectives and interpretation of physiological responses. Research has demonstrated that higher self-efficacy has a positive relationship with positive outcomes such as job performance and achievements (Somers & Terrill, 2022). Self-efficacy regarding law enforcement agents/officers is their belief about their abilities to

effectively perform their duties. Increasing self-efficacy within law enforcement professionals throughout their career is critical (Somers & Terrell, 2022). Public engagement of law enforcement into workplace violence has been minimally studied. This study explored the agent's/officer's experience and self-efficacy when engaged by the public on targeted violence investigations in the workplace. Self-efficacy theory was used as a guide to understand how the engagement of law enforcement agents or officers within workplace investigations has impacted their confidence.

Idiographic theory posits that there are general principles and patterns found in groups of individuals (nomothetic) and within the individual (idiographic; Frumkin et al., 2020). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this German historian, Wilhelm Windelband coined the phrases of Nomothetic and Idiographic to describe two different approaches to understanding (Castro-Schilo & Ferrer, 2013 & Florell, 2019). Nomothetic was meant to isolate the characteristics and patterns associated in group settings, while idiographic conversely focused on the individual. These principles can be viewed and categorized to demonstrate universally or culturally accepted characteristics or traits in individual(s) (Florell, 2019). In 1937, psychologist Gordon Allport brought the nomothetic and idiographic approaches to the American psychology arena. The idiographic approach to psychology is focused on the individual and their distinct characteristics and patterns of behavior (Florell, 2019). Threat assessments are SPJ tools that are individual case driven (idiographic) based on targeted violence scenario, rather than violence risk assessments based on aggregated group (nomothetic) data. Idiographic psychological approach aligns with this with the

focus of this study on the individual experiences of the law enforcement agent/officer. In this study, I applied the idiographic approach theory to explain the impact of the experiences of law enforcement officers involved in corporate investigations, where threat assessments are utilized. The experiences of law enforcement officers engaged with workplace threat assessment investigations were analyzed using the idiographic approach to understand those in the sample population.

### **Nature of the Study**

To address the research questions in this qualitative study, the specific research design included basic quality study and analysis that followed Saldaña's (2016) descriptive coding process and the use of cycle coding. For this basic qualitative research design, I recruited participants employed in law enforcement for individual semi structured interviews. Interview protocols were developed to address the purpose of the study. Data was collected from 10 law enforcement agents recruited through social media platforms such as LinkedIn and referrals by posting an advertisement at local police departments. Inclusion criteria were that participants must work in law enforcement with at least 3 years on the force and have investigated two or more violent incidents or threats referred to by a company representative.

The data analysis followed Saldaña's (2016) descriptive coding process. Descriptive coding is used to assign labels to words or phrases in the data. First and second cycle coding means that the data are reviewed more than once using one or more

types of coding. Codes were categorized, which means synthesizing the codes into consolidated meaning. Categories were grouped into themes, which describe a process.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Targeted violence:* Targeted violence is the intentional, premeditated and deliberate act that precedes an act of aggression or violence (Meloy, 2015). These targeted violence behaviors act as a warning to planned or imminent attacks.

*Workplace violence:* Workplace violence poses a significant danger (Cai et al., 2023). Workplace violence is the act of nonfatal or fatal assault against another at the place of work by for the offender and or the victim.

*Threat assessment:* The systematic evaluation and management of potential threats of harm, violence or concerns by an individual or group of individuals through examination of behaviors on the pathway to attacks (Jones et al., 2021). Threat assessments use predicted principles of prior targeted attacks (case driven approach) to use in individual situations to prevent other attacks (Meloy et al., 2021). These assessments are comprised of sources of information to inform risk interventions and strategies (Jones et al., 2021).

*Threat management:* The intervention designed to mitigate and address targeted threatening behaviors by an individual's ("The Protective Power of Behavioural Threat Assessment (& Management) (BTAM)," 2020) Beginning when a concern is submitted, threat management involves proactive strategies to minimize overall danger to the individual and others.

### **Assumptions**

The primary assumption in this study was the assumed honesty of the participants in their answers to the screening questions to be included and the semistructured interviews. The experiences of those in law enforcement who have worked threat assessment cases of targeted violence in the workplace is the focus of this study. The results and the themes collected relied on the honest recollection of the participants. Crucial to the successful identification of the themes collected in the coding process, participants who were not honest with their recollection of worked investigations would result in a misrepresentation of experiences.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

This study focused on the collective law enforcement's experiences of threat assessment investigations in the workplace. This includes the perceptions of law enforcement of being brought into the workplace investigation, their perception of the positives or negatives of being engaged in targeted workplace violence investigations, and their experiences of working with workplace violence threat assessments. Gelles et al. (2002) encouraged the collaboration of law enforcement and mental health professionals to great advantage of understanding and responding to an offender's violent pathway behaviors and support better change in the field of threat assessment investigations. Although recent research speaks to the validity and utilization purpose of threat assessments, little research exists in the connection between threat assessment in workplace investigations and the engagement of law enforcement. This study contributed

to the need for understanding of law enforcement's role in targeted violence within the workplace. Participants who have law enforcement experience but have not been involved or engaged with workplace targeted violence investigations were not included as participants in this study.

### **Limitations**

One potential limitation of this study was finding law enforcement willing to participate in a study about threat assessments investigations. Although the questions did not ask about specific details of ongoing investigations, the willingness to have law enforcement officers discuss investigations openly was anticipated to be a challenge. Another aspect is the concern of the perception of law enforcement interviews being used against them somehow both publicly and privately. The intent of this study was for research and was not intended in any way to discredit, disrespect, or incriminate any officer or agency with respect to their investigation engagement.

### **Social Change Significance**

Threat assessments have also been making their way in the corporate sector in recent decades with the increase in expectations from OSHA (Simeone & Crimando, 2018). The threat assessment approach in criminal investigations, criminal behavior or judicial proceedings, focuses on the subject's behavior and thoughts to assess their progression on the pathway to violent actions (Parfitt, 2022). Agencies within local, state, and federal arenas have access to utilize professional forensic psychologists for expertise in criminology, research, behavior profiling, and crime scenario analysis. There is little

known about the collaboration of threat assessments within corporate investigations and the transition or integration of law enforcement.

Organizations that utilize threat assessment within their investigations but fail to engage with law enforcement regarding any identified risks and notable pathway to violent behaviors can have dangerous results. One of the most significant social problems is that there is a lack of threat and risk assessments, and management performed in workplace investigations and the information transition to law enforcement engagement. This research provides insights into law enforcement's experience with threat assessments in workplace violence investigations and contributes to a better understanding of their perspective on the relevance or importance threat assessment plays in protecting and serving the communities.

### **Summary**

The need to mitigate targeted violence in the workplace has increased, as the rate of both nonfatal and fatal acts of violence rates have risen. Research into workplace violence has demonstrated this to be a substantial concern in workplace safety and can lead to fatal outcomes (Jankovic et al., 2020). To address concerns of targeted violence in the workplace, many organizations are moving towards establishing a workplace violence program and threat assessment model. This model integrates various aspects of the organization including human resources, legal and employee support programs. Targeted workplace violence and threat assessment involve the identification, evaluation and the management of potential violence or threats in the workplace. Law enforcement is often



thought of as a resource to engage with after a threatening incident has turned into an active violent event. However, successful investigation into workplace violence will engage with law enforcement

This study captured the perspective and experiences of the law enforcement officers who have worked on workplace violence investigations involving threat assessments. The purpose of this study was to identify how law enforcement officers interpret being engaged proactively on threats, instead of being reactive, and how they interpret the engagement in their role as community servants/protectors of society.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The term *threat assessment* can have different meanings in different fields (Reid Meloy et al., 2011). For this study's purposes, threat assessment was focused on the behavioral assessment of individuals who exhibit violent, harassing, disruptive and/or aggressive actions or expressed thoughts (Reid Meloy et al., 2021). *Threats* are defined as the perceived danger posed by a person or event that can cause harm however severe to oneself or others, and the response to these threats are integral to keeping society safe (Reid Meloy et al., 2021). Behavioral threat assessments have a long history within forensic psychology and clinical psychology (Bergkamp et al., 2023) as a method for understanding the pathway or sequence of behavior and cognitive intent that an individual has for committing an act of targeted violence. Threat assessments, unlike violence risk assessments, are case driven, looking at targeted violence against an individual or group, allow for dynamic factors such as protective and mitigating factors, and are concerned with the planned violence actions underway (Concannon et al., 2024). Some targeted violence threats include obsessional stalking, bomb threats, shootings at schools, churches, and threats against individuals. Targeted violence rarely occurs without signs and can sometimes include explosive behavioral outbursts that display uncontrollable anger.

Additionally, targeted violence offenders are predominately following a pathway or sequence that leads to the violent event. Since 1998, the U.S. Secret Service has supported local, state, and federal agencies in the effort to reduce and respond to targeted

violence situations. Threat assessments have increased in necessity over recent decades with the rise in targeted violence events. Using behavioral threat assessment, law enforcement agencies provide vital information in the investigation, tracking and mitigation of targeted violence. From 2016 to 2020, the United States saw 173 mass target violence attacks and in 2021 (U.S. Secret Service, 2023), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI, 2023) reported 23,251 targeted violence offenses based on race, ethnicity, ancestry, religion, orientation, gender, and gender identity.

