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Perceptions of Police Executives of Threat Assessment Practices in Municipal Level Policing

Robin Renee Griffin-Kitzerow
Walden University

Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Robin R. Griffin-Kitzerow

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Review Committee
Dr. James Herndon, Committee Chairperson, Psychology Faculty
Dr. Lois Woods, Committee Member, Psychology Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
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Abstract

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by

Robin R. Griffin-Kitzerow

MPhil, Walden University 2024

MS, Palm Beach Atlantic University, 2014

MPA, Barry University, 2010

BS, Palm Beach Atlantic University, 2002

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

While there is no single solution to responding to active threats and targeted acts of violence, strategies such as awareness, preparedness through threat assessment practices, and education are the keys to prevention. Threat assessment practices and mandates are widely used in university and K-12 educational environments and have successfully prevented these acts. However, research up until this point seemed to indicate that local municipal police departments were slow to adopt these practices. As a result, communities suffer through targeted acts of violence, senseless tragedies, and untimely deaths of innocent victims. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how threat assessment practices have been beneficial in preventing acts of targeted violence and how police chiefs perceive these practices in municipal settings in Florida. In this study, 15 municipal police chiefs in the State of Florida were asked about their perceptions of threat assessment practices and the adoption of daily police practices to prevent targeted acts of violence in municipal settings in Florida. Semistructured interviews were conducted, followed by a thematic analysis, which resulted in ten themes. Overall, municipal police chiefs perceived threat assessment practices as critically important to prevent targeted acts of violence, offering creative strategies in mitigation. The findings supported current research that threat management is an effective means of identifying persons of concern and deterring targeted acts of violence, furthering the opportunity for social change through interjurisdictional communication, creative resource sharing, and promoting further trust in municipal police departments.

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Dedication

This educational pursuit is dedicated to my parents, Robert Lee Griffin and Carolyn Patricia Griffin, who never had the opportunity to pursue an education but worked feverishly and unselfishly so that I could. Thank you for your encouragement, support, and consistent, unconditional love. You are the hardest-working, most loyal, and most loving parents a child could ask for. I truly hit the parental lottery. I could not be more grateful for you both. I am so proud of our humble beginnings and the many lessons you taught me along the way. Everything good that I am or have done is because of the two of you. Thank you.

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you can never lose. I will keep pushing you to grow to become the very best version of yourself. You can count on it. You two are my greatest blessings and my richest gifts. I am so incredibly proud of you both.

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I dedicate this effort to you all. Thank you for walking alongside me through what has been the most challenging academic journey of my life.

I love you all more than a million words could express.

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As a first-generation college graduate, I want you all to know that I did this for all of us. For all the family members in our bloodline before us who worked tirelessly to develop Florida's infrastructure, building roadways and buildings, working as mechanics, heavy equipment operators, welders, farmers, caregivers, and truck drivers. It is through the blood, sweat and labor of my hard-working, proud, blue-collar, family that I have been afforded the opportunity to pursue higher education. As another proud blue-collar worker in our family who has served as a police officer for thirty-plus years, I am honored to be counted among each of you in our family's contributions of service to others. This PhD is for all of us. I pray my research in this study will make a difference and save lives. Perhaps this work can be my contribution to our beautiful State of Florida for generations to come.

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Carl Metzger, who has pushed me and taught me more about leadership in a few short years than I have had in the decades prior to meeting him, and my work colleagues at the University of Central Florida Police Department, who have become my extended family. Thank you for the encouragement and support as I pursued my PhD. You have no idea how much it meant to me. Thank you all.

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It is often said that it takes a village to raise a child. I'd offer that it also takes a village of caring, intelligent, supportive, hardworking, helpful, and encouraging people for one person to achieve a doctoral degree.

Thank you all for being my village.

I could not have done it without you all.

This PhD is for all of us.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Targeted acts of violence are a constant threat present anywhere people frequent, and typically begin and end in minutes (Doherty, 2016; Theophilus et al., 2019). When the shots ring out, law enforcement officers are summoned to the scene via multiple 911 calls, and these responses take valuable minutes when the attacker is actively executing innocent people (Doherty, 2016). This was the case in some of the most violent targeted acts of violence occurring in American schools, including the tragedies occurring at Columbine High School, Virginia Tech University, Sandy Hook Elementary, and Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School (Bergkamp et al., 2022; Geurts et al., 2018). Once the first attack happens, communities are already at a loss. Sadly, these tragedies are preventable when sound prevention measures, such as identifying specific behaviors, backgrounds, motives, and target selection by attackers, could be utilized (Doherty, 2016; Wyman, 2020).

According to the United States Code 6USC SS124h-1(f)(2), targeted acts of violence are defined as an incident of violence in which an attacker selects a particular target to inflict mass injury or death with no discernable political or ideological motivation beyond mass injury or death (Legal Information Institute, n.d.). The perpetrators of targeted acts of violence are largely individuals who have a perceived grievance with a known target and have exhibited a host of precursor behaviors that would indicate that the person was escalating toward violence.

Those persons of concern, who may pose a threat, appear to law enforcement in a myriad of ways. A person of concern may be identified, and police noticed due to threatening communications such as verbal threats, email, text, or social media posts, increased hostility toward others, and a lack of concern for any criminal or civil consequences. In multiple post-incident analysis studies, several warning signs, also known as "leakage," emerged repeatedly (Cappellan & Lewandowski, 2019; Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2016; Hope, 2016; Scalora et al., 2020). In a study of school shooters compiled by the United States Secret Service, Safe School Initiative, Vossekuil, et al. (2004) found at least one of these identified pre-attack behaviors was present in 93% of the school shooters in their research sample (Schildkrau et al., 2022). Mental health issues, substance abuse, prior personal victimization, imitation of previous attackers, ideation with a cause or group, fascination with weapons, and significant adversity such as failures at school, loss of employment or relationships are among the common findings among these analyses (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2016; Hope, 2016; Lankford, 2018). Warning behavior typologies also include any factors that are indicative of accelerated risk of violence, such as pathway warning behaviors, which include research, planning, preparation, or implementation of an attack (Meloy et al., 2012).

The pathway to intended violence developed by Calhoun and Weston (2003a) is a structured model that is used by law enforcement and other professionals in understanding the physical and psychological precursors to acts of targeted violence. This

six-stage model is commonly used to identify pre-attack behaviors in persons of concern (Cowan & Cole, 2022; Schildkraut et al., 2022). Commonly used by the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Behavioral Analysis Unit and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, this model is used in conceptualizing cases of intended violence and evaluating identifiable pathway behaviors in previous high-profile mass casualty violent events (Schildkraut et al., 2022; Theophilus et al., 2019).

Those who commit targeted acts of violence typically do not do so without a plan. Instead, they plan, prepare, and often leak indicators that they intend to commit an attack (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2024b; Hope, 2018; Okada et al., 2020). Individuals near the person (family, friends, work colleagues, and neighbors) often have the first opportunity to intervene through appropriate notification when concerning behaviors emerge. While no single concerning behavior serves as an indicator that violence is imminent, research has shown that identified concerning behaviors may indicate a person is moving toward violence (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2024b.). Multiple combined concerning behaviors such as threats about violent plans, comments about committing harm to self or others, detailed violent fantasies, documenting explanations of violence, seeing violence as a solution, difficulty coping with problems, reduced interest in previous interests, outbursts of anger, increased isolation from loved ones, continued troubling interactions with others, interests in prior attackers, changes in hygiene and manner of dress, and inquiry or attempts at violence, fascination and/or acquiring weapons, and breaching a possible target are of significant concern and may

require immediate intervention (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2024b). Many of these behaviors are identified through comments made on the internet, appearing in blogs, and comments on various social media platforms (Calhoun & Weston, 2016). Preparation for a targeted act of violence may incorporate some of these concerning behaviors, including the ideation with known shooters, research into locations and means of committing targeted acts of violence, change of appearance, training, and committing a dry run (breach) to test for interference by others. The threshold for concern is not necessarily met when the person makes a threat, but when the evidence suggests the individual may be moving up the pathway toward violence (Okada et al., 2020; Reddy et al., 2001).

Background of the Problem

The general problem is that while law enforcement nationwide is aware of the dangers of targeted acts of violence, policing is often reactionary, not fully adopting the preventative benefits offered by threat assessment and management practices, particularly in municipal settings. Acts of targeted violence begin and end in minutes, long before the first law enforcement officer can arrive on the scene. According to Doherty, more than one-third of active shooter incidents in the United States extend for less than 5 minutes (2016). This fact alone speaks to the significant need for law enforcement to consider threat assessment prevention methods in addition to active killer response as a part of their ongoing attempts to fight crime (Doherty, 2016; Saxton et al., 2022). Many private organizations and municipal-level police agencies consistently work on crime in

communities. However, instead of constantly managing crises after their occurrence, municipal agencies may minimize the opportunity for them to occur at all by implementing threat assessment practices in their daily crime prevention work (Doherty, 2016; Jones & Gray, 2020). Federal partners like the Behavioral Threat Assessment Center (BTAC) have expanded to provide threat assessment to law enforcement partners working on targeted violence prevention (Wyman, 2020).

The significance of collaboration between law enforcement and mental health in the identification, assessment, management, and monitoring of persons of concern who begin to present on a pathway to violence cannot be understated. Early interventions from both first responders and clinical provider stakeholders offer the best results in preventing targeted acts of violence (Gelles et al., 2002; Jones & Gray, 2020). Today's threats go far beyond active shooters and have become more simplistic and rudimentary. A knife or a vehicle is often used in targeted acts of violence, taking the lives of multiple innocents in seconds. This fact speaks not to the mechanism by which the crime of violence is perpetuated but to the heart and mind of the person committing the act. This is where the opportunity for prevention lies.

While there is no single solution to responding to active threats and targeted acts of violence, strategies such as awareness, preparedness through threat assessment practices, and education are the keys to prevention (Kepp, 2016; Okada et al., 2020). Threat assessment practices and mandates are widely used in university and K-12 educational environments and have realized great success in preventing these acts;

however, local municipal police departments are seemingly slow to adopt these practices. As a result, communities suffer through targeted acts of violence, senseless tragedies, and untimely deaths of innocent victims. Little research has been done on municipal-level law enforcement leadership's perceptions of threat assessment practices and the delay in implementing these regular practices as a standardized policy in community-based crime prevention. Opportunities to explore the cause behind these delays exist and could offer significant research findings to the field of threat assessment in community-based policing. Effective threat management requires three key processes: (a) identification of individuals who have the ideal or intent to attack, (b) assessment of the individual through multiple sources of information gathering to determine the risk of attack, and (c) management of the individual to mitigate risk and thwart intent and opportunity to complete the attack (Doherty, 2016; Miller, 2014; Schouten & Brennan, 2016).

Identification of a Person of Concern

Identifying persons of concern typically occurs through self-identification with another person (Calhoun & Weston, 2016; Cornell & Heilbrun, 2016). These communications, also known as leakage behaviors, occur when a person intentionally or unintentionally reveals clues to feelings, thoughts, attitudes, or intentions that would lead a person to believe a violent act is forthcoming (Miller, 2014; Okada et al., 2020; Scalora et al., 2020). These clues may include a subtle threat, innuendo, prediction, or ultimatum delivered through spoken or written stories, diaries, poems, essays, posts, drawings, songs, or videos (Meloy & O'Toole, 2011) or electronically through the internet (Scalora

et al., 2020). Communications may come through personal contact, third parties, written text, blogs, or social media means to bring attention to themselves. In this way, the communication may be intended to garner attention, depending on the motive of the aggrieved.

Determining the motivation of the threatener can be linked to their intent as a hunter or a howler (Calhoun & Weston, 2016). Persons of concern, known to the threat investigator as howlers, often seek attention to elicit fear or interaction from others (Calhoun & Weston, 2016). Conversely, hunters are those individuals committed to the act of furthering their plan to engage in violent attacks (Calhoun & Weston, 2016). Hunters are calculated and premeditated in their intent and seek justice for their real or perceived injustice through the successful completion of their violent attack. The key to effective threat investigation and management of persons of concern begins with identification and a deeper understanding of the behaviors that can serve as precursor indicators to an attack, for the opportunity for intervention and violence prevention (Hinman & Cook, 2002; Mitchell & Palka, 2016). Identification of persons of concern through leakage behaviors is one of the most important clues preceding a violent attack (Meloy & O'Toole, 2011). Early identification of reporting concerning behavioral information is critical to effective violence prevention (Cornell & Heilbrun, 2016; Wyman, 2020).

Assessment of a Person of Concern

Assessment of a person of concern is a complex process involving the intellectual evaluation of information, balancing the information known and not known, using instinctive and formal evaluations, monitoring and evaluating behaviors, determining content versus context of the situation, and applying the pathway to violence model to the totality of the individual and circumstances (Calhoun & Weston, 2016). Threat assessment is an art that requires thoughtful, conscientious, and thorough analysis of the risks, relying heavily on professional training and experience (Hinman & Cook, 2002; National Threat Assessment Center, 2018). Objectives when conducting a threat assessment include determining the likelihood that a person who is making a threat will carry out the threat, identifying the targets, predicting the extent and nature of the threat to the identified targets, determining the most suitable interventions to manage and mitigate the opportunity for violence, and help to identify and or apprehend the identified person making the threat (Hinman & Cook, 2002; Randazzo & Cameron, 2012; Wyman, 2020). Multi-disciplinary teams provide the most accurate threat assessments (Duemig, 2022; Hinman & Cook, 2002; Okada et al., 2020). These teams should include individuals with expertise in specific areas such as law enforcement investigations, terrorism psychology, domestic violence, dignitary and celebrity protection, and stalking when applicable, providing a deeper perspective and resources that are often needed (Cornell & Heilbrun, 2016; Hinman & Cook, 2002). Schools are often mandated to use the Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines (CSTAG) model, which

leverages input from a guided multidisciplinary team and processes to determine threat intent and seriousness (Jackson & Viljoen, 2022). The core of any threat assessment includes behavioral intelligence analysis requiring systematic and interactive collaboration (Florida Department of Law Enforcement, n.d.; Wyman, 2020). It is important to consider that threat assessments have limited usefulness, as situation dynamics and intervention efforts create constant changes that require assessment of the effects of interventions on the person of concern (Calhoun & Weston, 2015). As a result, threat assessments from the law enforcement and criminal justice professional lens require a new set of skills. The level of threat posed at a given time becomes a critical concern in the investigation and management of the person and case (Borum et al., 1999; Calhoun & Weston, 2015). While law enforcement has typically been reactive to criminal activity, threat assessment is preventative in nature, allowing officers another tool in their crime-fighting toolbox. Prevention strategies such as averting criminal threatening behaviors and preventing acts of violence among identified persons of concern are increasingly more prevalent and valuable to law enforcement (Liam et al., 2015; Concordia, 2022). Recently, behavioral threat assessment and management (BTAM) training and processes have been developed and offered to law enforcement agencies in Florida (Florida Department of Law Enforcement, n.d.). BTAM teams apply relevant scientific research and structured professional judgment tools and strategies for operational guidance and implementation in law enforcement to identify, assess, and manage persons of concern to prevent targeted acts of violence (Florida Department of

Law Enforcement, n.d.). However, these processes are commonly underused in policing environments due to siloing valuable information relevant to the threat assessment process by schools, mental health professionals, the courts, other agencies, and friends and family members of the person of concern (Schildkraut et al., 2022). Additional challenges preventing participation in these processes are due to staffing shortages and training (Okada et al., 2020).

Management of Person of Concern

Effective threat management requires accurate, structured, and holistic assessment and intervention. Law enforcement responses are often the most appropriate management tools available when a person of concern requires immediate custodial intervention. Other times, law enforcement options are limited when the person of concern has not yet violated the law but is moving along the pathway to violence (Hope, 2016; Saxton et al, 2022; Wyman, 2020). Effective threat management in communities is best served through the implementation of threat management training, clear reporting mechanisms, adoption of multidisciplinary teams, and threat management interventions by law enforcement and non-law enforcement stakeholders. (Wyman, 2020). These efforts are appropriate as law enforcement continues to monitor the person of concern and their responses to their unique and specific intervention efforts. In one study of the management of persons who were fixated and obsessed with public figures such as politicians and celebrities, untreated mental illness was determined to be a commonality among those individuals studied. More specifically, those individuals identified as

persistent stalkers and threateners were determined to have serious mental disorders and were determined to be psychotic at the time of their highest attempts to contact their victims (Bleakley, 2022). This outcome presents an opportunity for law enforcement and non-law enforcement threat management team members to play an integral role in the management of persons of concern to prevent targeted acts of violence. A trained threat assessment team also recognizes that not every report of troubling behavior merits intervention. Sometimes, reports are not credible, and behavior can be misperceived or misconstrued. Hence, there is a need for a multi-disciplinary team to critically and holistically evaluate the individual and the content and context of the perceived threatening behaviors (Campus Security Report, 2012; Florida Department of Law Enforcement, n.d). Context is everything when it comes to threat management (Calhoun & Weston, 2015).