Threat assessments help to demonstrate whether warning signs of individuals who committed crimes were seen and ignored or missed or can evaluate whether behaviors displayed represent warning signs that can disrupt the society's sense of safety and security. The threat assessment approach in criminal investigations, criminal behavior or judicial proceedings, focuses on the subject's behavior and thoughts to assess their progression on the pathway to violent actions (Parfitt, 2022). Agencies within local, state and federal arenas have access to utilize professional forensic psychologists for expertise in criminology, research, behavior profiling, and crime scenario analysis. Considerable data exists on the law enforcement engagement on mass shootings, targeted violence situations, and offender and victim demographic information.

Behavioral science researchers have made significant contributions to validity and reliability of threat assessment instruments in assessing threats. Interrater reliability and validity of resources such as the CTAP-25 (James et al., 2022), WAVR-21 (White & Melroy, 2007), and a few others. Recent research has demonstrated that the CTAP

specifically has demonstrated significant support for the validity of the tool's ability to positively identify concerning communications in corporate cases (James et al., 2023). The WAVR-21 is becoming more popular with this focus on workplace assessments to support mitigating workplace violence and creating adequate early detection by organizations. However, there is little known about the experiences of law enforcement when they are engaged in corporate investigations derived from threat assessments. Threat assessments have also been making their way in the corporate sector in recent decades with the increase in expectations from OSHA (Simeone & Crimando, 2018). Although forensic psychologists are seeing the benefits of working with corporations to address mitigation plans, specific individual threat responses and assisting in mitigation plans, the gap in utilization is raising concerns about how the violent pathway of workplace violence prevention could be improved. This study examined law enforcement officers' experience and engagement within the workplace violence and threat investigations. This was a qualitative study that explored the experiences, perspectives and thoughts of law enforcement officers who have worked on at least two workplace violence investigations. This chapter outlines the literature search strategy, the conceptual framework relevant to the literature, and connectivity to the topic.

### **Literature Search History**

The literature search history used in this study includes keywords in multiple database search engines. These engines include Walden University Thoreau and EBSCO database, Google Scholar, U.S. Secret Service publications, and other research reports

provided by federal agencies. To ensure the authenticity and relevancy of the articles reviewed, peer-reviewed journals, accredited academic journals, and excerpts from scholarly academic books were utilized. Keywords to search and sort research results included *targeted violence, school shootings, mass shootings, workplace violence, threat assessment, behavioral threat assessment, law enforcement, corporate investigations, workplace threat assessment, and law enforcement threat assessment*. Searches for online databases were focused to be within the last 5 years, unless otherwise core to the foundation of the topic of threat assessment and law enforcement's role in assessing or responding to targeted violence. The theories utilized in the conceptual framework for this study fall outside the 5-year parameters but allow for the history of the well-accepted theory to ground the study's focus in understanding law enforcement's experience in corporate targeted violence threat cases.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Nomothetic and idiographic theory posits that there are general principles and patterns found in groups of individuals (*nomothetic*) and within the individual (*idiographic*; Frumkin et al., 2020). German historian Wilhelm Windelband coined the words "nomothetic" and "idiographic" in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to describe two different approaches to understanding (Castro-Schilo & Ferrer, 2013; Florell, 2019). Nomothetic was meant to isolate the characteristics and patterns associated in group settings, whereas idiographic conversely focused on the individual. These principles can be viewed and categorized to demonstrate universally or culturally accepted characteristics or traits in

individual(s) (Florell, 2019). Introduced in 1937, researcher Allport brought the nomothetic and idiographic approaches to the American psychology arena. This created a controversy among psychologists on the approach's ability to adequately explain the understanding of human experiences from a nomothetic perspective, as the thought of idiographic allows for more individualized experiences and not under generalizations.

In this study, I applied two psychological concepts—nomothetic and idiographic approach theory—to explain the impact about the experiences of law enforcement officers involved in corporate investigations, where threat assessments are utilized. The experiences of law enforcement officers who are engaged with workplace threat assessment investigations were analyzed using the nomothetic and idiographic approach to understand the characteristics shared among those in the sample population, against how they view the individualized characteristics of the offender. Threat assessments are SPJ tools that are individual case driven (idiographic) based on targeted violence scenario, rather than violence risk assessments based on aggregated group (nomothetic) data. The rise in targeted violence in the workplace has demonstrated a need for investigation and law enforcement support. The literature reviewed for this study identified a gap with respect to law enforcement's engagement with targeted workplace violence, through examination of targeted violence in the workplace, review of offender characteristics, threat assessment utilization and law enforcement response to targeted violence in the workplace.

## Review of Literature

### Targeted Violence in the Workplace

Targeted violence is any incident where an identifiable or potential identified offender poses a direct threat of violence toward a specific individual or individuals (Fein et al., 1995) and poses a significant threat to the safety of others (Doherty, 2016). From 2016 to 2020, the NTAC reported that 34% of mass attacks occurred in the workplace with most by current employees (Carlock & Cutler, 2023). The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that workplace violence is underestimated due to lack of reporting by employees, but accounts for 9% of all workplace fatalities in 2015 (Siegel et al., 2019). Although threats of violence are common and often the result of misplaced levity or emotional venting—with no intention of actualizing the violence (Mitchell & Palk, 2016), targeted violence is becoming increasingly more common. Publicized media coverage of mass shootings and the documentary of prolific targeted violence events has caused an increase in concerns about public safety. The targets of violent acts can vary in individual characteristics or even specific location and typically have direct meaning to the individuals making the threat. Within behavioral science research, targeted violence research is largely focused on mass shootings that result in multiple deaths and casualties, typically at schools, places of worship or other community locations. However, targeted violence is not limited to mass shootings and include a wide range of criminal acts including but not limited to stalking, harassing, assault (Harris & Lurigio, 2012).

In the past, analysis of the targeted violence events involved a post-situation assessment or a retrospective after-action report about what led to the event of that day. Statistics offered by nonprofit organizations in collaboration with National Institute of Justice Reporting, demonstrated that within the United States, there have been over 50 workplace violence events in the last 5 decades (averaging one every year) that resulted in loss of life and serious injuries (The Violence Prevention Project Research Center, 2023). Dr. Stephen White (2021, as cited in Melroy & Hoffman, 2013), a well-respected authority in the field of threat assessments in workplace violence, reported that while targeted violence in the workplace is not considered an epidemic, in 2010 there were 177 victims involved in incidents related to targeted violence in the workplace. In 2009, OSHA (n.d.) revised their workplace safety protocols for companies to include new workplace violence prevention programs. OSHA defines workplace violence as physical violence, harassment, intimidation or other threatening disruptive behavior that occurs in the workplace and can range from threats, verbal abuse to physical assaults.

There can be numerous reasons for why targeted violence occurs in the workplace. Andersen et al. (2020) studied workplace violence and threats that are becoming increasingly frequent in the private human service sectors. The utilization of the job-demand-control models was used to analyze the relationship between the psychosocial work environment and work-related threats and violence, high work demands, and low job control (Andersen et al., 2020). Andersen et al. also reported that high work demands, and low job control were associated with elevated workplace targeted violence.



The association between work demands and job control along with workplace targeted violence were mixed and required further study. Motivations for targeted violence include rejection of infatuation, grudges or feelings being wronged, anger for termination and discrimination or harassment against another. Targeted violence motivations will vary depending on how the offender feels or interprets the relationship with the intended target (White, 2021, as cited in Melroy & Hoffman, 2013) but can display typically consistent characteristics. In summary, attackers of targeted violence will demonstrate elicited concerns in family, friends, co-workers and others, have a history of aggression or intimidating behaviors or evidence of criminal arrests, are motivated by grievances, and experienced life stressors and perceived injustices (Carlock & Cutler, 2023). This study examines the experiences of law enforcement engaged in workplace violence investigations. Research into workplace violence is a critical component in law enforcement training. Workplace violence research allows for characteristics of offenders to be outlined and assessed.

### **Targeted Violence Offender Characteristics**

Predictors of workplace targeted violence offenders can be a challenge as the actions of the offenders can often go unnoticed and after-action assessments often demonstrate that though offender behavior was thought to be odd, it was not concerning to the victims. Media coverage of targeted workplace violence tends to be focused on the ex-employee who was angry over a termination or intimate partner violence that extended in the workplace. Analysis of mass attackers by the U.S. Secret Service determined that

nearly all targeted violence mass attacks were conducted by males (96%), were predominately Caucasian (47%) with an average age of 34 (Carlock & Cutler, 2023). Targeted planning occurs in 31% of the threat cases investigated and reported to the Secret Service (Carlock & Cutler, 2023). Some preparation behaviors include visiting, following, researching target and some plan to not survive the attack (Carlock & Cutler, 2023). The U.S. Secret Service (2023) also indicated that other intentional planning steps include acquiring weapons, documentation of items needed or intended targets created and creation of an attack plan. Training on how to identify, analyze, and mitigate targeted violence threats and not just behaviors by offenders is becoming increasingly necessary across the United States, as incidents such as terrorism, domestic violence, and stranger-on-stranger crime have risen.