Threat assessment has evolved into an effective prevention strategy nationally as targeted acts of violence continue to threaten Americans across the United States. The most lethal shooters in United States history have been those seeking fame and attention, including the 1999 Columbine attacks, the 2007 Virginia Tech Shooting, the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School Shooting (Lankford, 2018), and most recently, the Uvalde, Robb Elementary School shooting in 2022 and the 2017 Harvest Music Festival, Las Vegas Shooting. All highlight the desperate need for preventive strategies to identify persons of concern with brittle mindsets and ill intent to cause harm.

In recent years, the State of Florida has also endured many senseless acts of mass violence, including the 2016 Pulse Nightclub shooting in Orlando, the 2017 Fort Lauderdale Airport shooting, The 2018 Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in Parkland, the 2018 Jacksonville landing shooting, the 2018 Yoga Studio shooting in Tallahassee, and the 2019 Sun Trust Bank shooting in Sebring, Florida (States News Service, 2019). These preventable targeted acts of violence occurred, threatening the safety of Florida residents (States News Service, 2019). According to a recent article highlighting these mass shootings in Florida, Governor Ron DeSantis directed the then-serving, Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) Commissioner Rick Swearingen to prioritize the establishment of a threat analysis strategy, ensuring that every government entity participates through coordinated and cooperative efforts in the identification and intervention of persons of concern determined to be on the pathway to violence (States News Service, 2019). Governor DeSantis asserted his vision for Florida to become a national leader in intelligence-led policing by establishing a comprehensive threat assessment strategy (Florida Department of Law Enforcement, n.d.). According to Governor DeSantis, Florida will lead the prevention effort nationally through established threat assessment techniques delivered via the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, the Criminal Justice Standards and Training Commission, and the Regional Domestic Security Task Force to aid law enforcement agencies in implementing their threat assessment strategies (States News Service, 2019). Hence, Florida is primed to become a trend-setting state, leveraging threat

management as a true prevention strategy, provided that police Chiefs embrace and implement these new practices in prevention.

Statement of the Problem

The specific problem is that without the understanding, investment, and application of the municipal police chiefs in the State of Florida, threat assessment practices aiming to prevent targeted acts of violence are unlikely to be adopted by municipal police departments.

In the State of Florida, behavioral threat management in educational environments remains a legislative priority. According to the Florida Department of Education, Section 1001.212(12) Florida Statutes, maintains that a statewide behavioral threat management operational process, a Florida-specific behavioral threat assessment instrument and a threat management portal shall be required effective December 1, 2023 (Florida Department of State, n.d.). Additionally, since the governor's direction to implement threat management intelligence-led initiatives throughout the state, training from the Florida Department of Law Enforcement on Florida's Strategy for Targeted Violence Prevention has been implemented. Through Florida Governor Ron DeSantis's (BTAM) Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management initiative, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement has implemented new training courses effective February 17, 2022. The 'BTAM for practitioners', a 40-hour advanced course designed for officers who will conduct investigations and conduct assessments with civilian, diverse professionals dedicated to the multidisciplinary team assessment process, is being offered statewide

(CJSTC, 2022). In their comprehensive summary of Florida's Strategy for Targeted Violence Prevention, Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management, Intervention, and Prevention, Authors from the Florida Department of Law Enforcement highlight the need for behavioral threat management among law enforcement agencies due to ongoing targeted acts of violence around the state, touting these crimes as preventable through previously identifiable warning behaviors that merited intervention (Florida Department of Law Enforcement, n.d.). Through their clear delineation of operational and organizational training and statewide management of these high-risk cases, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement has created teams to assist local law enforcement agencies with high-risk persons of concern, meriting additional resources and intervention. However, it is unknown if municipal police chiefs have embraced these recommended practices or if these cases are going underreported, or worse, unmanaged.

Researchers addressing threat assessment and threat management want to know if law enforcement agencies are applying threat management strategies to prevent violence in communities in Florida. For example, in a study by Vossekuil et al. (2015), the authors want to know if threat assessment entails specialized units within the law enforcement community and inquire if this specialized training in threat assessment could be integrated into initial, specialized police academies and programs. Similarly, Muffler (2020) asserted that the cascading and numerous challenges facing law enforcement executives today create a demand from communities requiring leadership and transparency and recommended training for officers on threat assessment and

management strategies that will enhance safety and security for everyone. Wyman (2022) stated that opportunities for buy in from state and local law enforcement at all levels is required to materially improve the ability to prevent targeted acts of violence and that these efforts can be realized in five pillars: (a) culture, (b) training, (c) relationships, (d) structure, (e) process. Further, Wyman (2022) stated that some law enforcement leaders are opposed to threat assessment as a prevention model that can be leveraged in their communities for various reasons to include their belief that these crimes cannot be prevented nor, is it the responsibility of law enforcement to prevent them. Philosophical beliefs of the leadership of each police agency could significantly impact if these methods can and will be used in communities. These steps must be achieved to effect meaningful change.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how threat assessment practices have been beneficial in preventing acts of targeted violence and how police chiefs perceive these practices in municipal settings in Florida. I conducted a qualitative study because the determinate factors were largely based on perceptions of law enforcement executives based on their unique communities, budgets, administrative and financial supports, staffing considerations, and crime rates. Research participants were viewed as experts on their own experiences and offered personal and professional reasons for their responses (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

I used a basic qualitative design to determine the lived experiences of police chiefs in municipal settings and their perceptions of these practices. I used open-ended, semistructured interviews with participating police Chiefs from small, medium, and large municipal law enforcement agencies.

I am a career law enforcement officer and now police executive who has worked in traditional municipal law enforcement, K-12 educational policing environment, and currently serves in higher education policing as a Deputy Chief of Police for a large university police department in Central Florida. Having developed a Behavioral Services Division comprised of police officers who also held advanced clinical degrees and realizing the benefits of state-mandated threat assessment practices in educational environments, I questioned why local police governments had not yet embraced and implemented threat management processes in the interest of protecting their communities. To omit bias from the research findings, based on the reflexivity of my close experiences to the successes of these practices, clear and strategic methods of collecting data was observed.

Epistemological assumptions are that knowledge on these topics will be developed through the experiences and unique circumstances present in each community. Through these different lenses, the individual truths of each respondent police chief was realized.

Research Questions

Research Question 1 (RQ1): What are the perceptions of law enforcement executives, specifically, police Chiefs or executive level designees, of threat assessment practices?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): What are their views on the adoption of daily police practices to prevent targeted acts of violence in municipal settings in Florida?

Conceptual Framework

According to Kurt Lewin's Behavior Equation Theory, a person's behavior is a function of the person to include their experiences and history, personality, motivations, and environment (Gelles et al., 2002). Lewin's Behavioral Equation is "B=f (P,E) and asserts that to change behaviors, one must change the person or the environment. This theoretical framework provided a foundation for formulating research questions that helped determine the perceptions of law enforcement executives related to the prevention of targeted acts of violence based on the identification of these behaviors. Further, this framework was utilized to understand the perceptions of law enforcement executives relating to the perpetuation of police interaction, which could create more negative behavior among persons of concern (perpetuating the grievance). Starting with Lewin's theoretical construct, I created a framework to begin my research into law enforcement executive's perceptions of threat assessment practices to aid in prevention in municipal police settings.

Nature of the Study

To address the research questions in this qualitative study, the specific research design included a qualitative phenomenological approach to determine the perspectives of police Chiefs in municipal settings and their perceptions of these practices in preventing targeted acts of violence. This process was explored using open-ended, semistructured interviews with participating Police Chiefs or Deputy Chiefs from small, medium, and large municipal law enforcement agencies in Florida. The research design followed the processes described by Patton (2015) and Moustakas (2012).

Definitions

Municipal police chiefs: An official or officer, as contemplated in state statutes, who in service of the government derives their position from a duly and legally authorized election or appointment and who exercises continued employment with clearly described rules through government, not contract, that consist of critical public powers, trusts and duties as part of the administration of government, and exercises sovereign power over a municipal charter or ordinance and having done so through oath and or bond (Rose, 1975). For the purpose of this research study, and by definition, this group of police executives in the State of Florida, excluded university police Chiefs, school police Chiefs, and Sheriffs.

Persons of concern: A person who displays concerning behaviors that are observable and identifiable to others that may indicate the person may be on a trajectory or pathway to targeted acts of violence (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2024).

Targeted acts of violence: An incident of violence where the person committing the attack selected a specific target to inflict injury or death to others with no discernable motivation other than to commit the acts. (Legal Information Institute, n.d.).

Threat assessment: a systematic, fact-based method of investigation, blending collection and critical analysis of varied sources of information, combined with practitioner expertise and published research for the purpose of focusing on a person's patterns of thoughts and behavior to determine, if and to what extent, that person is moving toward committing an attack (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2017).

Assumptions

I assumed all participants were full-time police officers serving as police chief, deputy police chief, or assistant police chief in the State of Florida. The participants are all believed to be in a position of authority with direct influence and knowledge about the philosophical, financial, and literal interests of the police organizations they lead. They also have working knowledge and experience about practices within their respective organizations. Lastly, I assumed all participants were willing to participate in this study and provided honest answers that aided in the knowledge relative to this topic.

Scope and Delimitations

In this study, I focused on the perceptions of law enforcement executive leaders in municipal policing environments concerning preventative threat management practices in their communities. The sample of participants represented police Chiefs or their second-level designees (Assistant or Deputy Chiefs) within their organization who had the power

and authority to speak to the questions asked. This sample of participants was selected based on geographical location within the state, agency size, and availability and willingness to complete this study. As this is a qualitative study, it is assumed that I cannot reach all of the reflective municipal Chiefs in the State of Florida; instead, I can reach only 15 for a sufficient sampling of their perceptions in these environments. The participants in this study may not reflect every race, background, or gender available in the State of Florida among Police Chiefs.

Limitations

Limitations are defined as identified weaknesses that could be known in the method or study design and what efforts have been made to either resolve them or prevent them from being resolved (Burkholder et al., 2020).

Limitations notable for this study were as follows: First, as police Chiefs are typically incredibly busy, with full calendars and countless obligations, I anticipated that securing a full hour of their time would be challenging. It was, in fact, challenging to secure the timeslot for the interviews; however, once I secured the Chief on the calendar for the interview, it did not limit the opportunity to cover the content deeply. Additionally, while significant numbers of police Chiefs in Florida exist, identifying Chiefs interested in participating limited the sample size. I had to re-advertise seeking participants more than once. Lastly, police Chiefs are typically those tenured in the industry. Having worked in the field for so long, I anticipated that a degree of bias against threat assessment practices could be present, as it contradicts the norm of expeditious

police response and swift resolution versus methodical and strategic management and monitoring of persons of concern. This bias could have limited the breadth and depth of the dialogue between me and the participants. However, the overwhelming majority of the Chiefs were progressive in thought and supportive of the interviews and information sharing.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for both theory and practice. This study is significant for the work of researchers in the past. It provides contributions to the fields of psychology, policing, and criminal justice. First, this study is significant to the field of psychology. Scholarship related to psychology is concerned with ensuring the health and well-being of citizens through preventive and primary care. (American Psychological Association, n.d.). Threat management affords law enforcement and psychologists the opportunity to work in concert toward this goal. This study will further the work of helping individuals stay healthy by providing information to those who protect them in policing. For example, training law enforcement officers on the identification of various mental illnesses and the appropriate responses and referrals aids in threat mitigation. This study provides police with best practices related to threat mitigation. Second, this study is significant to policing and criminal justice. Threat Assessment practices in municipal and local level policing are an emerging trend that has recently surfaced to prevent targeted acts of violence in communities. Many law enforcement agencies have not yet been trained on, or even exposed to, this progressive means of managing persons of concern

who present on a pathway to violence in communities. This research aids police departments and communities in finding new ways to prevent violence when the offender has been identified through the demonstration of behaviors that indicate the potential trajectory toward violent acts. Law enforcement in municipal environments will lean on this research to present to financial stakeholders in their administration to support their efforts to protect their communities. Policing methods are consistently a public focal point, especially concerning police transparency. Communities will be interested to know about what methods police are using to prevent violent crime, including potential acts of targeted violence. Should police agencies begin to adopt these practices, additional hope and trust could be restored in the police overall.

This study is significant for practitioners. Historically, threat assessment has not been utilized as prevention in municipal policing environments. While 'see something, say something' messages prompt people to call 911 to report threats, many police agencies have not recognized multi-disciplinary team threat management practices as a method of preventing targeted acts of violence within their communities (Calhoun & Weston, 2003; Okada et al., 2020). This study helps police agencies by adding to the relevant research and providing awareness for police leadership on the potential for preventing targeted acts of violence through threat assessment and threat management practices. Due to the sensitive nature of police investigations, police officers often limit information sharing relative to persons of concern cases. Multi-disciplinary team practices within threat management require collaboration between community

stakeholders to address the many facets of a person of concern. Therefore, this study will demonstrate the benefits of information sharing and communication with stakeholders within the community to prevent targeted acts of violence.

Summary

This chapter presented the background of the problem, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the research questions, and the conceptual framework of this study. Targeted acts of violence are a constant threat present anywhere people frequent and typically begin and end in minutes (Doherty, 2016; Theophilus et al., 2019). Targeted acts of violence are defined as an incident of violence in which an attacker selects a particular target to inflict mass injury or death with no discernible political or ideological motivation beyond mass injury or death. (Legal Information Institute, n.d.).

The perpetrators of targeted acts of violence are largely individuals who have a perceived grievance with a known target and have exhibited a host of precursor behaviors that would lend to the belief that the person was escalating up a trajectory toward violence. Those persons of concern who may pose a threat present to law enforcement in a myriad of ways including, but not limited to, threatening communications such as verbal threats, email, text, or social media posts, noted increased hostility toward others, and a demonstrated lack of concern for any criminal or civil consequences. In multiple post-incident analysis studies, several warning signs emerged repeatedly (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2016; Hope, 2016; Okada et al., 2020).

The assessment of a person of concern is a complex process involving the intellectual evaluation of information, balancing the information known and not known, using instinctive and formal evaluations, monitoring and evaluating behaviors, determining content versus context of the situation, and applying the pathway to violence model to the totality of the individual and circumstances (Calhoun & Weston, 2016). Threat assessment is an art that requires thoughtful, conscientious, and thorough analysis of the risks, relying heavily on professional training and experience (Hinman & Cook, 2002)

The general problem is that while law enforcement nationwide is aware of the dangers of targeted acts of violence, policing is often reactionary and may not adopt the preventative benefits offered by threat assessment and management practices, particularly in municipal settings. The specific problem is that without the understanding, investment, and application of the municipal police Chiefs in the State of Florida, threat assessment practices aiming to prevent targeted acts of violence are unlikely to be adopted by municipal police departments.

This study will address threat assessment practices aiming to prevent targeted acts of violence. The following chapter will review the literature on threat assessment, targeted acts of violence, municipal police Chiefs, and other relevant scholarship. Chapter three presents the study's research design. Relevant appendices conclude this document.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

There is no single solution to preventing targeted acts of violence and responding to active threats. Instead, strategies such as awareness and preparedness through threat assessment practices and education are the keys to prevention (Bergkamp et al., 2022; Kepp, 2016). Widely used in Federal law enforcement, and now K-12 and higher education environments, threat assessment practices of identification, assessment, management, and monitoring of persons of concern provide the most robust and comprehensive plans for the overall prevention of targeted acts of violence (Doherty, 2016; Rahn, 2019; National Threat Assessment Center, 2019). Multidisciplinary teams and student lockdown drills are not the only mechanisms to ensure safety against threats (Madfis, 2014). Instead, trust between the students and staff, training, and a positive school climate had the greatest impact on their desire to report threats of targeted acts of violence in the school environment (Madfis, 2014; National Threat Assessment Center, 2019; National Threat Assessment Center, 2021).

Targeted acts of violence are a systemic concern for all municipal policing environments (National Threat Assessment Center, 2019). Educational environments continue to progress toward preventative solutions for targeted acts of violence. In contrast, municipal environments seem to focus their efforts on interventions with mental health-related calls through methods such as CIT (Crisis Intervention Team) training for law enforcement (Okada et al., 2020; Watson et al., 2014). These efforts are beneficial in managing one part of the problem, as the mental health crisis is occurring in real-time;

law enforcement will often be summoned as the first line of defense for addressing crime imminence and violence. However, agencies may not have the resources with staffed clinicians or trained team members to focus on the prevention area of threat management through creating internal processes for receiving, triaging, and investigating threat assessment cases and training and empowering multidisciplinary threat management teams to manage and monitor persons of concern (Okada et al., 2020). Multiple studies highlight how paired responses of police and psychological services to calls of persons of concern reduce the number of individuals involved in, and the number of incidents of, concerning communications and problematic behaviors by persons of concern (James & Farnham, 2016; Muffler, 2020; Olivero, 1990). This highlights the benefit of threat assessment practices in municipal environments and confirms that threat assessment processes are effective in reducing concerning behaviors in police-related responses to call-outs and stops.

Existing research demonstrates the effectiveness of threat assessment practices in schools and communities (National Threat Assessment Center, 2019; Weston & Calhoun, 2022; Wyman, 2020). In the State of Florida, Governor Ron DeSantis has taken a strong stance on prioritizing threat analysis strategies to ensure that every government entity coordinates to identify and interrupt individuals on the pathway to violence (States News Service, 2019).

While schools have taken a hard stance on this issue, law enforcement agencies in Florida municipal policing environments may still be reluctant to employ them. According to the States News Service, a Press Release from Governor DeSantis Stated,

> Florida has experienced many senseless acts of mass violence over the last few years, and it must end now. The acts at Pulse Nightclub, The Fort Lauderdale Airport, Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, the Jacksonville Landing, the Yoga Studio in Tallahassee, and just a few weeks ago, the SunTrust Bank in Sebring have all been avoidable tragedies. We live in a new era of policing as authorities now have analytical tools they can follow that will impede further violence (States News Service, 2019).

Traditionally, law enforcement agencies have employed techniques that focus on the apprehension and prosecution of violent offenders after the crime has been committed. When given information about the potential or probability of a person committing a crime in the future, their roles, responsibilities, authority, and investigative tools become more ambiguous (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2016; Meloy & Hoffman, 2021; Turner & Gelles, 2012).

The question remains why law enforcement executives may be hesitant to create teams of paired responses of legal and psychological services and stand-up threat management processes complete with multidisciplinary threat management teams within their law enforcement agencies to manage persons of concern that emerge in their communities to prevent targeted acts of violence. Establishing a co-responder team inside

a municipal police department involves pairing a specially trained officer and a mental health crisis worker who respond in tandem to persons experiencing a mental health crisis. Leveraging their combined experience and education provides effective and efficient responses that link people with mental illnesses to the best possible resources (Bureau of Justice Assistance, n.d.; Esserman, 2021).

Since law enforcement agencies are often stretched thin and have little manpower to manage ongoing criminal complaints, it can be difficult to dedicate resources to prevent occurrences that may or may not happen (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2016; Muffler, 2020). Police leadership models the way for clearly defined processes within a police agency, including employee expectations for consistency and professionalism, organizational culture, training, and managerial support (Shjarback, 2022). If the executive leadership of a police department is not in favor of or familiar with threat management, it will not be embraced or executed by those charged with facing the populace they serve. Thus, for municipal police chiefs to see the value in implementing threat assessment practices, research is needed to show the benefits of these efforts in municipal settings. In the following literature review, I will explore threat assessment, targeted acts of violence, municipal police chiefs, and their current policing methods.

Literature Search Strategy

The databases that I searched included the Walden Library, Ebsco Discovery Service, and Thoreau Database. I used the following keywords: *Threat assessment, threats, police, municipal police, intelligence, threat management, risk, violence, mental*

illness, school violence, mass public shootings, shootings, protection, intelligence, prevention, targeted violence, mental health, law enforcement, active threat, community, reliance, programs, silence, interventions, identification, training, police, municipal police, and *police training.* Additional research sources included books written by pioneers in the threat management industry, research articles from the Association of Threat Assessment Professionals (ATAP) resources, and annual relevant publications from the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Secret Service, National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC).

Threat Assessment

In this section, I will present the history of threat assessment and contemporary research on this topic. Threat assessment, by definition, was initially developed by the United States Secret Service and, is a prevention-based approach that serves as a proactive collection of practices used for recognizing, evaluating, assessing, and managing threatening or concerning behavior before an act of violence has occurred, (Department of Homeland Security, 2021; Rahn, 2019). According to the Association of Threat Assessment Professionals, threat assessment is defined as a fact-based method of assessment/investigation that focuses on the thought patterns and behaviors of a person to determine if and to what extent they are moving toward an attack on a specific target (Association of Threat Assessment Professionals, n.d.; Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2016). The FBI has been the trendsetter in research related to profiling, threat assessment, and the use of multidisciplinary teams to assess for violence (Bennell & Bloomfield,

2007; National Threat Assessment Center, 2018). The level of violence risk and imminence posed by a person of concern or group toward a specific target is the primary focus of the threat assessment process (Bergkamp et al., 2022). Fixated behaviors, like those in stalking-related crimes, are those behaviors that rise to a pathological degree and graduate to obsessive levels, prompting intervention (Pathé et al., 2015; Calhoun & Weston, 2016). These predatory behaviors are of significant concern to the threat management team and serve as opportunities for swift intervention to prevent a targeted act of violence. Commonly, celebrities are the victims of predatory, fixated attackers. Less often, politicians are targeted by the fixated; however, it does occur and has increasingly become an area of concern for police agencies (Bleakley, 2022; Pathé et al., 2015). Threat management processes include determining the likelihood that a threatening person will carry out a threat, identifying the likely targets of the threat, evaluating the predictive extent, nature, and harm to the target, determining appropriate interventions, and identifying and apprehending the threatening person of concern (Florida Department of Law Enforcement, n.d.; Hinman & Cook, 2002; Perloe & Pollard, 2016). Threat management teams involve multiple agencies and systems to investigate and manage persons of concern, working to mitigate grievances, identifying risk factors and protective factors, and intervening to solve problems that include strategies aimed at increasing the safety of the specific target (Calhoun & Weston, 2015; Cornell & Heilbrun, 2016; Fein et al., 1995; Florida Department of Law Enforcement, n.d.; National Threat Assessment Center, 2018). Threat assessment and management is

an evolving field of knowledge and expertise in prevention and requires employing a philosophical shift in law enforcement intervention efforts (American Psychological Association, n.d.; Hinman & Cook, 2002; Ngo, 2019). According to Fein et al. (1995), violence is not simply an act, but also a process that develops over time and is the product of the personal, triggering conditions, and a setting that allows the violence to occur (Hinman & Cook, 2002). As threat managers evaluate risk and imminence, they must also consider that not all individuals who make threats pose a threat. Conversely, some individuals who never make a threat pose a threat (Fein et al., 1995; Florida Department of Law Enforcement, n.d.; Rahn, 2019; Randazzo & Cameron, 2012).

The future of law enforcement should include the use of threat management, philosophically and contextually, leveraging the professional analysis and lens from the trained law enforcement investigator who can offer insight to a multidisciplinary team into the investigative understanding of the criminal mind while also partnering with other professions to identify a clear, holistic picture of the trajectory of the person of concern (Jones & Gray, 2020). More often, threat assessment is recognized by law enforcement agencies as a research-based, proactive solution in the prevention of targeted acts of violence and mass attacks (Jones & Gray, 2020). According to Hinman and Cook (2002), threat assessment requires new skills and methods of analysis and is an art that relies on professional training and experience. However, threat assessment, as a science, must occur through relevant research. Sans research, the art of threat management must include conscientious and thoughtful analysis of risk factors. This is most accurately provided

using multidisciplinary threat management teams (Hinman & Cook, 2002; Storey et al., 2011; National Threat Assessment Center, 2019). Threat management efforts are necessary in multiple investigative areas, including but not limited to domestic violence, stalking, workplace violence, school violence, dignitary, celebrity, and executive protection, hostage situations, product tampering, and extortion (Bergkamp et al., 2022; Hinman & Cook, 2002). According to Borum et al. (1999), "the threat assessment approach moves away from the idea of profiling and instead looks at pathways of ideas and behaviors that may lead to violent actions (Hinman & Cook, 2002)". Evaluating the threat requires less focus on the communication itself and more on the author's personal characteristics and gathering and evaluating personal, historical, contextual, and clinical information to determine the imminence and probability of the threat (van der Vegt et al., 2022). After a targeted act of violence, the public outcry is that of inquiry into the cause of the psychotic break, but most attacks do not occur in that manner. Instead, trajectory behaviors through the pathway to violence indicate that a series of events escalated to the targeted act. Using effective threat assessment teams to identify, assess, and manage these threats can prevent these acts from occurring (Bohenkamp et al.,2020; Gibson et al., 2020; Hope, 2018).

History of Threat Assessment

Threat assessment began with the assassination of President McKinley and continues through domestic terrorism and the modern-day threat to schools (Randazzo & Cameron, 2012). Threat assessment and threat management have been used for decades

to prevent targeted acts of violence, leveraging an intelligence-gathering approach to combat this problem (Clemmow et al., 2022). Pioneered by the U.S. Department of the Treasury's U.S. Secret Service to protect the President of the United States and foreign leaders, threat assessment strategies of investigation and analysis of behaviors of persons who may pose threats to these individuals became the new norm after President McKinley's murder by a fixated person of concern (Fein & Vossekuil, 1998). Violence is among the leading causes of death around the world (World Health Organization, 2004), and threat assessment and threat management prevention practices, while often challenging to quantify, have likely contributed to the reduction of injuries, up to and including saving lives (Guy & Hart, 2015).

Assassination of President McKinley

The first forms of threat assessment emerged from the assassination of President McKinley on September 14, 1901 (Fein & Vossekuil, 1998). McKinley was assassinated by the anarchist Leon Czolgosz, who fixated on the president, attributing societal oppression and economic strife to the president's leadership (Fein & Vossekuil, 1998; McDonald, 1980; Meloy & Hoffman, 2021). Postmortem analysis of President McKinley's death, by today's standards of threat management, identifies leakage and pathway to violence behaviors were present prior to his murder. Czolgosz exhibited extremist ideation of anarchist behaviors, following the teachings of a known anarchist and public speaker, Emma Godman, and conducted preparatory research and planning, pre-attack preparation, and probing and breaching prior to the attack (Calhoun & Weston,

2003; Meloy & Hoffman, 2021). Over eight decades later, Los Angeles Police Department adopted threat management into their policing strategies to protect high-profile celebrities experiencing threats. Subsequently, threat assessment entered a new era.

LAPD Hollywood and Celebrity Protection

Before Los Angeles Police Department implemented the LAPD Threat Management Unit in 1989, law enforcement did not involve themselves so intimately into the management of persons of concern (Department of Homeland Security, 2024; Gelles et al., 2002). In fact, it wasn't until the stalking and murder of a 19-year-old celebrity, Rebecca Schaffer, at her home that same year that the LAPD stepped up their investment into managing high-risk stalking cases of high-profile personalities (Meloy & Hoffman, 2016; Meloy & Hoffman, 2021). In addition, the State of California increased its attention by implementing stricter stalking laws in 1990 and limited accessibility to personal data information through the California Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles and the Driver's Privacy Protection Act in 1994 (California Department of Motor Vehicles, 2012). Access to Schaffer's personal information through an inquiry of her driver's license had been the open door that exposed Schaffer's home address and ultimately cost her life (Gelles et al., 2002).

The Schaffer murder prompted significant media attention and created intense political pressure, compelling the LAPD to dedicate resources to persons with long-term threatening behaviors. In short order, management recognized that stalking behaviors

were not the only concerning behaviors that necessitated intervention and directed the Threat Management Unit to utilize a range of strategies for the management of cases of persons of concern before opportunities for targeted acts of violence could occur (Calhoun & Weston, 2016; Meloy & Hoffman, 2021). As cases of targeted acts of stalking and violence evolved, so did the efforts made to combat them and the relationship between domestic terrorism and identifying known persons of concern.

As the first threat management law enforcement division in the United States, the Los Angeles Police Department Threat Management Unit committed its work to combat stalking. As of 2008, the Threat Management Unit would manage approximately 250 cases annually, with only about 10 percent represented as celebrities on their caseload (Corwin, 2008). Today, the LAPD Threat Management Unit focuses on local and world events, which have reshaped their expectations of the resources needed to manage the various threat-related challenges. Their investigative focus at present includes aggravated stalking cases, aggravated criminal threat cases, all threats directed at city elective officials, and all workplace violence cases involving city employees and their departments (Meloy & Hoffman, 2021).

Domestic Terrorism

The Federal Bureau of Investigation reports that its number one priority is protecting the United States from terrorist attacks (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2023). One way by which they accomplish this is through threat assessment practices. Domestic terrorism is broadly defined as the intentional use of threat of violence by non-

state actors to achieve political goals and to create significant psychological distress and maximum impact (Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2022; Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2023) This definition is consistent with the US Code 2331 as "Acts dangerous to human life, that occur primarily within U.S. territory and are intended to (i) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; (ii) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or (iii) to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination or kidnapping" (Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2022; Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2023). While the threat of domestic terrorism continued to trend upward over the last 25 years (Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2022), the media focus seems to be more on the types of weapons used and the political implications related to firearms possession. Government agencies (such as the Department of Homeland Security, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Secret Service (NTAC – National Threat Assessment Center) offer significant teachings to local-level law enforcement on how best to identify and aggressively target these individuals and groups who threaten the safety of schools and communities all over the U.S. (National Threat Assessment Center, 2018). According to Wyman, any tip concerning a threat connected to an ideology or terrorism is often likely referred to the Joint Terrorism Task Force, commonly referred to as the JTTF, and worked in a manner consistent with the trusted integrated team approach (2020). One of the deadliest terrorist attacks in the United States since the attacks on September 11th, 2001, occurred when a gunman entered the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida, and began shooting innocent

staff members and club patrons. Beginning as an active shooter, the suspect quickly barricaded himself inside the club with multiple hostages inside. By the conclusion of the incident, 102 people had been shot, 49 people were killed, and 5 had non-gunshot-related injuries. The attacker pledged his allegiance to ISIS in his 911 call to authorities, claiming ownership of the brutal killings. It was later learned that he had been interviewed by the FBI multiple times prior to the incident, and the multiple red flags preceding his attacks had been missed (Straub et al., 2017).

Post 9/11 Era

After the attacks on the Twin Towers in New York on September 11, 2001, the threat assessment landscape has continued to expand throughout the United States from both foreign and domestic threat actors (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2023). As time and technology evolved, so did the opportunity for international and domestic terrorists to recruit, promote, and enhance their efforts by gaining virtual access to people within the US to promote these attacks domestically (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2023). During President Barack Obama's term in the White House, Federal intelligence agencies engaged in proactive, wide-sweeping threat assessment of US citizens by monitoring their personal communication (Greenwald, 2013). Lone offenders typically discover appealing political or terrorist ideation through radicalization online and are difficult to identify, investigate, and interrupt (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2023). Social media creates additional challenges for investigators as it provides ease in recruitment and communication and provides a welcoming space for those troubled individuals seeking a

sense of belonging and purpose (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2023). Thus, FISC (Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court) proceedings were used during this time to enable such agencies to engage in covert surveillance online (Greenwald, 2013). Local, State, and National campaigns such as ‘See Something, Say Something’ have enhanced opportunities for reporting through websites, links, and tip lines (Department of Homeland Security, 2021).

Shifting Public Policy After School Shootings

American schools have been home to some of the most tragically memorable incidents of targeted violence (Bergkamp et al., 2022). While school shootings have existed since before the turn of the century, among the most impactful to public policy and heightened urgency for law enforcement response was the mass casualty incident at Columbine High School on April 20, 1999 (Hendrix et al., 2022). This shooting disrupted the country and gave the FBI a sense of urgency to delve into the relevant research related to the issue (Hendrix et al., 2022). As two student shooters actively executed fellow students within the walls of the large high school, law enforcement stood by outside and awaited SWAT (Special Weapons and Tactics) teams to prepare for entry from outside the building. By the time SWAT eventually made entry, 15 people were dead, including 12 students, one teacher, and the two attackers who committed suicide after their attack (Governor’s Commission on Columbine High School, 2001). After the attack at Columbine High School, the United States Secret Service and the Department of Education worked together to determine the reasoning for these acts, including a

thorough analysis of the thinking, behavior, motives, and goals of those who committed these targeted acts of violence (Vossekuil et al., 2015). Since this event, law enforcement officers have been trained in rapid emergency deployment, regardless of their assignment, and are required and equipped to enter and eliminate active threats. In addition, Incident Command System protocols leveraging successful planning and inter and intra-agency responses to large-scale emergencies to control the scene, assemble personnel, and clearly communicate objectives were implemented. Further, the development of comprehensive school crisis plans was implemented and are forevermore mandated as a national standard for best practices in school-based policing (Governor's Commission on Columbine High School, 2001). Threat assessment practices have evolved significantly since the Columbine tragedy (Goodrum et al., 2019).

On December 14, 2012, 26 victims were killed at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, after a rogue shooter entered the school, shot, and killed twenty young children (aged 6 and 7 years old) and six adults (Sandy Hook After Action Report, 2015). From this incident sprang mandatory gun law requirements prohibiting the sale and possession of high-capacity magazines and armor-piercing incendiary bullets. New legislation included the development of mandatory annual school safety plan development and safe school infrastructure to include entire perimeter lockdown capabilities and locking capabilities for interior classrooms (Sandy Hook After Action Report, 2015) as well as the mandated use of threat assessment teams in K-12 public schools (Cornell et al., 2018). Additional support for mental health crisis identification

and the application of resources to those in need were also a significant part of the evolution of statewide prevention efforts (Sandy Hook After Action Report, 2015).