The Bureau of Justice Statistics (Harrell et al., 2022) reported that from 1992 to 2019, there were approximately 18,000 individuals killed at work, while on duty or a targeted violence work-related incident by an offender. Data collected between 2015 and 2019 by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2022), indicated that male offenders committed over 60% of the targeted workplace violence offenses, of that 36% were committed by Caucasian offenders, 21% African American, and most were over the age of 30 at the time of the incident and 82% acted alone. Geck et al. (2017) discovered that of clinical files submitted by employers for mental health and risk assessments after an altercation at work, 72% of employees were aggressive during their incident, compared to 28% of those who were violent. Aggression and violence do not have to coincide and can occur

separately. Violence is more likely to occur when a criminal occurred in the offender's past. Silver and Craun (2023) discovered that criminal histories of offenders who had evidence of intention to carry out their threats were statistically significant in similarities to other threat offenders, meaning the ability to tell who or what is a more credible threat ambiguous. However, nearly 64% of researched offenders were known to have a prior criminal history (Carlock & Cutler, 2023). Employee safety is a priority for organizations, and they do their best to ensure that employee resources are equipped to support themselves to various emergencies and prevent disaster from occurring onsite, however, few have dedicated programs or professionals that identify threats of violence and respond accordingly.

In 2019, research discovered that workplace violence in the health sector discovered that verbal aggression was the predominate characteristic followed by bullying and racial discrimination (Sterbulle et al., 2019). With the underreporting of potential signs leading to the workplace violent events such as workplace shootings and assault, these offenders are often flying under the radar for early intervention until it becomes too late. Typically, lone actors of targeted violence are driven by a sense of injustice, injury to self, loss or perceived victimization and nearly all those studied harbor vendettas that are triggered by these injustices (Pathe et al., 2018). These offenders typically have prior moments of stress that are unaddressed and further compound continued perceived injustices. Other changes include mood, appearances, interactions with family, friends or coworkers, and sometimes increased substance use/abuse (Carlock

& Cutler, 2023). Research has shown that approximately 81% of studied targeted violence offenders, displayed evidence of psychological fixation prior to the attack (Brooks & Barry-Walsh, 2022). This study examines the experiences of law enforcement involved in targeted workplace violence investigations. The identification of violent offender characteristics helps to create an opportunity for threat assessments to be created and utilized in threat management programs within the workplace.

### **Threat Assessment and Threat Management**

Threat assessment instruments were created to help identify risk and protective factors for individuals who commit targeted violence. Conceptualization of threat assessment processing and analysis started in the early 1940s with the focus by the U.S. Secret Service Protective Research Section, whose purpose was to gather and analyze as much detail about individual(s) and groups who pose a risk to the U.S. President (Vossekuil et al., 2015). As threat assessments evolved from assessing danger to the U.S. President and other high ranking and public officials, threat assessments have expanded to now identify threatening behaviors and communications in individuals who pose a risk to the safety of society. Random attacks very seldom occur, and most offenders have made detailed plans to act out their attacks (Vossekuil et al., 2015). SPJ tools are nonclinical assessment tools designed to allow professionals to be trained in threat assessments during an investigation. Risk and targeted threat assessment SPJ tools are traditionally case-driven assessments that focus on the dynamic factors looking at behavioral indicators of planned violence. SPJs approach to assessments is based on

empirical research that has compiled risk factors to consider in the investigation and is at the professional's discretion. Common assessments such as those against stalking and intimate partner violence are often conducted by forensic psychology professionals or those trained in threat management, however the use of threat assessments has been increasing in recent years to coincide with the rise in threatening communications, behaviors and violent actions.

The CTAP is another assessment resource found to show strong support in workplace and targeted violence mitigation of threats. An examination of 62 cases referred to a Theseus threat assessment group, indicated that there is significant association with eight CTAP factors (escalation in anger/preoccupation, highly personal quest for justice, demand for money/apology, history of intrusive behaviors, prolific correspondence, known history of violence to others, amorous fantasies or delusions, and fantasies or beliefs in a shared past or density) and persistence of intentions of threats (James et al., 2023). Additionally, James et al. (2023), demonstrated that while the CTAP is not a predictive tool, it can help assist in investigations regarding threatening communications, it can help prioritize correspondences to aid in making faster responses to real time threats. Gerbrandij et al. (2018) focused on the assessment of intimate partner stalking (IPS) and intimate partner violence (IPV), and the aim to estimate the likelihood of a perpetrator committing acts against victims using the Brief Spousal Assault Form (B-SAFER) and Stalking Assessment Management form (SAM) threat assessment tools. Their research identified an overlap between IPS and IPV in low-risk offenders and that

threat assessment resources are demonstrating strong useability for those who utilize them in criminal investigations of offenders. Threat assessments can help law enforcement's investigation into threatening behaviors of offenders, but there are also assessments that can aid in workplace investigators in determining risk of threats.

The WAVR-21 V3 (White & Melroy, 2016) is an SPJ tool, a nonclinical resource instrument that is designed to measure warning risk factors of targeted violence in individuals 18 and older in the workplace or university setting (Cowan & Lankford, 2023). In a post incident analysis, researchers Cowan and Lankford (2023), studied the Virginia Beach Mass municipal mass shooting using the WAVR-21 V3 workplace threat assessment tool and discovered that there were 12 risk factors for violence that were prominent in the mass shooter's life and that he posed a significant threat of violence before committing the attack. Another assessment resource is the Cawood Assessment Grid (CAG; Cawood et al., 2020), that was also designed to assess violence in the workplace. Researchers Cawood, Scalora and Vinas-Racionero (2020), studied the predictive validity of the CAG assessment tool in workplace settings and its utilization importance, and discovered strong validity for the tool's predictive risk for physical violence. Additionally, the CAG tool demonstrated that with proper use, it can aid in early mitigation of threats in the workplace. Researchers Mitchell and Palk (2016) demonstrated through assessment review that threat assessment publications produced by law enforcement agencies such as the FBI or Secret Service, were more commonly used in threat assessment recommendations, therefore indicating that their methodologies lead

the way in responding to and mitigating threats. Additionally, these assessments can identify several common domains or themes of an individual who has threatened others. These include mental health, plan for enacting the threats, the motivation to make threats, access to weapons, substance abuse and if the individual has displayed any threatening attack behaviors. The benefits of threat assessments are that they are not only for clinicians, but also for the use of law enforcement and workplace professionals and allow for analysis and monitoring of the individual engaging in threatening behavior. Threat assessments performed before events of violence will demonstrate where early mitigation and threat management can minimize the violence risk to workplace settings and that the involvement of law enforcement can support community safety.

### **Reporting of Threats**

Reporting threatening behavior is critical in the management of safety and the mitigation of early violent incidents. Reporting begins with recognizing unusual behavior or statements made by another. Many organizations have employee safety programs where training is offered in recognizing the signs of threatening behavior, communications and encourage reporting these concerns to either security or human resources. While many agree that reporting threatening behavior is important, concerns of threats often are underreported and escalating matters to law enforcement are even less (Lankford et al., 2019). Reasons for the underreporting can include but are not limited to fear of retaliation, avoidance of responsibilities, lack of trust in justice process, minimization of threat (i.e., “no big deal” or “they don’t mean it”), lack of awareness into

what constitutes a threat and the common code of silence (Lankford et al., 2019) among social groups and cultures. Effective threat management strategies will have mechanisms to address these barriers in reporting threats. Targeted violence escalating in the level of violence, calls for improved reporting training to be created and executed in the workplace and engagement of law enforcement entities. From the legal litigation and negligence perspective, corporations need to be sure they are engaging law enforcement to ensure that the offender or individual displaying threatening behavior is on their radar. Engaging law enforcement in targeted violence investigations early is critical for mitigating escalated violence. Though reporting of targeted violence pathway behaviors is thought to be underreported.

### **Law Enforcement Response to Targeted Violence**

The percentage of nonfatal workplace violence reported to law enforcement reported by the Bureau of Justice Statistics in 2019 was 41% (Harrell et al., 2022). Since 2015, there has been a dramatic increase in nonfatal workplace violence with a gradual rise year over year in the last 3 years (Harrell et al., 2022). The increase in the workplace can be theoretically tied to many reasons but reveals the need for intervention programs, early detection, and appropriate responses to imminent threats. Failure to understand threat assessments and their role in mitigation and responsiveness will likely result in severe violent events such as workplace homicides. Workplace homicides in 27 years massed approximately 17,865 that were reported (Harrell et al., 2022).



The integration of law enforcement's role in targeted workplace violence has historically been at the end when an individual has already escalated a threatening act of violence against another person or persons. Intelligence-led policing is an initiative introduced to systematically collect, organize, analyze and use intelligence materials to inform decisions for law enforcement (Capellan & Lewandowski, 2019). An examination of threat assessment's role in prevention of mass shootings and an evaluation of the U.S. Secret Service threat assessment used in intelligence-led policing demonstrated that 40% of the shooters demonstrated leakage clues prior to the event, 88% intentionally leaked with 53% being verbal and 27% written (Capellan & Lewandoski, 2019). The statistical significance of the threatening leakage used in investigations of criminal behavior is high and demonstrates the need for continued utilization in investigations. This research demonstrates the linkage of law enforcement's use of threat assessment and the retrospective investigation of any leakage communication or behaviors that precipitated the mass shooting event and the use of bivariate comparative tests to identify statistical significance between groups and levels of risk (Capellan & Lewandowski, 2019). Threat management strategies require the collaboration of key stakeholders.

Effective threat management within the workplace should include (a) the security team, who can support a physical security response; (b) employee relations or human resources personnel who are trained in threat assessment; (c) employee assistance partners who can offer protective resources; and (d) the legal team, who will need to be aware of any potential actions that can be used in litigation. However, the integration of

law enforcement into the investigation is a crucial element many organizations fail to complete. Farkas and Tsukayama (2011) studied the use threat assessment and management in combination with appropriate mental health and law enforcement collaborations. These results showed that the integration of security, law enforcement, and mental health officials working with threat management techniques could mitigate violent events.