The Marjory Stoneman Douglas (MSD) High School in Parkland, Florida, experienced the deadliest school shooting to date on February 14, 2018 (Katsiyannis et al., 2018), and the subsequent investigation revealed a host of challenges related to the shooter and his pre-attack behaviors, as well as previously posted videos on YouTube outlining his intent to commit a shooting at the school three days prior to the incident. The MSD student shooter had multiple risk factors, including documented mental health issues, known identified acts of violence (including harming and killing animals), childhood trauma, familial and academic challenges, disciplinary issues, known ideations with school shooters, and grievances with students at the school. Law enforcement at the local and federal levels (FBI) had a working knowledge of many of these challenges but made limited significant efforts at intervention (Florida Department of Law Enforcement, 2019). After the MSD mass attack, the State of Florida aggressively fostered senate and house bills that led to the Marjory Stoneman Public Safety Act (Florida Department of Education, n.d), mandating behavioral threat assessment processes through the establishment of trained multidisciplinary teams in every school in the State of Florida (Florida Department of State, n.d.). Thus began the aggressive pursuit of leveraging behavioral threat assessment to prevent targeted acts of violence in the State of Florida.

Contemporary Research Regarding Threat Assessment

Contemporary research about threat assessment focuses on creating theoretical approaches to threat assessment, risk management, perpetrator psychology, and law enforcement psychology and wellbeing (Calhoun & Weston, 2003; Okada et al.,2020). Current research on threats predominantly involves the retrospective analysis of the events to determine those common features present in the perpetrators of the violence (Mitchell & Palka, 2016). Additional contemporary research in threat assessment includes studies on workplace violence, campus and university violence, school shootings, violence against public figures, terrorism, and the related theories and development of threat assessment protocols (Meloy et al., 2012).

Theories of Threat Assessment

Management of threats in real-time to reduce risk and mitigate escalation requires multiple layers of appropriate response (Campbell et al., 2022; Turner & Gelles, 2012). Each plan is as unique as the individual who poses concern. Management techniques applied to each aim to reduce risk and prevent escalation. These mitigation efforts are not a predictive means of determining an absolute outcome (Turner & Gelles, 2012).

Methods in contemporary threat management include but are not limited to Violence Risk Assessment, Structured Professional Judgment (SPJ), Understanding and application of the pathway to violence, Situational crime prevention, and multidisciplinary threat management teams. Regardless of the strategies employed, threat management situations are rarely open and shut and require consistent management and

monitoring to prevent violent behaviors (Calhoun & Weston, 2003). According to the U.S. Department of Justice, there are ten golden rules for effective contemporary threat management in their research regarding protecting judicial officials. These elements include recognizing the need for threat management processes, assigning responsibility to case management, providing training, documenting cases well, collaborating with other agencies, using practical and valid threat management strategies intelligently and flexibly, communicating professionally and competently with those parties impacted, and managing cases appropriately (Calhoun & Weston, 2006).

Violence risk assessment uses the method of estimating probability of violent behavior by connecting the involvement of the person of concern to a specific at-risk group (Meloy et al., 2011). According to Meloy & Hoffman, “Threat assessment typically occurs in an operational context and can be conducted by law enforcement, national security, private or corporate security, and mental health and human resources professionals; whereas violence risk assessment is usually done in a judicial context and can be conducted by mental health, corrections, and social service professionals” (Meloy & Hoffman, 2021, Pg. 7). Criminal Justice professionals are moving toward using structured risk assessments as they become critically important in the identification of risk and managing offenders within the community (Storey et al., 2011).

Structured professional judgment (SPJ) is the foundation of risk assessment and has been an effective tool for law enforcement when evaluating risk (Storey et al., 2011). Through this process, evaluators are given information that includes critical risk factors

taken from the existing scientific and professional literature on threat assessment (Storey, et al, 2011). According to Fein and Vossekuil (1998) Threat assessment is behavior-based and requires deduction. This is in direct contrast to violence risk assessment and profiling (Randazzo & Cameron, 2012). Law enforcement officers trained in criminal profiling offer a level of knowledge and expertise to the threat assessment team through assistance when the offender is unknown to investigators. Profiling, like threat assessment, involves both art and science (Hinman & Cook, 2002). Threat assessment draws on investigative experience and specialized training but also requires a deeper understanding of the psychology of aggression (Hinman & Cook, 2002). The Federal Bureau of Investigation has long since been the trend setter on research related to profiling, threat assessment, and the use of multidisciplinary teams in these processes (Bennell & Bloomfield, 2007).

Developed by Calhoun and Weston (2003), pathway to violence behavior is part of the pathway to intended violence model and in threat management is commonly used in structured professional judgment instruments, such as WAVR-21; a 21-item coded instrument used to asses risk in workplace and campus settings (WAVR-21, n.d.). Individuals who commit targeted acts of violence follow a recognizable pathway to violence (Hope, 2018). Researchers have identified these pathway behaviors typically beginning with a grievance or a constant and escalating grudge stemming from some sense of loss, humiliation, anger, and blame (Okada et al., 2020; Scalora et al., 2020). The six stages of the pathway include the grievance (real or perceived) held by the perpetrator, violent ideation, research and planning the attack, pre-attack preparation,

probing and breaches, and the final attack (see Appendix E) (Calhoun & Weston, 2003). Persons of concern can move along the pathway in no specific linear fashion, stages can be skipped, and the perpetrator can regress to earlier stages on the pathway before completing their attack. Some may reach the stage of attack but often move up and down along the pathway before doing so. Interventions at various points can interrupt the upward trajectory towards the attack (Miller, 2014). Targeted acts of violence are often preventable through the identification of pre-cursor behaviors identified on the pathway to violence (Calhoun & Weston, 2003; Florida Department of Law Enforcement, n.d.; Hope, 2018; Okada et al., 2020).

Situational crime prevention efforts involve reducing the opportunity for the crime to be committed through minimizing the reward and removing the opportunity (College of Policing, n.d.). In preventing targeted acts of violence in school settings that requires intervention strategies that include target hardening such as; school lock downs, easily accessible automatic lockdown buttons, single points of entry, perimeter fencing, and controlled access to buildings (Clarke & Eck, n.d). Additional strategies include consistent, practiced lockdown drills such as concealing targets appropriately and ensuring students remain quiet to prevent attracting the attention of the attacker.

Multidisciplinary threat management teams involve proactive strategies to prevent targeted acts of violence from occurring at all. These teams are effective in reducing concerning behaviors through intervention efforts resulting in management and monitoring of identified and assessed persons of concern (James & Farhman, 2016).

Multidisciplinary teams are comprised of collaborative key stakeholders who are trained, prepared, and aware of prevention and mitigation strategies for intervening and disrupting a person on the pathway to violence (Kepp, 2016; Liam et al., 2015).

Differing from risk assessment and profiling, as previously noted, threat assessment utilizes deduction and analysis of behavior and can be used in an operational context (Meloy & Hoffman, 2021). The steps include identification of a person of concern who may pose a threat, gathering information from various connected sources, evaluating if the threat is real and determining the imminence, and developing a plan to intervene to interrupt the opportunity for the threat to be carried out (Randazzao & Cameron, 2012). In one study, Liam and Michael, conducted a program evaluation research study on an integrated Threat and Risk Assessment Center to determine which case management intervention strategies were most frequently used. They determined that the most effective strategies included offering strict and immediate enforcement of court ordered conditions, holding a subject upon breaching, discussing the safety plan with the victim, and restricting child visitation, until substance abuse, mental health and anger issues have been addressed with appropriate people to include the police (Liam & Michael, 2015).

Effective strategies exist for a myriad of challenging and threatening behaviors but are as unique in application as the very people they are intended to manage. Specific information about the subject's motivation, intentions, mental health status, and ability to carry out a threat is important to include in the development of these management plans

(Geurts et al., 2018). Much of these important clues can be ascertained through investigative efforts and interviews with the person of concern (Geurts, et al, 2018). It is important for the team to develop effective interventions based on the specific needs of each individual and each case, and to make adjustments based on their effectiveness (Randazzo & Cameron, 2012). Finally, what is known during the interview and data collection must be critically evaluated against the circumstances and context of the current situation. For example, according to Calhoun and Weston (2015), Evidence of an interest in weapons is not as important when assessing an avid hunter. However, it takes on greater consideration when assessing someone who only recently expressed such interest during a volatile termination process with their previous employer. In these cases, context guides the assessment and should be considered during the management strategy implementation phase as well.

Risk Management

Turner and Gelles state, "Risk management has two intertwined primary components, 1. A threat assessment that remains ongoing and 2. Risk control actions that are intended to manage the threat and contain / reduce the level of threat" (2012, p.3). As criminal justice professionals, primarily the police, are challenged with triaging cases of persons of concern, leveraging risk management through identifying risk and offering interventions in real time that are keys to prevention. (Storey et al., 2011).

Cases of repeat violence where law enforcement is known to respond again and again, such as one of the most challenging and dangerous calls for service, intimate

partner violence (IPV) (Campbell et al., 2017) embedded within are critical opportunities for safety planning and risk management (Saxton et al., 2020). Studies related to training law enforcement on the use of validated risk assessment instruments and structured professional judgment have shown that these efforts aid law enforcement in the identification of appropriate responses and interventions (Campbell et al., 2017; Saxton et al, 2020).

Multidisciplinary threat assessment teams, established in both public and private organizations, as well as educational environments, enable the ongoing assessment and opportunity for intervention when a person is determined to exhibit potentially threatening behavior (Bergkamp et al., 2022; Concordia, 2022). The objective remains to interrupt the escalation on the trajectory toward violence and prevent violent acts. Behavioral indicators exhibited by the person of concern offer team members clues toward a trajectory of behaviors toward a bigger picture of potential intent (Doherty, 2016).

Conversely, the assembly of the team does not always necessitate aggressive and immediate intervention. According to the Campus Security Report (2012), a trained threat management team will understand that not every report of troubling behavior requires such drastic intervention. In fact, sometimes, the reports received can lack credibility, or the behaviors or words are taken out of context (Calhoun & Weston, 2015; Campus Security Report, 2012). Additional considerations are given to those persons who are considered socially awkward and / or the reporting person is trying to get

someone into trouble by making the report (Campus Security Report, 2012). Cases of concern brought to the attention of a threat management team offer assessment through the identification of risk and mitigation factors present in the subject's life, identification of true motives, and intervention strategies, as well as a range of management options to include but not limited to, safety planning, and voluntary or involuntary psychiatric treatment (Concordia, 2022; James & Farnham, 2016). These situations can be volatile and stressful and require attention to the ongoing evolution of the case (Calhoun & Weston, 2015).

According to James and Farnham (2016), 100 cases observed in their study illustrate that threat assessment teams effectively reduce concerning behaviors and that threat management is an ongoing process and not a single response event. Threat assessment, in its ongoing effort to monitor impact, aids in strategizing for reduced or supplemental efforts based on outcomes and requires attention, flexibility, and a swift response by the threat manager (Calhoun & Weston, 2015). Doherty says this specialized method of threat assessment inquiry requires three key steps: 1. Identification of persons of concern who are exhibiting signs or behaviors of intent to do harm through an attack. 2. Gathering information through multiple sources to conduct a comprehensive risk assessment. 3. Create a management plan specific to that individual to disrupt the trajectory toward violence (2016).

Perpetrator Psychology

Successful threat management involves developing a broad understanding of the person of concern (POC) through shared information gathering and communication among members of a multidisciplinary threat management team (Calhoun & Weston, 2015; Doherty, 2016; Wyman, 2020). Information collected through this process may include mental and medical history, behaviors (past and present), existing life circumstances, motivation, criminal history, organization connection, interest, or ideation, specialized training, weapons ownership or opportunity and interest in acquiring weapons, interviews with family, co-workers or those close to the POC, criminal history and/or any protective intelligence information such as risk protection orders, trespass warnings, or restraining orders (Doherty, 2016; Wyman, 2020). Additional considerations when evaluating risk include potential risk-enhancing and risk-mitigating factors (Department of Homeland Security, 2021). Risk factors involve those considerations that could enhance the likelihood of violence, whereas mitigating factors are those protective factors that could prevent the individual from acting out toward violence (Department of Homeland Security, 2021). Precipitating events, or those events that have been established over time, could contribute to triggering behaviors or adding stressors toward the person of concern (Department of Homeland Security, 2021). While it is impossible to predict dangerous behaviors in the future, the aim of threat management is prevention. Using risk factors as a guide, such as those behaviors that are statistically associated with

negative outcomes) it is possible to identify when persons of concern are at a higher risk of perpetuating violent behaviors (James & Farnham, 2016; Okada et al., 2020).

Perpetrator Psychology is often identified through pathway to violence behaviors (Hope, 2018; Reid & Meloy, 2003). Warning behaviors communicated through 'leakage' are important in the evaluation of perpetrator psychology, and the imminence of a potential threat being carried out by an individual (Lankford, 2017; Scalora et al., 2020). Internet and electronic communication technology, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, provide a space for perpetrators to release their instantaneous feelings and grievances for others to bear witness. This also opens the door to harassing and threatening messages for would-be perpetrators. Grievances are the first layer of pathway to violence behaviors and often help law enforcement officers identify the motive of the person of concern who is making the threats (Reid & Meloy, 2003; Scalora et al., 2020). Fixated behaviors are those behaviors that have an obsessive preoccupation with a person toward a pathological degree for an idiosyncratic purpose (Bleakley, 2022; Pathé et al., 2015). While fixation can normally be attributed to stalking behaviors toward celebrities or high-profile personalities, it can also be attributed to people who are fixated toward a cause or grievance that leads to harassment (Bleakley, 2022; Pathé et al., 2015). In threat assessment, the perpetrator psychology regarding the motive often takes priority over the intent, because in most cases the overt acts to further the crime are absent. Interventions to identify the underlying conflicts, triggers, and crisis help to shape the reasoning behind the grievance and aids threat managers in early intervention. Waiting for evidence of

intent could mean waiting too late resulting in a targeted act of violence (Concordia, 2022). To determine a true threat management plan, team members must gather information about motivation, intentions, mental health, data bases, and subject interviews. A holistic understanding of the person of concern is required for effective threat management (Concordia, 2022;Geurts et al., 2018). It is impossible to truly know when a person who has exhibited behaviors of concern is truly sincere about their communication to harm others; this is precisely why all leakage behaviors should be taken seriously (Hendrix et al., 2022).

Law Enforcement Psychology and Well Being

Law enforcement officers are uniquely trained to respond to persons in varying levels of crisis. The common response for a law enforcement officer to an incident involves identification and triage of the imminence of the threat, appropriate and often expeditious response, securing of the scene, identifying witnesses, gathering statements and evidence, documenting the findings, and making an arrest when appropriate (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, n.d.). Police officers receive ongoing and annual training for various required disciplines to include high liability training in firearms, defensive tactics, driving, and use of less-than-lethal weapons systems such as tasers and OC (oleoresin capsicum – pepper spray) as well as de-escalation techniques, ethics training, report writing, anti-bias training, etc. (National Institute of Justice, n.d.) ‘Training’ is common vernacular to law enforcement. It is expected and valued within the profession. Since they are familiar with training and recognize the need for constant

improvement and needs for process refinement (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2022), police officers are poised to receive and adopt additional methods that would aid them in the identification of persons of concern who could go on to commit targeted acts of violence (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, n.d.). Training officers in the risk factors, mitigating factors, concerning behaviors, safety planning, and risk management surrounding identified persons of concern is an established step to protecting the public from these acts (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, n.d.). Officers can be trained in risk assessment by leveraging instruments to assess threats and risks, and threat assessment and management strategies that enhance safety and security for all (Storey et al., 2011; Muffler, 2020). For example, in a study conducted by (Storey et al., 2011) two approaches to risk assessment using structured professional judgment (SPJ) and actuarial assessments in identifying potential risk of targeted acts of violence resulted in law enforcement responding positively to training. Their study determined that using Structured professional judgment instruments, reliability, and validity in practice by criminal justice professionals (including police officers) resulted in their ability to identify and manage offenders within their own communities (2011). This study highlighted those participants in their training of these instruments resulted in feelings of increased confidence, competence, and knowledge in their application (Storey et al., 2011). Structured risk assessments have been utilized by mental health professionals and are now becoming more important to criminal justice professionals in the assessment of risk (Storey et al., 2011).