In this study, I examined law enforcement officers' experiences when they are engaged in targeted violence threat investigations in the workplace. This engagement is critical for the prevention of violent acts against those in the workplace. Law enforcement engagement in workplace targeted violence investigations should include having trained threat management professionals who can liaison with law enforcement officials. Adequate investigation details to support criminal threat investigations should include identification of warning signs, documenting concerning behavior, handing over internal investigation's summaries and assessments (if performed) of targeted threats of violence to an individual(s) or groups.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

The literature reviewed indicates a gap in the research respective to law enforcement's engagement with workplace targeted violence. Inclusion of threat assessments is one critical component to addressing targeted workplace violence (Jones et al., 2021). The engagement of law enforcement with respect to escalated concerns and risks to the community is another critical element that is lacking research. Although there

is considerable information that has been researched and proposed regarding threat assessments in healthcare settings, in adjudications or criminal justice settings, little is known about how law enforcement is integrated into workplace targeted violence investigations conducted by threat management professionals.

There is little known about the application for threat assessments within corporate investigations, where law enforcement is contacted and how this affects early mitigation of workplace violence within the United States. Forensic psychologists are seeing the benefits of working with corporations to address mitigation plans, specific individual threat responses and assisting in mitigation plans; however, the gap in utilization is raising concerns in how the violent pathway of workplace violence prevention could be improved. Threat assessments help to demonstrate whether warning signs of individuals who committed crimes were seen and ignored or missed or can evaluate whether behaviors displayed represent warning signs that can disrupt the society's sense of safety and security. The engagement and supportive resource of law enforcement in threat assessment has become increasingly necessary over the years. With the U.S. Secret Service continuing to be the largest repository of information and training of threat assessments (Ennis et al., 2015), law enforcement's role in ensuring that they are a part of threat investigations earlier rather than later is increasing. Understanding the dynamics, perspectives, and experiences of law enforcement personnel who have engaged with workplace targeted violence investigations can shed light on the need for their early engagement to assist in mitigating workplace violence incidents.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

This study examined the experiences of law enforcement officers engaged in targeted violence investigations in the workplace. The experiences, thoughts, and perceptions of law enforcement officers regarding threat assessments in workplace violence investigations, credibility of workplace violence investigations, collaboration with corporate investigators, appropriate use of law enforcement engagement. Barriers to law enforcement engagement within investigations of workplace violence and lack of engagement with law enforcement when necessary were also explored. This chapter will include the rationale for the qualitative research design based on the research questions and the researcher's role as the interviewer. Additionally, this chapter will cover the purpose of the interview's semi structured and open-ended questions. The procedures for the recruitment, participation, and data collection of the interviews will be explained. Lastly, the issues of trustworthiness and ethical procedures will be addressed.

#### **Research Design and Rationale**

RQ<sub>1</sub>: What are the perceptions of law enforcement officers/agents regarding workplace violence investigations?

This study examined the experiences of law enforcement officers/agents involved in targeted violence workplace investigations. The areas of inquiry include the collective perspectives of participants regarding the use of threat assessments, inclusion of law enforcement, and the barriers to an effective investigation within the workplace and by community law enforcement. Through exploration of the experiences of law

enforcement's involvement in workplace violence investigations and the use of threat assessments, using a qualitative study is most appropriate. This study's approach is a standard generic qualitative approach, using open-ended semi structured interview questions, which is in line with the behavioral science approach to qualitative studies (Patton, 2023).

This study did not focus on specific cases within threat assessments or law enforcement investigations, so case study design would not have been appropriate. Grounded theory would not have been appropriate given that the aim of this study was not to develop a theory (see Patton, 2023). Additionally, as this study did not aim to address concerns or events as a result of the researcher's profession (Ravitch & Carl, 2016), the practitioner research model would not have been suitable. Given the focus on the experiences of law enforcement officers, the use of generic qualitative research to explore the perspectives, thoughts, and feelings of law enforcement officers was the most appropriate design.

### **Role of Researcher**

I assumed the role of observer, interviewer and researcher in this study to gain insight into the law enforcement officers' perceptions and experiences with respect to their involvement in workplace violence investigations. I was not a participant within the study, nor did I have any prior relationship with the participants. My role as the interviewer was to ask semistructured questions in the interview. I held no biases in favor of or against the participants. If biases arose, they would be noted, explored, and

discussed with the dissertation chair and committee. Additionally, the participants responses were removed from the study and notated in the study.

## **Methodology**

### **Participant Selection Logic**

The participants for this study are law enforcement officers with experience working on targeted workplace violence investigations and the use of threat assessments. Individuals are from various police departments as well as federal and state agencies around the state of Minnesota, USA. Participants were over the age of consent (18 years old) and have had current or prior law enforcement experience in threat investigations that originated from workplaces of the offender or suspect. This population shows lowered concern of vulnerable populations and efforts made to disclose potential concerns were listed at the beginning of the interview to allow for the participant to opt out.

Participants were asked to identify their law enforcement role (i.e., officer, investigator, agent, detective, etc.). The participants were also asked to identify their experience in threat assessments and their experience in workplace violence investigations. I contacted the participants via email, phone, and social media messaging (LinkedIn). From there, I asked for referrals to additional participants. Using the Walden University informed consent and participation invitation form, I informed participants of the purpose, process, and intention of the study. I planned to interview a minimum of eight participants and continue until saturation was achieved.

## **Instrumentation**

Data collection for this study included the use of open-ended questions and semi structured interviews that follow qualitative interview protocols. An interview guide was created from the identified gaps in the literature regarding law enforcement officers' experiences in workplace violence investigations. Also, the interview questions needed to elicit information from the participants' perspectives, providing meaningful contributions to data collection and interpretation.

## **Participant Inclusion Criteria Questions**

I asked participants the following questions to determine whether they met the study inclusion criteria:

1. Are you currently in a law enforcement position?
2. Have you been in law enforcement for 5 years or more?
3. Have you been involved in a threat assessment concern or case before?
4. Have you been involved in a workplace violence concern or investigation before?
5. Are you receiving treatment for a disorder that would prevent you from understanding your participation in this survey?

## **Participant Exclusion Criteria**

Individuals were excluded from the study if any of the following were true:

- They have been suspended from duty.
- They have had less than 5 years of law enforcement experience.

- They have indicated a reason for why they cannot participate.

### **Interview Questions**

1. Please tell me about how you got involved in the threat assessment investigation?
  - a. Please tell me about how a typical case is conducted with law enforcement and workplace investigators?
2. What is your perception of threat investigations in the workplace setting?
3. What are some of the barriers to threat assessment in workplace violence investigations and engaging law enforcement?
4. What is working well for those that work with law enforcement during these investigations?
5. What is your recommendation for companies that do not have a threat assessment process in workplace violence investigations.
6. What are your recommendations for companies that have a threat assessment process in workplace violence situations?
  - a. Please describe the basis for your recommendations.
7. When do you think law enforcement should be engaged in workplace violence threat investigations?
  - a. What is your perception of a good way to engage with law enforcement in workplace violence investigations?



8. What are some concerns you may have about workplace violence and the ability to investigate in the workplace settings?
9. How do you work with other community resources?

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

Recruitment and selection of the participants in this qualitative study was from sampling channels such as law enforcement agencies and social media sites (e.g., LinkedIn searches). Snowball recruiting (i.e., the use of referrals from one participant to find another; see Ravitch & Carl, 2016) would be utilized if recruitment became a challenge. Law enforcement agents/officers who have workplace violence investigation experience were asked to participate in the study. A screening interview was conducted first to ensure that the participants qualified for the study. If they did, they were asked to participate in the study's interview and received a copy of the consent form, both in hard copy and by email. The process for scheduling the interview included identifying the best location and time for the participant. Email communication or social media messaging was used to communicate with each participant. If I determined that the participant did not qualify to participate after the inclusionary interview, they would be thanked for their time but not allowed to participate in the study. The selected participants were asked to identify the types of workplace violence investigations they have experience in but were not asked to share ongoing or confidential information regarding these investigations and those involved. Defined inclusionary criteria included only the identification as a current or former law enforcement agent/officer, the experience working with threat or workplace

violence investigations, and not having any conditions that would impact their ability to understand their participation in this study. Demographic characteristics such as gender, age, or ethnicity were not factors associated with participation selection. Participants were interviewed in person or through virtual meeting platforms.

I contacted the participants of this study individually through social media sourcing and referrals from selected participants. The details used in contacting participants include their name, email address, phone number, or social media profile address. The interviews were scheduled with the participants to be at their convenience in a public setting or via virtual meeting platforms. In wanting to respect the privacy of law enforcement participants, it was left up to the participant to notify their coworkers and leadership of their participation in this study. The benefit of the participant sampling pool being diverse around the Midwest region in the United States was that there is little ability to discern which agency or department the participant may be affiliated with.