Finally, considering threat assessment, researchers regard threat assessment as "the determination of the level of targeted violence risk posed by an individual or group toward a specific target" (Bergkamp et al., 2022). Threat assessment is useful in Federal law enforcement, k-12 and higher education environments, providing the most robust and comprehensive plans for overall prevention of targeted acts of violence (Doherty, 2016). Threatening situations are more likely to have favorable outcomes for society when entities inside and outside of law enforcement collaborate to investigate and manage, to provide solutions to problems (Hinman & Cook, 2002; Muffler, 2022). While threat assessment is a new concept to local law enforcement agencies, as it is developing and providing another mechanism for law enforcement to manage persons of concern, refining expertise, and techniques are consistently developing and evolving to meet the challenges presented by each case (Hinman & Cook, 2002, Muffler, 2022).

What researchers do not understand about threat assessment is how it impacts traditional law enforcement and criminal activity in municipal settings. For example, Jones & Gray (2020) highlight how traditional law enforcement approaches to targeted violence have been primarily reactive, focusing exclusively on tactical police responses to active shooter incidents. Threat assessment and management are foreign concepts to traditional law enforcement officers as they are taught from the beginning of their careers to gather facts and file criminal charges as deemed appropriate. They also discuss the multifaceted ethical and legal challenges that face law enforcement in these complex investigations, including maintaining the balance between the protection of the

constitutional rights of the subject while protecting the public (Jones & Gray, 2020). At the conclusion of their study, Jones and Gray suggest that further research should be conducted on how these challenges related to law enforcement officers as threat managers and assessors are different or similar in other law enforcement agencies in other states and jurisdictions (2020).

Law enforcement responses today include taking a more nuanced view and working toward identifying those persons who pose a threat versus those who make a threat, with an understanding of the significant difference (Gibson et al., 2020; Rahn, 2019). Modernized law enforcement strategies include the use of threat assessment processes that incorporate police, psychology, and protective intelligence toward the prevention of targeted acts of violence (Doherty, 2016; Muffler, 2020). Yet while threat management strategies are recommended as best practices, the role of local and state law enforcement officers responding to these persons of concern whose behaviors suggest the potential for imminent danger or future violent behavior creates a series of challenges for the responding officer (Concordia, 2022). In fact, the local-level responding officer has few options if the person of concern does not rise to the level of arrest or mandatory mental health evaluation (Concordia, 2022). What researchers do not understand about threat assessment is how it impacts traditional law enforcement and criminal activity in municipal settings. As discussed, much of the literature about threat assessment, and the utilization of multidisciplinary teams, focuses on educational policing settings and dignitary or celebrity protection. Therefore, scholars recommend future research about

threat assessment in municipal policing and law enforcement environments in different states and jurisdictions, as it is being recognized as a research-based, proactive solution to prevent incidents of targeted acts of violence (Jones & Gray, 2020).

Targeted Acts of Violence

Weston and Calhoun assert that an individual planning violent acts typically engages in observable behaviors (2022). This is the foundation of threat assessment as a means of preventing targeted acts of violence. Targeted acts of violence are defined as incidents of violence where an attacker identifies and selects a specific target to inflict injury, mass injury, up to and including death, with no discernable political or ideological motivation other than the intent to inflict one or more casualties (Legal Information Institute, n.d.). Targeted violence is also the result of an understandable and frequently discernable process of behavior and thinking triggered by an interaction among the attacker, past events, a current situation, and the target (Meloy & Hoffman, 2021). As these violent acts occur around the globe, it is commonly the case that observable concerning behaviors are present in multiple areas of the perpetrator's life. Commonly seen after any attack, out of the woodwork comes the media interviews of the neighbor, the work colleague, and the ex-lover speaking publicly about how they always knew the described attack was imminent. This creates an opportunity for threat managers to gather information on identified persons of concern to manage the behaviors and interrupt the trajectory on the pathway to violence before violence occurs (Calhoun & Weston, 2003).

Accordingly, the following presents the history of targeted acts of violence and contemporary research regarding the same.

History of Targeted Acts of Violence

The United States has more mass public shootings than any other developed country globally (Cappellan & Lewandowski, 2019). Leakage and communicated threats to commit a violent act toward a target are consistently discovered as precursors to the event (Cappellan & Lewandowski, 2019). Precursor identifiers were present in all the following cases that led to some of the most significant targeted acts of violence in the United States. The following highlights the history of targeted acts of violence, including 9/11, the Columbine and Sandy Hook School Shootings, the Virginia Tech active shooter, and the 2017 Las Vegas shooting.

The 9/11 Attacks

Evaluating threat management from the lens of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, requires a deep dive into the psychology of the suicide terrorists. Their top ringleader, Mohamed Atta, is likely the most significant suicide terrorist in human history (Lankford, 2012). Atta, leading Al Qaeda's 19 hijackers, took the lives of nearly 3000 Americans at the Twin Towers and the United States Pentagon, prompting the US response of the global war on terror (Lankford, 2012). Had threat management been applied to Atta's motives and psychology preceding the attack, we would have learned of his ongoing anger regarding the foreign occupation of Muslims, escalating social withdrawal and isolation, deep religious practices, and the authoring of his last will and

testament pledging to carry out a suicide attack (Lankford, 2012). A major risk factor for depression and suicide is often social isolation, including being single, living alone, having few friends, and absent familial contacts and relations (Lankford, 2012). In earlier days, Atta was vocal about not using violence to solve conflicts, but as he withdrew from social networks, he drew closer to extreme religious ideologies (Lankford, 2012). After the attacks on 9/11, intelligence-led policing models such as those dedicated to lone actor grievance-fueled violence have been used, leveraging multi-agency intelligence sharing from mental health providers, criminal history of offenders, and other community resources (Clemmow et al., 2022). Protecting the United States from terrorist attacks remains the FBI's number one priority (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2023).

Columbine

On April 20, 1999, two disgruntled Columbine High School seniors walked onto the school grounds with the intent to kill as many teachers and students as possible. After previously planting two 20-pound propane bombs that failed to ignite, the two would-be murderers began shooting students outside and inside the school. Their onslaught of shootings and killings took place in hallways, the school's library, and the outside grounds, and ultimately ended in the cafeteria. The calls to 911 flooded in, and dispatchers advised students to take cover under tables. Many were killed execution style. Others shot with potentially non-life-threatening injuries died due to significant delays in first responder arrival times. A full 47 minutes after their reign of terror began, both shooters committed suicide, leaving 13 dead (12 students and one teacher) and multiple

wounded. Due to first responders being unaware of their deaths inside the building, several more hours passed before they made entry to provide rescue and identify the deceased (Governor's Commission on Columbine High School, 2001).

In their 188-page report, the Governor's Columbine Review Commission Executive Summary described recommendations that surfaced that changed the way law enforcement responds to active killer events forever. A top priority for law enforcement after Columbine has been to stop any ongoing assault immediately. First responding officers are to have immediately available weapons and protective equipment in preparation for the immediate pursuit of active armed attackers and should receive specialized training in rapid emergency deployment, regardless of their assignment on any special weapons and tactics teams. Additionally, the immediate establishment of incident command on any critical or emergency incident is essential for the successful planning and ongoing interagency communication necessary to manage a large-scale event. Managing such a crisis from an Incident Command System (ICS) is necessary to establish leadership responsibilities, control resources and personnel, and communicate objectives early on to subordinate staff (Governor's Commission on Columbine High School, 2001).

The horrific tragedies at Columbine forced law enforcement to alter the way they responded to these incidents and created a "stop the killing, stop the dying" mindset in the culture. Since this implementation, fire rescue emergency workers have joined forces, adding "rescue task forces" also identified as fire-fighter/paramedics who are trained in

special weapons and tactics measures to bring the wounded to a warm zone inside a scene that is yet to be secure to provide immediate life-saving measures. Since their implementation in emergency response, these efforts have truly aided in stopping the killing and the dying.

In addition to the recommendations, the commission established that a threat assessment team should be established at every high and middle school that will be responsible for evaluating threats of violence reported by teachers, students, school staff, or law enforcement. The team should include a school staff member, a counselor, a vice principal, a trained mental health professional, and a law enforcement professional. The team shall receive training on threat assessment and suicidal ideation, and is expected to keep items confidential and maintain records of their interactions. Additionally, the team should investigate all reports of verbal and written threats, hit lists, and any other indication of potential or future violence, and every potential threat leaked should be taken seriously and investigated (Hendrix, 2022). Each school shall also adopt effective violence prevention programs that meet the needs of the school, in both school and community-based programs that allow for family referrals. After the Columbine killings, the Secret Service and the Department of Education created the Safe School Initiative to develop threat assessment strategies into the thinking, behaviors, motives, and goals of those who commit targeted acts of violence (Vossehuil et al., 2015).

These tragedies would have likely been prevented altogether if the two killers had been identified, assessed, and managed before the crisis. In their postmortem threat

assessment of the two, it was determined that one suffered from depression and social ostracism, had journaled of his intent to obtain a gun to commit suicide, and go on a killing spree. The other had been placed on antidepressant medications. Both killers created a series of troubling videotapes discussing their plot to acquire weaponry without detection. Although they attempted to act alone, others knew about their bomb-making, firearms, and ammunition accumulation. After the killings, other students told law enforcement they had seen the videotapes of target practice when one of the shooters played them for his classmates at the school video studio. Additionally, a teacher was concerned about a violent essay written by one of the shooters and took steps to meet with his parents and the school counselor about the "ghastly composition" (Colorado Commission Report 2001). Both killers had been flagged by the Jefferson County Juvenile Justice System for "dangerous potential," had been arrested for theft, and suspended from school for hacking into the school's computer programs, and they both were placed in juvenile diversion programs as a result. They were also accused of making threats to another student and expressing hatred for all of society and humankind. In addition to their video evidence trails seen by many, the two spent months garnering their explosives and weaponry, arming themselves with dozens of explosive devices, seven knives, two sawed-off shotguns, a 9 mm semiautomatic pistol, and a 9 mm semiautomatic carbine rifle, and enough ammunition to commit their killings and then some (Governor's Commission on Columbine High School, 2001.).

An active threat management team and a clearly defined process would have identified, assessed, and intervened, preventing these historical and tragic school shootings from occurring in the first place (Governor's Commission on Columbine High School, 2001). Since the killings, uniformed officers have been seen in K-12 schools and universities daily and are revered as part of a safe, educational ecosystem. Students and faculty are comfortable with seeing a uniformed presence in campus communities today (Parfitt, 2012).

Sandy Hook

The devastating acts of targeted violence impacted the entire nation on December 14, 2012, when 20 children and six educators were senselessly murdered by a lone attacker at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. The killer, an adult mentally ill man, shot and killed his mother at their home, and then drove to the school he attended as a child, gained entry to the front of the school by firing through glass, and began shooting administrators and first-grade children with an arsenal of previously acquired firearms and ammunition. Police responded within minutes of the first 911 calls, but were too late to stop the killing and dying. The lone killer had quickly executed the innocents and then ended his own life with a self-inflicted gunshot wound, leaving a legacy of senseless murder, unrelenting fear, and inexplicable tragedy (Sandy Hook After Action Report, 2015). From this horrific school massacre, the commission determined several areas that required change in providing mandated safe school designs and operation strategies to school environments, including incorporation of these best

practices in future school design and renovations, advancements in building materials, security technologies, situational awareness, special attention toward mental and behavioral health and stricter laws on firearms (Sandy Hook After Action Report, p.15). The Sandy Hook shooter suffered from mental health challenges, including a diagnosis of Asperger's syndrome, depression, and suicidal thoughts. He had an unhealthy obsession with weapons, previous mass shootings, and school shootings, including Columbine, and had created an in-depth spreadsheet of previous mass murders (BBC News, 2017). In response to this mass attack, Virginia became the first state in the U.S. to mandate the use of threat assessment teams in public schools (Cornell et al., 2018).

Virginia Tech

A horrific mass casualty attack was perpetrated at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, resulting in the deaths of 32 people and injuries to 27 on April 16, 2007. This targeted act of violence drew attention to campus safety and discussion of the ability to respond to such emergencies in these environments (Deisinger & Scalora, 2016) Subsequently, the Commonwealth of Virginia created a statutory requirement for government supported higher education institutions in the commonwealth to "implement policies and procedures for the prevention of violence on campus, including assessment and intervention with individuals whose behavior poses a threat to the safety of the campus community" (Virginia, 2008; Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007). Among the new requirements, campus authorities are required to offer guidance for students, staff and faculty regarding threatening and concerning behaviors exhibited by persons of

concern and identify methods, policies, and procedures for those stakeholders to report, and establish threat assessment teams that include members of law enforcement, mental health professionals, student affairs representatives, legal counsel, and human resources (Deisinger & Scalora, 2016). In addition to these mandates, the Virginia legislature also passed laws relative to increased services in mental health related cases, including improved emergency evaluation processes for mental health crises, modifications to involuntary commitment standards, increased funding for mental health services, enhanced collaboration between the courts and mental health providers, and data management of monitoring and oversight of commitments and their processes (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2016). The shooter was diagnosed with major depressive disorder and selective mutism, was bullied throughout school, wrote plays and other writings containing references to violence concerning teachers and students, was described by other classmates as a loner, was transfixed with the Columbine shooters, and wrote in a school assignment how he wanted to 'repeat Columbine.'

Las Vegas

A mass public shooting occurred at the Harvest Festival on October 1, 2017, claiming the lives of 58 and injuring over 800, 422 of whom were gunshot wounds (Marcou, 2019). Known as the deadliest mass shooting in the history of the United States, the cause of injuries to the masses resulted from both gunfire and the subsequent chaos, creating terror and pandemonium. The hospitals quickly became overwhelmed with patients when hundreds poured in seeking care (Melmer et al., 2019). Law enforcement

responded quickly, but the damage was done in minutes. The shooter, positioned on the 32nd floor of the Mandalay Bay Hotel, was detected when a security officer making his rounds saw him. He was hit by fragments from the shooter firing at him, but was able to notify police of the shooting and the location. Unfortunately, his report came in simultaneously with other reports of the shooter being on the ground. While thousands of concert goers scrambled toward exits and knocked down fences to escape, two law enforcement officers made their way up to the 32nd floor. Responding officers on the ground worked toward getting people safely out of the exits, assisting the wounded, and forming strike teams to locate and eliminate the threat (Marcou, 2019). Upon arrival on the 32nd floor, breaching tactics were deployed to the identified hallway, which had been barred, and the shooter was later discovered inside a room, deceased due to a self-inflicted gunshot wound (Marcou, 2019). After this incident, much of the response by law enforcement was to change response protocols, enhance training on clearing rooms and areas and tabletop exercises, develop mass casualty protocols, and ensure enough appropriate equipment (such as medical kits and tourniquets) was at the ready. However, at the top of the list of post-incident recommendations, a Police evaluator from Police One training advised that Security should have been trained in safety threat assessment (Marcou, 2019). While a heavy security presence was at the hotel, the shooter was able to transport multiple weapons and equally large amounts of ammunition from his vehicle to his room without anyone questioning or reporting the behavior. Had hotel staff been

educated on “see something, say something,” this tragedy could have been avoided entirely (Marcou, 2019).

Targeted Acts of Violence in Florida

Unlike many states in the Nation, Florida has experienced unique targeted acts of violence that have significantly impacted the way that law enforcement responds to these incidents. While localities such as Las Vegas and New York City may have unique response paradigms to targeted acts of violence, the entire State of Florida has made significant changes to safety and security measures on school campuses. Through the implementation of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act, laws governing the improvements of school climates by expanding mental health supports for students, reducing gun violence on school campuses, enacting red flag laws, and mandating assigned police officers or armed guardians and threat assessment teams on every single campus have changed the way Florida manages their persons of concern in schools (Florida Department of Education, 2018). Thus, to adequately understand Florida’s stance toward targeted acts of violence, the following two events are of particular interest.

Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School.

On February 14, 2018, in Parkland, Florida, 14 people were fatally shot and 17 more were wounded when a former Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School student entered the school with a rifle and several hundred rounds of ammunition. The shooter gained access to the interior of the school through an unlocked and unmanned gate that

had been opened for dismissal. Making his way through the school, he entered a building and began actively executing students as he saw them. He made his way out of the school with the mass exodus of panicked students and staff. He was apprehended by police off-campus within an hour, but not before many lives were lost. After his apprehension, facts learned about the shooter outlined his long history of violence, behavioral issues, mental illness, and familial and academic struggles. Accordingly, Florida established the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Public Safety Commission, a 20-member group created by Florida's Governor Ron DeSantis, which was assembled to establish legislation, recommendations, and system improvements to mitigate the impacts from and prevent targeted acts of violence and school shootings (Florida Department of Law Enforcement, 2019). These efforts laid the groundwork for mandated threat management in every single school district in the State of Florida, physical security expectations, training, and assignment of officers at every school, mental health supports and services for students, and mandated use of the Florida Safe Schools Assessment Tool (Florida Department of Law Enforcement, 2019). As a result of these efforts, Florida schools are now among the safest in the Nation.

Pulse Nightclub Shooting

The shooting that occurred at Pulse Nightclub in Orlando, Florida, was the deadliest terrorist attack on American soil since September 11, 2001 (U.S. Department of Justice, 2017). On June 12, 2016, 49 people were killed, and dozens of others were injured when a lone attacker entered the Pulse LGBTQ Nightclub and began shooting,

ultimately leading to an hours-long barricaded suspect with hostages. A host of glaring red flags were present in the would-be killer's behavior throughout his life but most notably right before the attacks, including his purchase of firearms, body armor, and bulk amounts of ammunition, his fascination with extremist videos to include beheadings, and his final postings on social media to seek revenge against the "filthy ways of the West." (Stewart, 2017; Wikipedia contributors, 2024). During the event and after the conclusion of the events, the Orlando Police Department and those who contributed to the rescue of the patrons of the Pulse Nightclub were touted as the bravest and most dedicated of public servants. Their rescue efforts led to the neutralization of the suspect and the rescue and recovery of those in attendance that night, mitigating further deaths (U.S. Department of Justice, 2017). From a tactical response perspective, Orlando Police Department did it right. However, the red flags that precipitated the attack were missed.

Contemporary Research of Targeted Acts of Violence

Researchers focusing on targeted acts of violence write about risk management, perpetrator psychology and characteristics and the associated impacts. Risk management to prevent targeted acts of violence requires multiple methods to reduce opportunity for perpetrators to escalate up the pathway to violence. Perpetrator psychology helps to shape the motivation of the perpetrator and assists with the development of appropriate interventions.

Risk Management

Risk management to prevent targeted acts of violence requires multiple methods to reduce the opportunity for perpetrators to escalate up the pathway to violence. These efforts are accomplished in various ways and are not singularly based. Prevention strategies must match the imminence of the behavior of concern and the expedience of the intervention need (Meloy et al., 2012). The experienced threat manager recognizes the need for communication and collaboration with stakeholders, ongoing training for community members, target hardening, threat assessments, risk assessments, lockdown drills, community engagement through messaging, safety planning, publicly accessible mechanisms for reporting with assigned personnel to respond to these reports in real-time, and ongoing monitoring (Clarke & Eck, n.d.; Silva, 2021). Partnerships within threat management teams should always include stakeholders who can effectively participate with valuable information that contributes to the overall assessment of the person of concern and contributes valuable solutions to management strategies (such as human resources, clinical resources, or law enforcement interventions).

Perpetrator Characteristics

While the specific psychology of an attacker is heterogeneous, the two most common features in previous targeted acts of violence attackers were that they were male (97%) and they acted alone (98%) (Lankford & Silva, 2022; Theophilus et al., 2019). Aside from those two commonly identifiable features, each attacker is as unique as their fingerprints. However, some identifiable common characteristics and preattack behaviors

resurface time and again in reviewed targeted acts of violence case studies. Mental health disorders and untreated mental illness were key findings in all cases that were examined by the Fixated Threat Assessment Center in the UK (Bleakley, 2022). Notably, the most persistent stalkers and threateners examined were psychotic at the time of their attacks (Bleakley, 2022). Commonly, much of the literature on these attackers reports they experience mental illness, including suicidality, depression, grievances with others, and personal crises (Theophilus et al., 2019). Additional pre-attack behaviors include leakage behaviors, or the communication to a third party of the intent to harm a potential target (American Psychological Association, n.d.), indicating some threats were communicated ahead of their attacks. Gibson et al. found that 70% of men who had committed homicides of their partners had communicated their intent to do so before committing the act (Gibson et al., 2020). Substance abuse has also been identified as a common characteristic of attackers, as well as an indication of personal loss, rejection, or a known failure prior to the incident (Vitz & Faria, 2020). Lacking prosocial activities or positive motivators, projects, goals, or activities was another common denominator in the literature, indicating the attacker's lives had little meaning or purpose and lacked positive reinforcements or rewards (Vitz & Faria, 2020). Of the mass public shooters evaluated in one study, the most common profiles established were young males who were unemployed and unmarried without children, suggesting that sexual frustration was also a commonality among mass shooters (Lankford & Silva, 2022).

Linking behaviors and leveraging link analysis when evaluating pre-attack behaviors or indicators are beneficial in both law enforcement investigations of cold cases and threat management when managing and monitoring persons of concern (Keatley & Clarke, 2019). According to Fein et al. (1995, “Violence is not merely an act, but also a process which develops over time that is the product of the individual, triggering conditions, and a setting that allows the violence to occur” (Hinman & Cook, 2002). This statement still holds true today, as evidenced in research by threat management pioneers such as Calhoun & Weston (2016), who introduced the threat assessment and management model, and Meloy & Hoffman (2016), who have linked targeted acts of violence as the product of identifiable behaviors on a discernable pathway to violence.

Impacts

Asking the right questions and critically evaluating the information gathered is key in determining the level of risk and imminence of violence. No single behavior is connected to violence imminence; however, the sooner the behaviors are noticed, the greater the likelihood of intervention (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2024b). A threat assessment may be generated for any communication that can be cause for concern, and while it may be later determined to be taken out of context or not a true threat, it should never be ignored (Reddy et al., 2001; Calhoun & Weston, 2015). The gathering of information towards the critical analysis of what was communicated and how, the corroboration of facts, the individual’s behavior, and the progression of behaviors

demonstrated by the accused, may be the movement from the development of the idea to action. Intervention is imperative to the prevention of violence, and strategic case management can make the difference to prevent a tragedy (Okada et al.,2020; Randazzo & Cameron, 2012; Reddy et al., 2001). Although completed mass shootings only made up 17% of incident outcomes in one study reviewed of 546 targeted acts of violence, these identified pre-attack behaviors of those mass shootings bring to life the important factors that serve as predictors of future violence, requiring swift and strategic intervention (Silva, 2021).

In summary, researchers regard targeted acts of violence as incidents where known and/or unknown perpetrators with an established grievance escalate up a trajectory or pathway to violence against one or many victims. Targeted acts of violence are increasing in frequency, which could be in large part due to copycat behaviors and the prevalence of media impacts on perpetrator fame and notoriety. Researchers do not understand the precise formula for preventing targeted acts of violence, but they do recognize the benefit of preventive strategies such as threat assessment (Calhoun & Weston, 2016; Hinman & Cook, 2002; Meloy & Hoffman, 2016). Scholars recommend future research about targeted acts of violence and best practices for prevention. As law enforcement is often the first to receive reports of individuals who make threats of targeted violence or learn about persons of concern who make concerning statements (Okada et al., 2020), opportunities exist to explore how threat management techniques could be applied in municipal policing settings to prevent these acts (Jones & Gray,

2020). The following is a review of the job functions and expectations of police Chiefs in municipal and educational settings and how threat assessment and management can be leveraged as a means of prevention in these environments.

Police Chiefs

Police Chiefs have a heavy responsibility. According to Muffler, the challenges facing law enforcement today are numerous, requiring consistent leadership and transparency in a changing world by leveraging resources and working with community stakeholders (Muffler, 2020). Training officers on threat assessment and management strategies will enhance safety and security for all (Hinman & Cook, 2002; Jones & Gray, 2020; Muffler, 2020). In addition to overall police department management through ensuring appropriate staffing to enable short response times and prevent burnout, police Chiefs must develop strategic plans and achieve goals through measurable outcomes, write and enforce policies and procedures, stay abreast of advancements in law enforcement techniques and technology, and protect their community from crime and harm (International Association of Chiefs of Police, Strategic planning, 2021). Charged with the safety of their community's citizens, frequently measured through the observance and management of crime trends and crime rates, Chiefs must stay ahead by maintaining community connections for the prevention of crime (Lankford, 2017; Wiatrowski & Vardalis, 1994). Leveraging a community policing model offers the police a wider range of alternatives than arrest (Patterson, 2023; Wiatrowski & Vardalis, 1994). Community policing is a proactive model intended to involve the community to inspire

confidence in the police through creating partnerships, inviting problem-solving, and building bridges of trust within the community (Majmundar & Weisburd, 2018; Muffler, 2020; Patterson, 2023). Notably, municipal or 'local' police represent most of the policing efforts in the United States. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, in the year 2020, nearly 14,700 general-purpose police departments in the United States employed about 708,000 full-time sworn police officers. Of those represented in their survey, about 473,000 served in a local policy agency (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2020). From this perspective, most police agencies are considered local or municipal, and crime rates and trends tend to drive the overall success of the police chief and their police agency, impacting the overall community. Law enforcement has historically been reactionary to violent crime, and threat assessment practices serve as preventative measures that can be added to the local law enforcement officer's crime-fighting response (Liam et al., 2015). Hence, the consideration for threat assessment and management in municipal policing environments in the 21st century is to prevent targeted acts of violence through the identification, assessment, management, and monitoring of persons of concern (Muffler, 2020; Wyman, 2020). The following discusses municipal police Chiefs, municipal police forces, and municipal police departments.

Municipal Police Chiefs

Municipal police Chiefs have a unique place in the profession of law enforcement. On top of the duties required of all police Chiefs, municipal police Chiefs are required to manage the burdens of ensuring public safety through the prevention and

cessation of crime and criminal activity in the widest array of calls for service and situations. Their responsibilities are not limited to the prevention of crime in one area, such as a school, airport, or university. Instead, the municipal police chief's overarching responsibilities cover the gamut of having schools, airports, malls, residential communities, commerce, businesses, highways, roadways, parks, and bodies of water all situated within their jurisdiction. According to Shjarback, Police leadership contributes to and models the way for others to follow through clearly defined processes, clarity of expectations, training, management, support, demands for consistency, and professionalism, setting the agency's benchmark for behaviors in their own policing environments (Shjarback, 2022).

Municipal police Chiefs must lead their agencies through various challenges in diverse, rural, urban, populated, unpopulated, commercial, and residential areas of communities. With so many competing challenges, prevention methods, such as threat assessment, could take a back seat to reactionary and emergency response. However, prevention strategies to avert criminal behaviors, such as threatening behaviors, are becoming increasingly more prevalent and valuable to law enforcement. Threat management in all policing environments offers opportunities to identify, assess, and manage persons of concern before they commit a targeted act of violence (Liam et al., 2015).

Municipal Police Forces

In municipal police forces, managing large crowds to prevent targeted acts of violence daily is likely not the norm. Large masses of people do gather for a singular purpose in municipal jurisdictions such as in shopping malls, airports, community centers, and houses of worship. However, in municipal settings, many of these specialized environments likely house their own security or special police personnel and are less of a consideration for municipal police departments. Additionally, not all police officers can manage multitudes the same. To be sure, effective crowd control and management requires officer self-control, specialized training and preparation (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2024, Crowd management). A municipal policing agency will have different priorities and areas of focus outside of these places where people gather. For example, a primary focus in a municipal policing environment typically includes regular operations through traffic, call response, and special investigations where people are spread out and moving around for various reasons and purposes. Leveraging these proactive policing efforts, serves as a method to employ policing strategies to prevent or reduce crime and disorder, with an emphasis on prevention, mobilizing resources based on police initiatives, and targeting those areas that may be responsible for higher crime rates (National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine, 2018). In their publication, “Making Prevention a Reality”, the FBI discusses challenges experienced by municipal police forces, including call volume, building relationships with the community, and the need to move quickly from call to call (Federal Bureau of

Investigation, 2016). Repeat contacts with known individuals are likely not positive and make developing positive rapport with individuals toward solutions more challenging. Traditional law enforcement techniques focus on the apprehension and prosecution of violent offenders after the crime has been committed (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2016; Meloy & Hoffman, 2021; Okada et al., 2020). When untrained police officers are given information about a person who may potentially commit a crime in the future, their authority and responsibility become cloudy, often prompting no call to action (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2016.; Meloy & Hoffman, 2021). In municipal policing environments, the mission varies from day to day and issue to issue.

Conversely, in educational policing environments, the police are student and staff safety-focused. The priority mission is to provide safety through building relationships, fortifying the external and internal structure against targeted attacks, developing processes for discipline and support, providing adequate police staffing to ensure shorter response times, training officers to evaluate for mental health concerns, and providing appropriate interventions as needed (National Threat Assessment Center, 2019). Threat Assessment in campus communities is considered a best practice and requires trained multidisciplinary threat assessment teams in campus communities to assess and intervene with persons of concern to prevent targeted acts of violence (Hinman & Cook, 2002; Hope, 2018; Rahn, 2019) The composition of a threat assessment team is typically composed of school administration, school-based police or School Resource Officers, mental health personnel, and other key stakeholders on an Ad hoc basis, to include

human resources or legal counsel (Rahn, 2019). As a result, the structure to provide additional services and support is in place and readily available (National Threat Assessment Center, 2019). Viewing a person of concern from a multidisciplinary team lens in problem-solving provides evidence-based, multi-tiered levels of support for mental health and school safety through crisis prevention (Vallancourt-Strobach & Cowan, 2019).

Similarly to municipal policing, in educational policing environments, police Chiefs have multiple key responsibilities, including administrative leadership, crime prevention, management of budget and resources, personnel management and training, and community engagement (Proud Police, 2024). Every day, hundreds, if not thousands, of people commune, congregate, and traverse various campuses all over the nation, creating the potential for an opportunity for a mass casualty incident to occur. An overarching priority of educational police Chiefs remains keeping students and staff safe from targeted acts of violence that result in injuries or fatalities. Crowd management and preventing targeted acts of violence is not only the priority, but also the norm. Ensuring officers are trained in crowd management, coordination with staff, communication with students, and operational planning of large-scale events is critical to public safety in policing educational environments (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2024; International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2020).

In contrast to the responsibilities of police Chiefs in K-12 and higher education policing, municipal police Chiefs are typically tasked with the management of persons of

concern with fewer resources, fewer internal communications and processes, and less access to information about the person of concern from multiple vantage points. This arises from the fundamental difference between municipal police forces and K-12 and Higher education policing environments.

Mental Illness

Mental illness does not discriminate among communities, and police agencies from municipalities, counties, states, or educational environments all answer the call when people are experiencing a mental health crisis. Police officers are typically the first call for assistance when a person having a mental health crisis must be managed immediately, as they serve as a primary connection to psychiatric services (Olivero, 1990; McTackett & Thomas, 2017; Schriver, 2021). Calls for service involving individuals with mental health challenges cross all areas and often bleed over from one area to another. For example, law enforcement officers who interact with a child in school who has a mental health crisis ultimately turn the child over to a parent or other trusted guardian and will likely displace the challenge to the community where the child resides. Municipal agencies likely have significant challenges related to persons in mental health crises when they do not meet the threshold for involuntary examination (Olivero, 1990). Due to call volume, staffing challenges, and a lack of training or employed clinicians who respond in tandem with law enforcement, municipal police departments could miss a person of concern advancing up the pathway to violence. Many municipal agencies must instead triage calls due to high call volume, staffing challenges, and often

no legal opportunity to intervene with repeat offenders who do not meet the probable cause or mental health involuntary custody threshold (Siegel, 2014). Conversely, in educational policing environments, officers may have a greater understanding of the specifics related to the case and the person of concern and have the time and opportunity to refer the individual for resources, pointing their case to the already established threat assessment team housed on campus. At a minimum, opportunities for ongoing monitoring of the person of concern through multiple stakeholders may provide context to the next steps or intent to commit harmful acts, including suicidal ideation. Training for law enforcement in responding to mental health crises is critical. According to Fiske et al., municipal police departments report spending only 6.5 hours per year on mental health-related training for their officers (Schriver, 2021).

Crisis Intervention training (CIT) is a common training technique for officers as it enhances de-escalation skills and increases police awareness of mental health crises experienced by persons experiencing mental illness (Schriver, 2021). The CIT model is qualified as an industry best practice for law enforcement through many criminal justice, law enforcement, and mental health organizations based on its positive research results (Segal, 2014). Appropriate and frequent training on de-escalation and managing persons experiencing a mental health crisis results in fewer uses of force (also commonly referred to as response to resistance) incidents by law enforcement. Some evidence suggests that police more commonly use a higher level of force when a person is experiencing a mental health crisis (McTackett & Thomas, 2017). Scholarly literature on Crisis Intervention

Team Models suggests positive results in decreased stigma of mental illness by law enforcement, increased confidence in the management of persons having a mental health crisis, including substance abuse-related issues, decreased uses of force, and decreased time to resolve a mental health call (Segal, 2014).

Agency policy, resources, and priorities may also dictate the level of training and resource referral a police agency has in mental health cases. Officers trained in Crisis Intervention and/or agencies with full-time clinical staff to assist with responses and resources produce the greatest outcomes (Okada et al., 2020; Segal, 2014). While statistically, heightened response to resistance cases is correlated to mental health-related police calls (McTackett & Thomas, 2017), domestic violence calls are among the most dangerous and the most lethal for law enforcement officers (Breul & Luongo, 2017). These often-repeated response incidents can be mitigated with appropriate threat assessment training and management of identified perpetrators (Saxton et al., 2020). In all, municipal police forces and Chiefs respond to mental illness with an increased understanding of the importance of de-escalation and crisis intervention techniques.