The data collection process was the same for all participants interviewed. All participants were asked the same open-ended and semi structured interviews questions. Any follow-up questions asked were to provide clarification to statements made and may differ from one participant to another. Themes collected from these follow-up questions were categorized the same way. Data collection began after the first screening call was made to ensure the participant meets the criteria. Using a digital voice recorder, I interviewed participants for 20–30 minutes, depending on the speed of responses. Information was later transcribed using a paid transcription service. A document

surrounding confidentiality was used for the transcriber, given the limited information provided about engagement of law enforcement investigations. At the end of this study, the participants will be given contact information in case of any concerns or questions. Those who elected to be contacted for a copy of the research document will be contacted for that purpose.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of law enforcement who have been engaged in workplace violence and threat investigations. As such, qualitative research design was the most appropriate approach for this study. Data were collected during semistructured interviews around the perceptions of law enforcement agents/officers regarding workplace threat and violence investigations and the experiences and perceptions of law enforcement agent/officers regarding threat assessment utilization in workplace investigations. The responses to these questions were transcribed to begin generating the coding and themes. Using Saldaña's cyclic approach (Miles et al., 2018), the collected data went through two cycles of coding. Coding is the process of arranging themes or codes into a system for organization and categorization (Saldaña, 2021).

There are several types of coding that Saldaña recommends in the first cycle coding process, and each one can provide a strong foundation for secondary coding. For the purpose of understanding the experiences of the law enforcement agent/officer in workplace threat assessment investigations, I coded the collected data using the in vivo

coding method (Miles et al., 2018). In vivo coding uses the participants' own words or phrases as the code and is often considered highly regarded in respecting the participant's voice (Miles et al., 2018). Leveling of details in coding was consistent throughout cycle one but not lengthy. The coding word or phrase was written next to the participant's responses and then added to a complete coding list. The in vivo coding method generated a listing by which patterns could be identified and provide the foundation for the secondary coding process called pattern coding.

Pattern coding is the process of collecting cycle one coding into categories and concepts that allowed me to use a thematic analysis approach to examine the experiences of law enforcement agents/officers investigating workplace threats. This is the second step in the coding process for the researcher to examine the participant's experiences. Pattern coding has four critical components that assist the qualitative analysis process. The first component condenses many codes from cycle one into smaller units or themes (Miles et al., 2018). The second component focuses on the analysis during the data collection, whereas the third allows the researcher to develop a schema of incidents and interactions from the data collection (Miles et al., 2018). Finally, the fourth component provides the framework for cross-case analysis through the comparison and review of common themes (Miles et al., 2018). The themes were analyzed for interpretation and summarization using thematic analysis.

Thematic analysis is the process of analyzing the coded themes and patterns from the data collection in qualitative research (Saldaña, 2021). As one of the most common

methods in qualitative research, thematic analysis demonstrates the collective themes of the participants' responses to the research question of this study. Thematic analysis is a highly regarded method of qualitative analysis that is diverse and adaptable due to its ability to not be limited to a specific theory (Rutten, 2021). Developed in the late 1970s by a physicist and expanded in the early 2000s by psychology researchers Braun and Clark (2006), thematic analysis can be both deductive and inductive (Rutten, 2021). Deductive thematic analysis is the use of predetermined codes created from prior theoretical research of the known situation, while inductive uses codes that have emerged during the data collection process (Daniels, 2018).

The NVivo software is a reliable and commonly used qualitative analysis system that codes and categorizes collected themes, where the results can then be reviewed and analyzed. Coding in qualitative analysis occurs when a phrase or word is assigned to a statement or phrase in an interview transcript (Saldaña, 2021). NVivo is designed to code, categorize codes identified and show patterns among the participant responses. This system helps with the pitfall of confirmation bias, which can reduce the study's trustworthiness (McSweeny, 2021). In qualitative research analysis, confirmation bias is a significant concern when trying to articulate the researcher's viewpoints. Use of the NVivo software allowed me to synthesize the results from the participants and demonstrate themes of the selected population.

## **Issues of Trustworthiness**

### **Credibility**

One of the core areas of trustworthiness in research studies is credibility. Credibility within qualitative research is assured throughout the entire study and is especially important during the data collection process (Patton, 2023). The credibility principle with all scientific research involves ensuring that the research data findings are compatible and are not being misrepresented by researcher bias (Patton, 2023). Focused on the accurate articulation of the participants, I recorded the responses to each question.

### **Transferability**

The second core component in trustworthiness is transferability (Patton, 2023). This component speaks to the assurance that the data from the study are applicable in similar settings across the discipline and are not generalizable (Patton, 2023). This study had clear assumptions and outlined inferences for the data collected from the research participants. The purpose of transferability is that there is assurance that the details of the participant responses are clearly articulated. The transferability of this study's findings will allow for applicability of findings to strengthen research in the discipline of threat assessment and threat management of forensic psychology.

### **Dependability**

The third component in trustworthiness is the dependability of the research data. Dependability is demonstrated through the assurance that the results were obtained regardless of any changes that might have occurred (Patton, 2023). These changes can

occur during the participation interviews or research setting during the time of data collection. Dependability in the data collection process was achieved through consistency in data collection methods (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Through rich descriptions of the methodology and the articulation of the steps to complete the data collection (Forero et al., 2018), dependability within this study was ensured. This study ensured dependability by keeping detailed track of the data collection and the use of coding of the data.

### **Confirmability**

Lastly, confirmability is the process to ensure that the data and the findings in the study are not a reflection of biases and helps ensure trustworthiness (Patton, 2023). Within qualitative research, confirmability is achieved when the data are consistently checked through the collection and analysis process and can be repeated by others later. This further supports the confidence and reliability of the study and can be corroborated or confirmed by other researchers in future studies (Forero et al., 2018). In qualitative research, triangulation is a method of converging multiple points to demonstrate validity (N. Carter et al., 2014). This study did not use multiple sources of data to demonstrate validity as each participant was a law enforcement officer interviewed in a semistructured interview.

### **Ethical Procedures**

I have not participated in prior qualitative research as a facilitator or participant. To mitigate biases within the data collection process and analysis of the results, regular reflective journal writing was conducted. Additionally, I held reflective discussions with

my dissertation chair, along with bracketing and member checking, to ensure accuracy.

Participants for this study were all given the informed consent form that outlined the study's purpose, what would be required of their participation, the ability to withdraw and any time, and the details of Walden University's role in this study. Participants were made aware of the waiver's importance, and their approval was obtained before the interview began.

Participants were reminded that they were allowed to withdraw from the study at any time. The participants were anonymized through alphanumeric identifiers within the study's data collection and results. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the study by this use of alphanumeric identifiers. There were no identifying indicators of the participant's name, law enforcement agency, or department. Identifiers of alphanumeric codes, LE, were assigned to participants (e.g., Participant 1 was coded LE1, meaning law enforcement agent/officer 1). Given that the participants were contacted, this study cannot be considered fully anonymous. If the participant chose to leave, their responses and listing would be removed from the study. Participants who may be hesitant or concerned with participating in the study were given the option to not be included in the study before it began. No compensation was provided, and participation was kept confidential. The collected data will be stored electronically in a secure file and any notes were transcribed to the digital copy during the study. Post analysis, the data will be stored electronically with no identifying information for a period of 5 years, per the research regulations in the United States (Elsevier Author Services & Elsevier Author Services,



2023). Data will be stored in an encrypted file on a locked removable storage device.

Upon completion of the 5-year period, data will be erased permanently from digital storage.

Finally, this study demonstrated no apparent ethical issues; anyone with a prior personal or professional relationship with me was not included. As such, there were no apparent conflicts of interest. The researcher–participant interaction occurred only during the recruitment and interview. While there was no compensation or incentive provided for participation, the participants were thanked for their time.

### **Summary**

This qualitative study examined the experiences of law enforcement agents/officers engaged in workplace threat and violence investigations. As discussed in this chapter, this study has thoroughly addressed data analysis, components of trustworthiness and ethical considerations. This was a voluntary participation study and recruitment began through flyer postings and social media postings. There were no previous relationships between any of the participants and me. The following chapter will outline participant demographic information, data collection processes, data analysis, proof of trustworthiness, results, discussion and implications of the study.

## Chapter 4: Results

This study explored the experiences and perspectives of law enforcement agents or officers during workplace violence investigations with threat assessments. This study's area of interest centered around the agents and officers' experiences working threat investigations of workplace violence and their thoughts about when community partners should engage with law enforcement. Areas of consideration include the participants perception of threat investigations in the workplace, recommendations of when to engage law enforcement in threat investigations, and how a typical case of workplace violence occurs. The study's research question was: What are the experiences and thoughts of law enforcement agents and officers who are engaged in threat investigations within workplace violence investigations?

### **Research Setting**

Direct interviews were conducted over the phone at the availability of the participant for this study's research. Ten participants were interviewed in September 2024. Interviews were recorded for later transcription and coding. Participants were advised of and agreed to the recording of calls.

### **Demographics**

A total of 10 law enforcement agents and officers from various departments and agencies from the United States and Canada (LE3) served as participants. Two participants were from federal agencies (LE4, LE10) and the remainder were from police counties and departments. Of the participants interviewed, two were not on a specialized

task force that addresses threat assessments (LE1, LE5). While some departments and agencies do not have specialized units, every participant has experienced threat assessment investigations in workplace violence scenarios. Of the initial 16 contacted and interested participants, four individuals (LE7, LE9, LE11, LE13) consented to the study but did not respond to setting up an interview time and two (LE14, LE16) did not respond after showing initial interest in the study.

### **Data Collection**

Participants were asked to schedule an interview based on their availability after consenting to the study. The participants provided consent via email and included their response to the inclusion criteria questionnaire. Data collection was completed through semistructured interviews with each participant. Participants were asked the interview questions, and their responses were audio recorded for transcription later. In addition to audio recordings, I took notes on the tone, statements, and follow-up questions that were asked for clarification. Each interview included a summary of the participants' responses to ensure the researcher captured their responses.

### **Data Analysis**

Audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed and uploaded into the NVivo software (Lumivero, n.d.). This software assists qualitative researchers with identifying keywords, common phrases, critical terms and repeated phrases from the participant interviews. Notes taken during the interview were also added and common trends could be assessed across all interviews. The use of the NVivo system allowed me to organize

codes and themes into groupings. Within the themes and codes identified, there were some common phrases stated by a majority if not all the participants but there were some outliers that were unique to one or two individuals. This was not a surprise given that the interview uses semi structured questions and allowed the experiences of the participants to be described in their own words. Given the balance of agents and officers interviewed with the focus in threat assessment in workplace violence, data saturation was achieved in 10 interviews with the commonality in responses.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

Qualitative research provides deeper examination of the experiences, perspectives emotions and motivations of the participants. By diving into the complexities of areas researched through qualitative research design, deeper understanding of the identified phenomena can lead the way for improved understanding and deeper analysis of when and how human behaviors occur. Ravitch and Carl (2016) indicated that a significant benefit of qualitative research is that the participants' understanding of their behaviors and emotions can be interpreted without the minimization that can occur when quantifying the significance of the phenomena studied. To ensure that the qualitative study has provided evidence of trustworthiness, the research must examine the four elements: confirmability, credibility, dependability, and transferability (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Confirmability is defined as the reaffirming of the participants responses instead of the assumptions of the researcher (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). It is important to ensure

confirmability with the responses through the repeated engagement and affirmation of statements made by the participant. Within this study, I reiterated the responses of the participant but also engaged in self-reflection journaling both during and after the interview. This allowed the thoughts of both me and the participant to be documented and reflected on after the data collection process.

To address the trustworthiness element of credibility, I performed components of due diligence in data collection reflection and documentation and ensuring saturation of data with no new themes emerging. The participants of this study were all interviewed using the same guidelines and interview questions. Patton (2015) described the criticality of due diligence in the collection and analysis of the data, to ensure the alignment of credible qualitative practices.

Dependability is the level of accuracy and clarity of detail within the data collection (Ravitch & Carl, 2016), to ensure that future research can follow the methodology and procedures. This is a phenomenological research study with the focus on understanding what are the experiences of law enforcement are in workplace threat investigations. I collected the data in this study through semistructured interview questions that allowed for the participants to respond from their own experiences and offer their perspectives rather than select from a prepopulated response list. Open-ended questions provided me the opportunity to ask follow-up questions either to elicit more detailed responses or seek clarification to situations that can enhance detailed responses.

Lastly, transferability is defined as the ability for one finding to be applied to another (Ravitch & Carl 2016). Important elements to transferability include the applicability, resonance, and the theoretical engagement (Stalmeijer et al., 2024). The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of law enforcement agents and officers in workplace violence and threat investigations. Although the setting is in workplaces, the transferability of the data collected can also be used in other areas of threat assessment research or the engagement of law enforcement in criminal justice research.

## **Results**

Three themes emerged from this study. The first is the importance of workplaces to have a threat investigation program. The second is that law enforcement should be engaged in threat investigations as soon as possible, through the identification of a law enforcement point of contact for both imminent and nonimminent concerns. The third theme is the importance of training in threat assessment and threat management.

### **Importance of Workplace Threat Programs**

While each of the 10 participants indicated the critical importance for workplaces to have threat management programs, each participant indicated that a vast majority of organizations do not have a threat program. When engaged with organizations on threat cases, six participants indicated they connected with a human resource professional who had performed a less than thorough investigation on the individual of concern. It is not uncommon for organizations to have a human resource professional or an individual in a

segment of the human resources department complete an investigation into the allegations of workplace threats or concern for potential violence. However, nine participants described the lack of threat programs as a barrier to threat investigations. Several participants indicated they felt that this was because there is a reluctance on behalf of the organization to delve deeper into threat investigations beyond what is necessary to terminate the individual of concern.

When asked about the barriers in threat assessment investigations in the workplace, LE4 indicated that there is “a lack of focus on the spectrum of behaviors beyond those of physical violence but will respond more quickly to physical violence.” While LE3 stated that “workplace investigations into concerning or threatening behaviors are challenged but legal parameters and therefore do not conduct a thorough investigation.” While discussing who should be involved in threat assessment programs, LE5 and LE6 indicated that a member from the security team, human resources, legal department and law enforcement should be the core team. LE8 went on to state that law enforcement can offer insights that are crucial to the pathway to violence and the risk factors associated with those who can enact workplace violence.

Workplace violence investigations are often thought to take place after a violent event has occurred. LE15 stated that “there is a lack of awareness, training and insights about how to investigate threats to workplace safety and therefore do not have the capability to have a workplace threat management program.” LE12 stated that “many organizations that do not have a program lack the understanding of the importance in

documentation.” When asked the clarifying question of how the participant felt this affected threat investigations with law enforcement, LE12 indicated that it “makes it more challenging to identify if there is a concern that requires them to provide assistance to the person of concern or begin a criminal investigation.” Discussing the participants’ recommendations for workplaces to have a threat program, all participants indicated that organizations should have a program. LE10 stated that the multidisciplinary approach that is being widely used across the educational system is successful and ensures collaboration and engagement with appropriate partners.

### **Importance of Threat Assessment and Threat Management Training**

Each of the 10 participants identified threat assessment and threat management training as a crucial element to the success of a threat program and the support of law enforcement engagement in assisting to respond to and investigate workplace violence. When discussing the barriers to threat assessments in the workplace, LE4 discussed how lack of training has a huge impact on the success of workplace investigations. LE12 indicated that the “use of ATAP [Association of Threat Assessment Professionals] resources and agencies like the Department of Homeland Security or Federal Bureau of Investigation have great resources.” When discussing the perceptions of threat assessment in the workplace, LE10 indicated that there is a focus on the punitive response such as arrest being the goal, when often it is making sure that the individual of concern is getting supportive resources and well-being is checked on.



Threat assessment training often has a subsection of workplace violence training and how to use SPJ tools such as the WAVR-21, within workplace concerns. LE1 stated one of the biggest challenges to threat assessment in the workplace is the understanding of those involved in addressing these concerns of the role of behavioral threat assessment and management (BTAM). Although lack of awareness is one reason for lack of training, other reasons include that the legal department does not want to go beyond the scope of the immediate concern of the investigation. The silo of information and lack of awareness in benefit of sharing information can also play a significant role on the struggles of workplaces conducting threat investigations.

Eight law enforcement participants indicated that training with community partners and law enforcement is an area where corporate partners can engage with law enforcement to effectively conduct a thorough investigation into workplace threats. Perceptions of participants indicate that there is a strong argument for stronger collaboration and communication between law enforcement entities and community partners. The Association of Threat Assessment Professionals (ATAP) is one of the highly recommended organizations to obtain training, certifications and have access to resources to assist in threat investigations. LE10 stated, “the resources at ATAP demonstrate that BTAM is not just about criminal charges and law enforcement involvement but the emphasis on the need to identify behavioral pathway indicators to mitigate the potential for violence.” LE1 agreed that training surrounding what BTAM is and how it can be

beneficial to workplaces is lacking, but additionally, the lack of awareness around when to engage law enforcement is also present.

### **Importance of Early Law Enforcement Engagement**

Nearly all of the participants felt that it was crucial to engage law enforcement in workplace threat investigations. LE12 stated, “it would be beneficial to have a law enforcement agent as part of the threat program team in the workplace.” When asked for clarification on their involvement, LE12 stated that the officer could be a core team member that meets with the organization’s threat team to discuss persons of concerns, ongoing investigations and share information that may not be available in open sources such as social media. LE10 indicated there is a difference when law enforcement is engaged early. LE8 indicated that siloing of information can have negative impacts on investigation and can miss key indicators by those who might not think of the situation as a big deal. Although there was agreement in the need engage law enforcement early, LE6 stated, “law enforcement is only one component to policing and that community engagement is another.” LE4 indicated in order for effective engagement, cultural changes need to be enacted that remove the fear of reporting concerns to law enforcement. Workplace climate change and discovering connections through programs such as ATAP and community outreach can help ensure that threats are properly investigated. Relating back to the research question (What are the perceptions of law enforcement officers/agents regarding workplace violence investigations?), Nine of the participants indicated that the sooner they are brought into investigations into workplace

threats, the better. The intervention for supportive resources for the individual concern and the ability to enact the firearm owner identification (FOID) card retraction, which removes access to firearms of a person of concern while an investigation is ongoing.