Domestic Violence

Intimate partner violence is broadly defined as “attempted, threatened, or actual violence committed against a former or past romantic partner, and can take the form of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse as well as intimidation and control (Campbell et al., 2017). Domestic Violence, also referred to in the literature as (IPV) Intimate partner violence, has long been discussed as one of the most lethal encounters in a law

enforcement officer's career. The heightened emotion of the event and the incursion into the home in the heat of the moment, coupled with the potential loss of the relationship and the offender's freedom, make for a volatile encounter. Known threat management pioneer and author de Becker says, "Spousal homicide is the single most predictable serious crime in America" (de Becker, 1997, p. 234). A strong correlation exists between nonfatal intimate violence strangulation cases and officers involved in shootings in those cases. Additionally, research studies have demonstrated a strong correlation between nonfatal domestic violence strangulation and officer-involved shootings, according to Police Chief Magazine (2020). One such study identified that 80% of suspects in officer-involved shootings had a previous criminal history involving domestic violence, and of those cases, 30% involved strangulation (Police Chief Magazine, 2020). Another analysis found that 75% of suspects in the intentional homicides of police officers had a history of domestic violence (Police Chief Magazine, 2020).

In addition to the link between domestic violence and police officer deaths, there are also strong correlations between domestic violence perpetrators, who commit stalking and strangulation offenses, and commit mass killings (Police Chief Magazine, 2020). The motives of control, manipulation, and power are consistent through domestic violence, stalking, strangulation, law enforcement homicides, and mass killings, and often escalate to these violent acts (Police Chief Magazine, 2020). Opportunities for law enforcement interventions exist through threat management, threat assessments, the creation of dedicated domestic violence units, training officers on signs to look for in

domestic and stalking cases, and utilizing domestic violence questionnaires to assist in identification. These efforts can not only support the individual victims but can also aid in the prevention of targeted acts of violence (Police Chief Magazine, 2020). According to Saxton et al., Police are often involved in cases where domestic violence is most severe and headed toward lethality (2020). While these cases are rare, they do serve as a roadmap to the identification and prevention of cases like these through the identification of key behaviors that are present in previous domestic-related homicides. In addition to domestic violence as a precursor behavior for homicide, one study found that incidents of stalking were found in 94% of domestic violence cases evaluated in the sample (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2020). Since spousal homicide is the single most predictable crime in America (de Becker,1997), knowing this fact alone creates opportunities for law enforcement agencies, hospitals, social services, and clinical professionals to leverage threat assessment management techniques to aid victims of this targeted act of violence. This research is significant in the identification, management, and monitoring of persons of concern who could be on a trajectory toward targeted acts of violence.

Stalking

Stalking behaviors are those targeted acts of violence that are predatory in nature and often go underreported for a host of reasons (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2020). Stalking, in its broadest definition, is a pattern of behavior that is unwanted, repeated, and intrusive, invoking fear or significant distress by one person to

another (Parkhill, Nixon & McEwan, 2022). A crime of power and control, victims of stalking are often threatened and humiliated through unwelcome visits to their jobs, homes, and family members' homes, texting and emailing them constantly, often with sexually explicit messages and content. (Randall, 2023). Survivors of stalking incidents report having high levels of anxiety, depression, and insomnia, and are often forced to quit their jobs or move away to attempt to avoid the harassment and protect themselves and their families (Randall, 2023). While stalking is a significant concern, only one in three people actually report it to the police (Randall, 2023). This is largely attributed to stalking allegations being difficult to identify, investigate, and prosecute, leaving victims feeling unsafe, terrorized, and ultimately altering their way of life (Randall, 2023). Stalking often graduates to more violent behavior. In one study, about one-third of stalking victims were eventually physically or sexually assaulted (Psychology Today, n.d). Stalking, much like other threats of school-related violence, has risen in significance over recent years, propelling municipal police forces to provide interventions or support before the behavior escalates to violence or criminal behavior (National Threat Assessment Center, 2019). Connecting to the community to build bridges through education to communicate mechanisms and ways of reporting these incidents is integral to prevention (Wiatrowski & Vardalis, 1994).

Community Policing

Wiatrowski and Vardalis assert that solving crime in the community requires both the police and the community working together (1994). These coordinated efforts come

through police outreach into schools, communities, housing developments, houses of worship, parks and recreation programs, and after-school programs to identify problems and provide quality-of-life solutions. To that end, community policing models provide police departments with other alternatives to problem-solving other than arrest or incarceration (Wiatrowski & Vardalis, 1994). The key to community policing efforts begins with building a foundation of trust between the community and the police. These efforts promote engagement and information sharing and provide law enforcement opportunities to receive communications about when a person of concern is at risk to themselves or others (Rodriguez, 2014). Sir Robert Peel's principles of crime prevention are as relevant today as they were when he authored them in 1829 (Patterson, 2023). His philosophy of crime prevention incorporates proactive policing, garnering and maintaining public trust, cooperating with the community through community policing efforts, impartiality in service to the community, and using only the force necessary to prevent crime and protect the peace (Patterson, 2023). Community Policing strategies would be best suited if an added consideration of threat management were layered within Peel's Principles. While law enforcement has historically been reactive to violence and violent crime, threat assessment practices serve as a preventative measure that law enforcement can incorporate into their toolbox of crime-fighting strategies (Liam et al., 2015). Law enforcement agencies should consider becoming versed in preemptive measures to prevent violence through increased awareness of threat assessment and

management and how these strategies fit into daily operations (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2016; Meloy & Hoffman, 2021).

Threat Assessment

Prior to the implementation of threat management from the lens of law enforcement, most police officers felt powerless to do anything about individuals who threatened to commit crimes of violence unless the threshold of committing a criminal act was met. Unfortunately, all too often, that meant that the now-arrested perpetrator was able to complete their targeted act of violence (Calhoun & Weston, 2008). Since the inception of threat management through the early works of the United States Secret Service (Fein & Vossekuil, 1998), threats of targeted acts of violence or reports of persons of concern have been potential law enforcement or criminal matters (Wyman, 2020). During the information gathering and initial investigative phase, law enforcement officials, with their enhanced training, experience, and investigative authority, greatly enhance the threat assessment and management process (Wyman, 2020). Upon learning of a potential threat, law enforcement officers focus on the imminence, credibility, capability, and significance of the threat and make immediate decisions about opportunities for mitigation and immediate action (Wyman, 2020). During this initial triage phase, professional and responsible law enforcement discretion is utilized to determine appropriate and timely responses (Florida Department of Law Enforcement, n.d.). According to the findings from Protecting America's Schools: A U.S. Secret Service Analysis of Targeted School Violence, tragedies such as these can be prevented

with the support and involvement of law enforcement and the implementation of multidisciplinary threat assessment teams working together (National Threat Assessment Center, 2019). Law enforcement tools and responses to incidents can be the most effective threat management tool available, given the specific circumstances (Wyman, 2020). The use of threat assessment and management teams can aid in the identification of the most effective threat management option, and law enforcement can assist in coordinating the most appropriate response (Wyman, 2020). Depending on the threat's significance and imminence, immediate intervention may be required, and as such, law enforcement would likely be the responsible stakeholder for custodial actions such as arrest or mental health crisis response, standing by during termination of an employee, or expulsion from school (Wyman, 2020). While there is no single correct response, it is prudent to include law enforcement (in schools and municipal environments) in the communication and planning to mitigate long-term threats in the future (Wyman, 2020).

Establishing a reporting process for threats is essential, but not the beginning when implementing a process for managing communicated or perceived threats (Weston & Calhoun, 2022). Instead, training individuals who can assess and act on the reports to critically evaluate who poses a threat and who makes a threat is key. Understanding the gamut of strategies to manage and mitigate threats, including taking no response, implementing threat management strategies in low-risk situations, all the way up to having law enforcement respond and manage imminent threats, threat managers must be able to identify the most appropriate responses (Weston & Calhoun, 2022). Reporting

processes for these individuals must be effective and must include the procedures, means, and methods for moving the information along smoothly through the threat management team (Weston & Calhoun, 2022). The team should be trained and ready to critically evaluate, prioritize, and assess the information as it flows in and remain available day and night as the evolution of the threat and perpetrator intent can change quickly (Weston & Calhoun, 2022). Criteria for reporting should be suspicious, observable behaviors, and communicated to the team to evaluate the threat and threatener from a holistic approach. When information is joined with other factors surrounding the report, actionable information may be revealed. Broad information gathering surrounding the reported incident is key to determining the level of threat risk (Weston & Calhoun, 2022). Utilizing a collaborative threat assessment and management process, leveraging stakeholders through community engagement, and implementing proactive and holistic case management could aid police agencies in mitigating and preventing targeted acts of violence in communities (Calhoun & Weston, 2015).

In summary, municipal police Chiefs have an established and growing role within police departments nationwide. Their work is evolving through technology, innovation, transparency, offender psychology, crime prevention strategies, community policing efforts, mental health interventions, and collaboration with various stakeholders to prevent crime. As police agencies and chiefs are measured through their responses to crime and critical incidents, the true measure of a successful threat management process is the absence of targeted acts of violence. However, how can successful prevention

efforts be measured if the attack never occurred? (Follman, 2022). Researchers regard municipal police forces and Chiefs as the subjects of well-known controversies presented by the media, including targeted acts of violence and what information was known to police before the attack occurred. Researchers do not understand the challenges that law enforcement leaders face with the intricacies and challenges in these cases, including the inability to take custodial actions against persons of concern when they do not meet the criminal or psychological threshold of custody. Scholars recommend future research about municipal police forces and Chiefs in threat management in municipal policing settings in different states and jurisdictions (Jones & Gray, 2020).

Summary and Conclusions

Researchers of threat assessment recommend management processes that identify, assess, manage, and monitor persons of concern toward the prevention of targeted acts of violence in communities (Calhoun & Weston, 2015). Threat assessment, by definition, "is a proactive, prevention-based approach for recognizing, evaluating, assessing, and managing threatening or concerning behavior before an act of violence has occurred, including terrorism" (Department of Homeland Security, 2021).

Scholars of targeted acts of violence recommend research into practices by law enforcement toward these prevention methods (Florida Department of Law Enforcement, n.d.). The level of violence risk and imminence posed by a person of concern or group toward a specific target is the primary focus of the threat assessment process (Bergkamp et al., 2022). Fixated behaviors, like those in stalking-related crimes, are those behaviors

that rise to a pathological degree and graduate to obsessive levels, prompting intervention (Pathé et al., 2015; Calhoun & Weston, 2016). These predatory behaviors are of significant concern to the threat management team and serve as opportunities for swift intervention to prevent a targeted act of violence.

Municipal police Chiefs have a unique place in the profession of law enforcement. On top of the duties required of all police Chiefs, municipal police Chiefs are required to manage the burdens of ensuring public safety through the prevention and cessation of crime and criminal activity in the widest array of calls for service and situations. Researchers recommend that municipal police Chiefs explore opportunities to develop threat management processes and reporting mechanisms and create collaborative threat management teams to include paired responses by law enforcement and mental health clinicians to actively combat targeted acts of violence through prevention efforts (Esserman, 2021). Opportunities for law enforcement interventions exist through threat management, threat assessments, the creation of dedicated domestic violence units, training officers on signs to look for in domestic and stalking cases, and utilizing domestic violence questionnaires to assist in identification. These efforts can not only support the individual victims but can also aid in preventing targeted acts of violence (Police Chief Magazine, 2020).

Police are often involved in cases where domestic violence is most severe and headed toward lethality (Saxton et al., 2020). While these cases are rare, they do serve as a roadmap to the identification and prevention of cases like these through

the identification of key behaviors that are present in previous domestic-related homicides. In addition to domestic violence as a precursor behavior for homicide, one study noted that incidents of stalking were found in 94% of domestic violence cases evaluated in the sample (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2020). According to de Becker, “Spousal homicide is the single most predictable crime in America.” (1997). Knowing this fact alone creates opportunities for law enforcement agencies, hospitals, social services, and clinical professionals to leverage threat assessment management techniques to aid victims of this targeted act of violence. This research is significant in identifying, managing, and monitoring persons of concern who could be on a trajectory toward a targeted act of violence.

Accordingly, the purpose of this study was to explore how threat assessment practices have been beneficial in preventing acts of targeted violence and how police Chiefs perceive these practices in municipal settings in Florida. The following chapter will present the research design of this study, including its instrumentation, data collection, and analysis procedures, and ethical considerations.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Targeted acts of violence are a constant threat present anywhere people frequent, and typically begin and end in minutes. The general problem is that while law enforcement throughout the United States is aware of the dangers of targeted acts of violence, policing is often reactionary, not fully adopting the preventative benefits offered by threat assessment and management practices, particularly in municipal settings. The specific problem is without the buy in of the municipal police chiefs, threat assessment practices aim to prevent targeted acts of violence are unlikely to be adopted by municipal police departments. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how threat assessment practices have been beneficial in preventing acts of targeted violence and how police chiefs perceive these practices in municipal settings in Florida. I answered the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of law enforcement executives, specifically, police Chiefs or executive level designees, of threat assessment practices?

RQ2: What are their views on the adoption into daily police practices to prevent targeted acts of violence in municipal settings in Florida?

In this chapter, I will discuss the research design of the study. I will also discuss recruitment, data collection, and data analysis. The chapter will conclude with a summary and transition to Chapter 4.

Research Design

Qualitative studies are conducted to learn about and deeply understand what particular people do in their daily lives and what those experiences mean to them (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The intention behind qualitative studies is to determine the relevance and meaning of differences and similarities in people, actions, beliefs, and interests and to describe these in narrative form with a focus on differences to express meaning (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The purpose, generally, of qualitative studies is to explore material practices using various representations such as field notes, interviews, conversations, recordings, memos, and photos to interpret phenomena and the meanings people bring to them (Burkholder et al., 2020).

This exploration is often done through the collection of stories, responses, thoughts, and perceptions that are elicited through research questions and the meanings or associations that human beings ascribe to human or social problems (Burkholder et al., 2020). Qualitative research typically begins with interpretive and theoretical frameworks and certain assumptions that lend an informative approach to the study. Studies are conducted using the collection of data in a natural setting, with due care to the people and places involved, leveraging deductive and inductive data analysis to establish patterns and themes that the researcher uses to find a logical interpretation of the problem (Burkholder et al., 2020). This is in contrast to quantitative methodologies, in which researchers collect numerical data and analyze it statistically.

I chose to use a qualitative methodology in this study. There are numerous types of qualitative studies. A case study is an empirical method of research that investigates a phenomenon (the case) in detail and within the context of the real world, even if the boundaries or connections between the two may not be clear. A case study is conducted to understand a real-world case with the assumption that such understanding could likely involve conditions that offer context to the case (Yin, 2018, p. 15).

The phenomenological approach is used to understand an individual's lived experiences of a certain phenomenon and does not need to be bound by space and time (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The phenomenon can be a specific event or individuals who identify in a specific way. The purpose of phenomenological research is to learn how individuals feel or respond in a specific circumstance or situation. Data collection is commonly done through interviews, but can include participant observation or other written sources such as documents or poetry (Yin, 2018).

Grounded theory involves specific procedures that are used to analyze qualitative data to develop formal substantive theory of social phenomena (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p.22) Data are collected through interviews, observations, documents or other sources relative to the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016) Through constant comparison, grounded theory researchers use empirical indicators such as actions and events observed and recorded in context, and described in documents, from the words used by the participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Finally, in narrative studies, researchers describe an individual's life through their story as told through their writings about those experiences. This can include life history, journals, autobiographies, memoirs, and biographies. Narrative research methodology posits that individuals construct reality through the telling of their story (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p.22).

For this study, I chose to use the case study design. Case studies are intended to be conducted to investigate a contemporary phenomenon in depth within its real-world context without a clearly identified nexus between the boundaries of the phenomenon and the context (Yin, 2018). As stated by Yin, case studies often have certain features that identify them as case study research. For example, case studies will offer more variables of interest than data points, often guiding design, data collection, and analysis through prior development of theoretical propositions, relying on multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2018, p. 15). Yin stated that case study research is comprised of an "all-encompassing mode of inquiry, with its own logic of design, data collection techniques, and specific approaches to data analysis" (2018, p. 16). As a result, case studies are less limiting and offer more opportunities to gather data through both data collection tactics and design features (Yin, 2018).

In this study, I used Yin's (2018) five-step approach to case study design. Yin (2018) provided a foundational text for strategizing and building a case study. Yin described five steps for undertaking a case study: First, identifying the case study's questions; second, identifying its propositions, if any; third, identifying the case that

needs to be studied; fourth, identifying the logic linking the data to the propositions; and fifth, determining the criteria for interpreting the data collected and findings (Yin, 2018, p.27).

Participants

The participants of this study included 15 municipal police chiefs in the State of Florida. As described in the literature review, municipal police chiefs generally. In this study, participants met four inclusion criteria:

1. Being a municipal police chief (or designated police executive responsible for higher-level policy and process development and implementation).
2. Holding this title in the State of Florida.
3. Being a certified police officer.
4. Have you been employed in this role for more than 12 months?