### **Summary**

A qualitative and phenomenological research study was conducted that utilized semistructured interviews using open-ended questions addressing the perceptions of law enforcement officers and agents during workplace threat investigations. The participants' responses were transcribed and reviewed to identify codes and themes. Research analysis identified three themes that were prominent: the importance of threat assessment programs, the importance of threat assessment training, and the importance of engaging law enforcement in threat assessment investigations. Themes identified were applicable in addressing the research question: What are the perceptions of law enforcement officers/agents regarding workplace violence investigations? The following chapter will summarize the findings of the study, examine any implications, discuss limitations of the study, as well as recommendations for additional research.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

Workplace violence is defined by the CDC as an act of violence or the threat of violence and can range from verbal abuse to physical assaults on employees in the work setting (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, 2024). Recent research has demonstrated an increase in workplace violence acts and highlighted a gap in the collaboration of law enforcement has been identified (LeBlanc & Kelloway, 2002). The lack of threat assessments performed in workplace investigations combined with the lack of information sharing with law enforcement, creates a significant safety problem in our communities. Workplace threat investigations that neglect to assess the pathway to violence and engage with law enforcement authorities early on can delay early mitigation and offer supportive resources to those in crisis. The impact of workplace violence on the employee and company can be significant, ranging from psychological impact, financial costs and employee resignations (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, 2024). Although prior research has provided ample information regarding threat assessments, and offenders of targeted violence, there is limited research on the experiences of law enforcement on workplace threat investigations. This study explored the experiences and thoughts of law enforcement agents or officers regarding the threat assessment investigations conducted in the workplace. Participants responses during the study allowed me to examine corporate workplace investigations into targeted violence from the perspective of the law enforcement agent or officer.

Upon completion of the data collection from the participant interviews, the analysis utilized the conceptual framework of self-efficacy theory and idiographic theory to interpret the three themes identified in the study. This chapter provides an interpretation of the results with the theoretical framework of these two theories. The results of the study offer critical insights into the experiences of law enforcement officers and agents working on workplace violence threat investigations. This chapter also discusses the limitations of the study, recommendations for further research, and the social change implications of this study's results.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

An extensive literature review was completed in the areas of targeted workplace violence, targeted violence offender characteristics, threat assessment and threat management, the reporting of threats, and law enforcement response to violence in the workplace. These areas of literature were crucial in establishing a foundation for the study. While the emphasis of this study is on the experiences of law enforcement's experiences in workplace violence threat investigations, the study builds on the threat literature. Findings from this study offer insights into how community leaders and members can engage law enforcement appropriately and early to assist in mitigating threats enacted in the workplace and the community. Additionally, research studies offer supportive insights into how the engagement between community leaders and partners supports the successful connection between intelligence- and community-led policing initiatives. Results of this study identified three themes: importance of threat assessment

programs, importance of engaging law enforcement and the importance of having threat assessment and management training. These themes address the research question and demonstrate the need for further research of threat assessment investigations with the support of law enforcement.

### **Importance of Workplace Threat Programs**

This theme was developed as a result of each participant indicating the critical importance for workplaces to have threat management programs. Many of the participants indicated they connect with a human resource professional who had performed a less than thorough investigation and this can miss violent pathway indicators. However, many participants described the lack of threat programs as a barrier to threat investigations. As discussed in the literature review of research from 2016 to 2020, the NTAC reported that 34% of mass attacks occurred in the workplace by current employees (Carlock & Cutler, 2023). Law enforcement participants supported the current concerns of threat investigations of current employees that have often failed to be thorough due to a lack of a dedicated program for threat management. As reviewed in prior literature by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, reports of workplace violence are estimated to be underestimated but account for 9% of all workplace fatalities in 2015 (Siegel et al., 2019). Organizations that have threat management programs have a great chance to address and mitigate targeted violent behaviors before they escalate to imminent violence.

Participants strongly encouraged workplaces to have threat programs; otherwise, it will become more challenging to identify appropriate mitigation strategies or potentially identify the threat too late. One participant indicated that the best program for medium to large organizations should follow a multidisciplinary approach that incorporates a legal partner, a security partner, a trained threat management professional in human resources, and a law enforcement partner. Results demonstrated that law enforcement personnel who engaged with organizations that had these programs were able to get more thorough investigation information and assist in mitigation strategies that offered support for the person of concern, rather than a focus on an arrest.

### **Importance of Threat Assessment and Threat Management Training**

Findings in this theme around the importance of threat assessment and threat management training for workplace employees is consistent with the literature. OSHA revised their workplace safety protocols in 2009 that forced corporations of a certain employee population to include new workplace violence prevention programs in their workplace safety guidelines (OSHA, n.d.). Participants who are specifically trained in SPJ tools spoke about the benefits of these resources in providing sufficient details to the investigation. Participant responses also indicated that the benefit of threat assessment and management programs can only be gleaned if the focus is not on criminal arrests or termination of employment but rather used to as early mitigation in safety concerns and supportive resource sharing to the employee population. Participants indicated that in their experiences, there is a heavy focus on the punitive response such as arrest being the

goal, when that is not usually the case. Often the follow-up offers support for the individual of concern, while maintaining vigilance.

As the rate of workplace violence increases, participants indicated that collaboration training between community partners and law enforcement can be effective when conducting a thorough investigation into workplace threats. Threat assessment training often has a subsection of workplace violence training and how to use SPJ tools such as the WAVR-21 (White & Meloy, 2016), within workplace concerns. Although lack of awareness is a reason for lack of training, other reasons include the reluctance of the legal team to go beyond the scope of the immediate concern of the investigation. Participants indicated that their experiences around those who do not have threat management or threat assessment training cause significant delays in conducting a thorough investigation, lack capability to effectively mitigate threatening behavior appropriately and limit information sharing. Research has indicated that threat and risk assessments are critical in the early mitigation and monitoring of threats (Rousseau et al., 2023) and participants are seeing the faults of not having training around these areas when conducting threat investigations. When discussing where individuals can get involved with threat assessment trainings, participants indicated that not only does the ATAP offer great resources, but there is also an opportunity, as a collective community, to share best practices and integrated approaches of supporting community leaders and law enforcement.



## **Importance of Early Law Enforcement Engagement**

The theme around early law enforcement engagement was significant to this study's findings. Participants indicated that they are typically referred to or directly called regarding a concerned individual. When directly asked how a typical case is conducted, participants indicated that investigations typically begin with an interview of the complainant to gather information about the concern. The importance of engaging law enforcement early theme came from the responses regarding the barriers to threat assessment in workplace investigations and engaging law enforcement, and what works well for those organizations that work with law enforcement in threat investigations. One participant indicated that it is most beneficial to have a law enforcement member on the threat management team. Analysis of the results demonstrated that a benefit of engaging law enforcement early is the expanded detail in documentation. However, as learned in the literature review, workplace violence concerns often go underreported. There are numerous reasons for underreporting, including fear of retaliation by the reporter, not wanting to be involved or avoidance of responsibilities, lack of trust in justice process, minimizing the danger behaviors, and lack of awareness (Lankford et al., 2019). However, participants agreed that underreporting also comes from the lack of wanting to see the individual arrested as a result of reporting their concerns. Participants responded that arrest is not the primary goal, but instead to offer support to the individual of concern or protect potential victims.

Participants recognized that limitations such as information from open-source information (e.g., social media accounts, internet searches, etc.) do not paint a full picture of the type of threat that they are attempting to mitigate. However, law enforcement having the ability to see any prior criminal history concerns, can assist in determining the level of credibility to the threat. Law enforcement response is often thought of the tactical response to situations of threats and therefore there is a resistance to sharing information earlier on as the police are considered last resort responders. However, this study indicated that law enforcement is actively seeking engagement with communities and should be considered as a resource for ongoing safe environments in the workplace and hopefully eliminate the apprehension of reporting concerns to law enforcement.

### **Findings in the Context of the Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework of this study was based on self-efficacy theory and idiographic theory. Self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997) states that a person's beliefs have an impact on if they can or cannot achieve a goal or outcome. These beliefs are situational and are influenced by the experiences and social perspectives of the physiological responses (Bandura, 1997). The higher the self-efficacy of the individual, the more likely they are to have a positive relationship and positive outcomes in their job performance and achievements (Somers & Terrill, 2022). Self-efficacy in relation to law enforcement describes the officer's belief in their abilities to in order to succeed in a situation. This type of mindset can have significant impacts on their perceptions of experiences and the actions of others.

As discussed in Chapter 2, this study utilized self-efficacy theory as a guide to understand the experiences of law enforcement when they are engaged in workplace threat assessment investigations. Aspects of self-efficacy that were seen or heard in participant interviews included clues to their confidence in their training that assisted in them to respond to targeted violence situations. Using self-efficacy to examine the theme of the importance of threat assessment training, participants advocated for basic, ongoing and enhanced training in threat assessments as a supportive method of proactive policing. Additionally, it was determined that self-efficacy theory can be used to describe the experiences of law enforcement in the community and the theme of the importance in early engagement with law enforcement. It was noted during the interviews that the confidence of the participants was high when speaking of the need for early engagement. As reviewed in Chapter 2, self-efficacy that is high within individuals will be reflected in their positive engagements and relationships with others. Six participants described that while troubling circumstances bring them into the investigation and there are areas of opportunity, the participants felt that connection between community partners and law enforcement was crucial in addressing threat assessment and threat management in the workplace.

Additionally, using self-efficacy theory to explain the second theme, the importance of threat assessment and threat management programs, results indicated that participants who had higher confidence in their capabilities to support or investigation threatening behavior, were more likely to have positive engagements with the community

partners in the workplace. Five of the participants highlighted that while there may not be criminal charges to file, having the law enforcement apart of the threat assessment and threat management programs, workplace community partners have an opportunity take advantage of the law enforcement training and expertise. This result demonstrates that the participants believe in their capabilities and the positive contributions they can have on others. Similarly, this also explains the importance of engaging law enforcement early. Law enforcement's desire to support early mitigation and management of targeted violence threat assessments investigations demonstrates that the officers are operating within the sphere of integration intelligence-led and community-led policing. Community-led policing, sometimes called community-oriented policing (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, n.d.), is focused on the community partnerships in information sharing and police onsite presence to support prevention methodology. Intelligence-led policing involves the collection, organizing, analyzing and utilization of information to guide law enforcement responses (U.S. Department of Justice, 2009). Law enforcement perceptions of workplace threat assessments and investigations demonstrated the importance of both of these policing methodologies.

Idiographic theory focuses on the characteristics of and within the individual (Florell, 2019). Idiographic theory within psychology research focuses on the individuals' unique themes and patterns of characteristics (Barbot, 2020). This study demonstrated that law enforcement's individual backgrounds, training and interactions impacts their experiences with community partners and shapes their opinions of success in threat

assessment investigations for targeted violence in the workplace. The various backgrounds of the law enforcement officers offered perspective in their ability to approach threat investigations in the workplace. Every participant came from a different background, and they did not work together. Individual experiences, while unique to each person, collectively demonstrated that their experiences, training and belief in their abilities shaped their perceptions of threat assessment investigations.

Using idiographic theory to explain the importance of threat assessment programs, analysis of the data collected demonstrated that participants felt threat assessment programs are critical to the success of early mitigation and minimization of violence acts. Three participants indicated that the goal of these programs should be information sharing and resource support, rather than criminal prosecution or termination. The experiences of these participants shaped their perceptions of what is successful in targeted violence investigations in the workplace. The perceptions of eight of the 10 participants were that relationships with community partner relationships are critical and the belief in their own capabilities support these investigations. The training that each of the participants experienced was highlighted in their interview as a strong indicator of their success in investigating and responding to targeted violence investigations in workplace settings, as well as working with the community partners to ensure community safety.

Similar to self-efficacy theory, idiographic theory also helps to explain the second theme identified in the study of the importance of having threat assessment training.

Threat assessments are idiographic in their approach, as they are highly individualized case studies based on current behaviors (Soliman, 2021). Results of the study provided an understanding of the participant's experiences and collectively demonstrated that threat assessment training is strongly recommended and considered to be a key marker of success in the field. Eight participants discussed the importance of threat assessment training as a requirement for organizations and law enforcement partners to do collectively to appropriately address workplace violence.

Lastly, using idiographic theory to address the third theme of the importance of early engagement with law enforcement. Law enforcement participants articulated individually the importance of engagement of law enforcement early in order to effectively address concerning individuals and offer supportive resources. Five of the participants articulated that law enforcement engagement should not be considered a last resort, that engagement can be casual and collaborative. Both self-efficacy and idiographic theories were appropriately chosen to analyze the data collected and interpret the results of the law enforcement participant.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The literature surrounding threat assessment investigations into workplace violence has demonstrated that workplace violence occurs around the world. Threat assessments were originally designed to address predatory violence against public figures (Soliman, 2021). A limitation of this study is that there was not a focus on the type of predatory violence that law enforcement investigated. Today, threat assessment has

expanded its research to identify the pathways to violence, risk levels, and common characteristics found in violent offenders (Soliman, 2021). However, this study did not assess risk levels assigned to threat investigations. Future studies could assess this aspect to determine the number of high-risk cases that are investigated. Workplace violence trends have steadily increased in the last decade and have also increased in severity of fatality (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2022). Over a 27-year period, more than 1,000 employees have been murdered at work, with an increase of 11% in the 5 years between 2014 and 2019 (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2022). A limitation of this study was the lack of assessment of fatal and nonfatal injuries in the threat investigations. Research in the increase in violence with or without fatalities necessitates collaboration with community partners and law enforcement in targeted violence investigations.

The population of this study comprised law enforcement agents or officers from various agencies or departments from Canada and the United States. As a result, the findings of this study are limited to a specific population and do not account for the population of community organizations and the perceptions of working with law enforcement in targeted violence threat investigations. Departmental agencies and offices included federal, state, and local agencies, and results were not compared against each agency. Additionally, the participants did not disclose the number of threat cases they have worked on, so the number of experiences that shaped the participants' perceptions cannot be determined. Another limitation was the virtual setting of the interviews. Due to limited ability to travel to meet with participants across the two countries, face-to-face

interactions restricted the ability for reading facial and body cues. These limitations do not undermine the importance of the data collected of the participant's experiences, but rather give opportunities for future studies. This qualitative study design was also a limitation. Qualitative studies are more susceptible to researcher bias and therefore have a higher likelihood of being subjective (Anderson, 2010). Efforts to mitigate this potential bias are outlined in the Ethical Procedures section in Chapter 3. As this research did not include community partner's perspectives, this study is limited in scope and missed trends or patterns that are captured in quantitative methods (Anderson, 2010).

### **Recommendations**

The study's findings provide a strong foundation for further studies.

Recommendations for future studies include focuses into the relationship between law enforcement and community partners in threat assessment utilization, the use of threat assessment in the integration of intelligence-led and community-led policing, and the role of law enforcement in a multidisciplinary approach to targeted violence in the workplace. The collaboration between threat assessment professionals in law enforcement and community leaders cannot be understated. Future research should consider utilizing the experiences and perceptions described by law enforcement found in this study to determine whether early mitigation efforts are more effective when there is collaboration between these community partners and law enforcement. Future studies should also consider researching how threat assessment serves to integrate community-led policing and intelligence-led policing. This study demonstrates that threat assessments can assist



in the connection between these forms of policing through information sharing and assisting in proactive community engagement. However, further depth should be examined to understand on a larger scale the effectiveness of threat assessments on the integration between these two forms of policing. Future research should consider assessing the approach to having law enforcement as a member of a multidisciplinary team that address threat assessment and threat management. This is crucial as the need for collaboration and early response to potential threats becomes greater.

Additionally, the three themes identified in this study confirmed the importance of having law enforcement's engagement in threat investigations within the workplace setting. The training and experience that is provided by these individuals assists in early mitigation, opportunities for de-escalation, and information sharing. Future studies should consider expanding on this study to identify whether the collaboration between law enforcement agencies and community partners is stronger in one type of employer or another and what trends are seen in the disruption of pathway behaviors. Findings in this study suggested that participants saw community partners as those who need to have more training and dedicated programs for threat management. Finally, future research is suggested in understanding the perceptions of community partners in their engagement with law enforcement in threat assessments and workplace violence investigations, thereby comparing the perceptions of these two partners in the approach to threat assessments in targeted violence. Future studies should seek to understand whether the perception is shared by community partners and whether those who may not share that

same perception feel that their programs adequately address potential targeted violence in the workplace.

### **Social Change Implications**

Threat assessment and threat management is an exciting field within forensic psychology and criminal justice. While not meant to be a crystal ball in predicting criminal behavior or who is most likely to be violent against others in the workplace, threat assessment and threat management are critical components that organizations can use for addressing workplace safety. The purpose of the study was to explore the experiences and thoughts of law enforcement agents or officers regarding the threat assessment investigations conducted in the workplace. The results of this study demonstrated that participants with high self-efficacy in their abilities to adequately investigate and address threat assessments and threat management in threats of targeted workplace violence and belief in their prior training felt that threat programs, training, and early law enforcement engagement are crucial to successful workplace violence investigations. The first social change implication is the opportunity to improve the relationship between the community and law enforcement. The strain that has been between these two parties over the last decade has proven difficult and as such community safety is at a critical stage. Community partners need to support law enforcement efforts when handling threatening behavior of an individual by providing information, early engagement, and collaboration. This study demonstrates that law enforcement sees community members as partners in the information sharing and investigation resources.

Future study should seek to understand how community partners feel about law enforcement engagement and hear from them how they feel law enforcement can support their approach to targeted violence in the workplace.

Secondly, this study demonstrates that law enforcement partners are not just recipients of threat assessment information, but also users of some of these SPJ tools in assessing the pathway to violent behaviors of the individual of concern. This means that threat assessment resources should be inclusive of more than just clinicians or psychologists, as others such as law enforcement may utilize these resources in their investigations. Lastly, the findings of this study support the need for threat assessment and threat management training to assist in de-escalation of individuals who are on the pathway to violent acts. All 10 participants indicated that training in threat assessment is crucial in helping to identify someone in crisis and opportunities to avoid escalating violent behaviors or planning. Police are often thought of as only first responders or there to begin the criminal process. However, this is an old-fashioned approach that could miss key indicators of targeted violence. Law enforcement should instead be thought of as mitigation partners. The findings of this study demonstrate that social change should consider moving away from reactive tendencies, to being aware of proactive measures in the era of “see something, say something.” It is important to note that workplace leaders could benefit from the identified themes of this study when creating threat programs and/or addressing targeted violence in the workplace.

## Conclusions

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of law enforcement agents or officers targeted violence threat investigations in the workplace. Understanding the experiences through the basic qualitative approach, 10 participants were asked semistructured interview questions. The results of the study demonstrated that law enforcement see a strong importance for workplaces to have threat assessment programs, threat assessment and management training and the early engagement of law enforcement. With nearly a 9% increase from 2021, there were 524 fatal workplace violence incidents and nearly 58,000 nonfatal injuries in workplace violence incidents in 2022 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024). The need for stronger collaboration between community partners and law enforcement in the field of threat assessment can no longer be siloed but instead must be collaborative and cooperative. In conclusion, the findings of this study provide crucial insights into the experiences of law enforcement in workplace violence threat investigations, which can be used to create meaningful social change in the field of threat assessments used in the connection between community-led and intelligence-led policing.

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