In the State of Florida, there are approximately 411 municipal police chiefs, located in 67 counties.

Instrumentation

I interviewed the participants using a 10-question interview protocol, with five questions for each of the two research questions. This interview protocol was developed using Kurt Lewin's behavior equation theory, in which he posited that a person’s behavior includes their experiences and history, personality, motivations, and environment (Gelles et al., 2002). Therefore, the questions were used to delve into the experiences, history, personality, motivations, and environments of police chiefs in

Florida. Concerning threat assessment and targeted acts of violence, key constructs identified by the literature included perpetrator characteristics, history of violence and stalking, and mental illness. The following table illustrates the relationship between the research questions, the key constructs, and the interview questions.

Table 1

Instrumentation Alignment

#	Interview Question	Aligned RQs	Aligned Concepts
1	How do you define a targeted act of violence?	2	Experience, history, and motivation
2	What is your experience in law enforcement concerning targeted acts of violence?	2	Experience, history, motivation, environment
3	What has your experience and history with targeted acts of violence taught you as a law enforcement officer/leader?	2	Experience, history, motivation, environment
4	What have you learned about perpetrator characteristics associated with attempted and completed targeted acts of violence?	2	Experience, history, motivation, environment, perpetrator characteristics
5	What have you learned about the history of violence associated with attempted and completed targeted acts of violence?	2	Experience, history, motivation, environment, history of violence
6	What have you learned about domestic violence and stalking associated with attempted and completed targeted acts of violence?	2	Experience, history, motivation, environment, domestic violence, stalking
7	What have you learned about mental illness associated with attempted and completed targeted acts of violence?	2	Experience, history, motivation, environment, and mental illness
8	Have you ever heard of the term threat assessment? If so, what does this term mean to you?	1	Experience, history, environment, mental illness, domestic violence, stalking, targeted acts of violence
9	Can you explain the pathway to violence?	1	Experience, history, threat assessment, mental illness, domestic violence,

#	Interview Question	Aligned RQs	Aligned Concepts
			stalking, targeted acts of violence
10	What have you learned about threat assessment through your professional experiences as a police officer in your community?	1	Experience, history, threat assessment, mental illness, domestic violence, stalking, targeted acts of violence.
11	What are your views regarding threat assessment practices employed by your department in your community?	1	Experience, history, threat assessment, mental illness, domestic violence, stalking, targeted acts of violence
12	If you have adopted threat assessment practices in your agency, how have you implemented them, and how do you measure success?	1	Experience, history, threat assessment, mental illness, domestic violence, stalking, targeted acts of violence
13	If you have not adopted threat management in your agency, what are the reasons for not doing so?	2	Experience, history, threat assessment, mental illness, domestic violence, stalking, targeted acts of violence
14	Is there any other information you would like to offer relative to your experience?	2	Experience, history, threat assessment, targeted acts of violence

The interview consisted of fourteen interview questions relating to threat assessment, targeted acts of violence, municipal policing, and the constructs of Kurt Lewin's Behavioral Equation Theory. In addition to these questions, the interviewer may ask additional probing questions.

Recruitment

To obtain the 15 participants, I took the following steps. First, I assembled a list of potential participants in small, medium, and large municipal law enforcement agencies in the state of Florida that I knew. Next, I added additional agency names by leveraging information garnered through the Florida Police Chiefs Association (FPCA). Third, I engaged in purposeful sampling, where I focused my recruitment on varied areas of the state. I identified 15 additional candidates for participation in the study. Next, I sent out a communication through the Florida Police Chiefs Association seeking the willingness of Police chiefs throughout the state to participate in a qualitative interview process (see Appendix B). The communication included a link to an interest survey wherein the participants made known their willingness to participate (see Appendix C). Finally, those who were qualified to participate in the study were provided an opportunity to schedule an interview.

Data Collection

Interviews were scheduled with the participants and conducted and recorded via Zoom. The interview consisted of ten open-ended questions, covering topics such as professional experiences and tenure of existing police chiefs throughout their law enforcement career, leadership opportunities within the field, specializations within the field, threat assessment and threat management, and the pathway to violence. For example, one question was, “Have you ever heard of the term threat assessment? If so,

what does this term mean to you? Can you explain the pathway to violence?" Another question was,

> Based on the information you have about threat assessment practices, do you believe threat assessment and threat management are an effective means of preventing targeted violence? Why or why not? If you do not have threat assessment practices in place, is there a reason?

The full interview protocol can be found in Appendix D.

Patton (2015) describes the process of qualitative interviewing. First, concerning skillful interviewing, Patton says asking questions in such a way that makes people want to tell their story requires non-judgmental interaction, active listening, and building rapport. Remaining transparent, trustworthy, clear in the questioning, and listening to really hear will garner the best responses. (p.427). Further conversational interviewing is described as an open-ended approach that welcomes spontaneity and opportunities for open-ended questions that flow depending on what is observed and learned through the process. Benefits to conversational interviewing include opportunities to expound on information learned in the discovery of the flow. No two sets of questions are alike. This personalized conversation flow could deepen responses; however, it proves difficult to collect systematic data for themed research outcomes (p.437). Further, Patton highlights the components of a standardized open-ended interview as A. having exact prepared wording and sequencing prepared in advance of the interview. B. participants are queried with the same exact questions in order to C. Open-ended formatted questions are worded

to elicit the maximum level of information from the response (p. 438). Patton describes many forms of questions. This study included Standardized open-ended questions that were worded exactly and were delivered to all participants in the same manner and order. All questions were pre-determined and will provide the respondent with the opportunity to answer each question from their own informed perspective. Results of these questions will enable the researcher to identify themes, variables, commonalities, and differences (p. 438). These questions may be found in Appendix D.

Data Analysis

Patton (2015) describes qualitative analysis as a systematic approach focused on comparison of groups for the purpose of explanation (p. 590). The purpose of qualitative analysis is to compare and contrast case units for the specific intent of determining causal and outcome conditions through coding and thematic constructs (p.590) First, following Patton's steps, I organized my data by noting and recording the patterns and themes during the process of the beginning fieldwork, and then inventory and organize that data to include the interviews, documents and observations made (p.523). Additionally, I filled in the gaps by recording and connecting those data items that were fresh in my mind, and I ensured the data remained protected after collection (Patton, 2015). Additionally, upon conclusion of the interviews, I was sure to express gratitude and appreciation to all my participants in a timely manner and remained focused and affirmed in the purpose of the need for this research and my inquiry. One way I accomplished this was to continue reviewing exemplars in my field that offered inspiration to consistently

motivate me through this process (Patton, 2015). Two notable sources I referenced through this process were research materials through the Association of Threat Professions (ATAP) and the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP). I also determined what qualitative software to use during this process to capture the data and conduct analysis. For my interviews and transcription, I used Zoom, and for my coding, I used AtlasTI. Committing time to learn these software programs ensured my success. Additionally, I scheduled time to analyze the data and set realistic expectations of time management by committing that time to that process. Then, I clarified the framework and the organization of the data and how it is reported by remaining reflective and reflexive, monitoring how I am considering the information through critical introspection related to my own biases, fears, hopes, predispositions, and constraints (Patton, 2015). To aid in this process, I used an analysis journal to document my decisions, ideas, challenges, and epiphanies, and I have maintained this journal to ensure I have retained all the information for use throughout the research process (Patton, 2015). Finally, I engaged in a content analysis process, looking for patterns in the data to identify core consistencies and meanings to make sense of the data. Finding patterns helped to develop themes within the content (Patton, 2015).

The intellectual and mechanical work of the analysis of that data included developing some manageable classification or coding steps as a first step toward analysis to avoid confusion. According to Patton, further content analysis requires identification, coding, categorization, classification, and labeling of all the primary patterns found in the

data to determine what is significant to the study (2015). Reading through field notes and interviews and making notes in the margins aided in this first step toward organizing the data into topics and files (Patton, 2015). After reading the content again after the first analysis, the formal coding process started in a systematic way (Patton, 2015, p.554; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Multiple passages through the data were necessary before field notes or interviews could be completely coded and indexed (Patton, 2015).

Ethical Considerations

Three forms of ethical considerations were observed in this study: (1) Informed consent, (2) Confidentiality, and (3) Data security. I provided each participant with an informed consent form that they read and consented to over Zoom audio recording. These recordings were preserved and transcribed after the completion of the interviews. This informed consent form detailed the rights and responsibilities of the participant, including any potential risks that were involved with participation in the study. Further, the confidentiality of the participants was maintained. This was accomplished through the non-disclosure of the participants' names, agency names, or any clearly identifying information that could indicate their participation in the study. Additionally, when any disclosure occurred during the process of the in-depth interviews, all personal identifying information was redacted from the written, final report.

Data security included passwords, encryption, and not leaving information exposed and available.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in a qualitative study requires an understanding that the findings can be trusted. According to Korstjens and Moser, there are five forms of trustworthiness worth considering when conducting a study: credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and reflexivity (2018). Each of these forms is discussed below, along with mitigation strategies for each.

Credibility

According to Korstiens and Moser, credibility is defined as research findings that demonstrate the reader can be confident in the data (2018). Credibility determines that the research findings demonstrate that the content garnered from the participants is a correct and true representation of the original data collected from the source (2018). To ensure credibility in this study, I provided prolonged engagement; investing sufficient time with the participants to become familiar with the context of their perspectives and with persistent observation; identifying the characteristics and elements that are most significant to the issue and focusing on these areas in deeper detail (Korstiens & Moser, 2018).

Transferability

The quality criteria element of transferability ensures that the results of qualitative research can be transferred to additional or outside respondents in the context of what was delivered. Strategizing thick descriptions enabled me to articulate the behavior and

experiences with appropriate contexts so that they would become meaningful to outsiders who review the content (Korstiens & Moser, 2018).

Dependability

Dependability ensures that the findings over time provide stability to the data in context. Dependability involves the participants perspective of the findings through review, evaluation, interpretation, and recommendations. Dependability was determined by how it is supported by the data received from the participants within the study (Korstiens & Moser, 2018). I accomplished dependability through strategically creating an audit trail and being transparent in the description of the research steps taken throughout the entire study, from the beginning to the conclusion of the research findings. All records of the research gathering process were maintained from start to finish. (Korstiens & Mosier, 2018).

Confirmability

Confirmability is the extent to which findings of the research study can be found and confirmed by outside researchers. This level of quality criteria is achieved by establishing that the data and interpretations of the data were clearly from the established data pursuit and not my imagination. Confirmability was also established through an audit trail, leveraging the use of accurate record taking throughout the entire research process (Korstiens & Mosier, 2018).

Reflexivity

Establishing reflexivity in trustworthiness requires critical self-reflection to include understanding and consideration of my own biases, preferences, and preconceptions about the topic, as well as how I felt about the respondents and how those feelings influenced the participants' answers to the questions posed within the study. The appropriate strategy to manage this core element is to use a diary to record and examine the conceptual lens, including preconceptions, values, and implicit and explicit assumptions that could affect the research outcomes throughout the study (Korstiens & Mosier, 2018).

Summary

This chapter presented the research design of this study and its participants. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how threat assessment practices have been beneficial in preventing acts of targeted violence and how police Chiefs perceive these practices in municipal settings in Florida. The purpose, generally, of qualitative studies is to explore material practices using various representations such as field notes, interviews, conversations, recordings, memos, and photos to interpret phenomena and the meanings people bring to them (Burkholder et al., 2020). This exploration is often done through the collection of stories, responses, thoughts, and perceptions that are elicited through research questions and the meanings or associations that human beings ascribe to human or social problems (Burkholder et al., 2020). In this study, rich data were gleaned from in-depth interviews with municipal police Chiefs in the State of Florida. A selection

of small, medium, and large municipal agency Chiefs from all over the state provided various perceptions and experiences related to threat assessment and threat management at the municipal policing level.

This chapter also discussed instrumentation through the interview questions and how they were delivered to the participants, as well as recruitment efforts made to garner the targeted population of police executives. Data was collected from municipal police Chiefs through one-on-one interviews. Additionally, data analysis was discussed in detail, with consideration of ethical standards and expectations. The processing steps of thematic analysis were detailed, adopting the method described by Guest et al. (2017). Chapter 4 will present the findings of this study.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this qualitative study was to research the perceptions of police chiefs in municipal policing settings of threat assessment practices. I conducted virtual interviews with 15 police chiefs from various small, medium, and large police departments across the state of Florida. I used two research questions to guide this study:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of law enforcement executives, specifically police Chiefs, of threat assessment practices?

RQ2: What are their views on the adoption of daily police practices to prevent targeted acts of violence in municipal settings in Florida?

Data Collection

I interviewed 15 police chiefs between January and February 2025. Many of the police chiefs were obtained by utilizing the Florida Police Chiefs Association Green Alert notification system, which was sent to all chiefs within the FPCA membership. Others were obtained through the Central Florida Criminal Justice Association membership email. Lastly, some chiefs learned of the study and reached out to participate.

Data Analysis

All recorded interviews were transcribed using the Zoom transcription service. All transcripts were reviewed for accuracy. All transcripts were coded in AtlasTI for content. Initial codes numbered in the hundreds, approaching nearly 1000 codes. Codes were merged to reduce redundancy. Afterwards, the codes were grouped by category.

Categories were grouped together to form themes. Transcripts were reexamined at each step described previously, and the codebook was further refined.

Demographics

Chiefs represented within the study were represented from both genders, varied ages, multiple nationalities, and backgrounds. Variations in experience levels from the long-tenured police Chiefs to the newly appointed police chiefs were also present in the study. Collectively, all the chiefs had significant experience in police work from the ground up. Chiefs also represented small, medium, and large police jurisdictions, and that was determined based on the number of sworn police officers in their agency. There was also mixed representation of cities and towns from all over the state of Florida.

Table 2

Participant Demographics

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Female	6	40%
Male	9	60%
Region		
Central Florida	4	26.67%
North Florida	2	13.33%
Panhandle	2	13.33%
South	4	26.67%
West	3	20%
Agency Size		
Small	5	33.33%
Medium	2	13.33%
Large	8	53.33%

Note. *N*=15.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in this qualitative study required an understanding that the findings could be trusted. Each of the five forms of trustworthiness in a study (credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and reflexivity) are discussed in detail below, along with the mitigation strategies achieved for each.

Credibility

To ensure credibility in this study, I provided prolonged engagement and invested sufficient time with the participants to familiarize them with the context of their perspectives, experiences, and understanding. As a result, I was able to identify the characteristics and elements that are most significant to the issues and focus on these areas in deeper detail. Those issues were identified through the coding process.

Transferability

I was able to ensure transferability by ensuring that the results of the qualitative research were understandable and transferable to additional or outside respondents in the context of what was delivered. Strategizing through appropriate coding and determining how the perspectives and perceptions were delivered and intended enabled me to articulate the experiences with appropriate context so that it becomes meaningful to an outsider reviewing the content.

Dependability

Dependability was ensured, so the findings over time provide stability to the data in context. Dependability in this study involved the participants' perspective of the

findings through review, evaluation, interpretation, and recommendations. Dependability was also determined by how it was supported by the study participants' data. I ensured dependability by strategically creating an audit trail and being transparent in the description of the research steps taken throughout the entire study, from the beginning of the study to the conclusion of the research findings. All records of the research gathering process were maintained from start to finish.

Confirmability

In this study, confirmability was achieved by confirming data as determined by outside researchers. This level of quality criteria was realized by establishing that the data and interpretations of the data were clearly from the established data pursuit and not my imagination. Confirmability was also established through an audit trail, leveraging the use of accurate record-taking throughout the entire research process.

Reflexivity

I was able to establish reflexivity in trustworthiness through critical self-reflection, including understanding and consideration of my own biases, preferences, and preconceptions about the topic. Additionally, I was careful to deeply evaluate how I felt about the respondents and how those feelings influenced the participant’s answers to the questions posed within the study. Management of this core element was done through the use of a notepad to record and examine the conceptual lens to include preconceptions, values, and implicit and explicit assumptions that could affect the research outcomes throughout the study.

Findings

In this section, I will discuss my findings in the study, including all themes and subthemes that emerged from the data analysis. Themes were identified using the focal point of each of the research questions and through the responses of the participating chiefs interviewed. To maintain confidentiality, I did not identify the participants individually, but instead captured their responses through their quoted experiences in their own policing environments.

Research Question 1: What Are The Perceptions Of Law Enforcement Executives, Specifically Police Chiefs Of Threat Assessment Practices?

Through the course of this qualitative research study, I interviewed a total of 15 police chiefs or deputy police chiefs from various municipal policing environments from all over the state of Florida using a total of 10 structured questions. Variations in responses hinged on multiple factors, including jurisdictional considerations, challenges in each community, resources, technology, and the philosophical and conceptual understanding of threat management. After coding their responses, five themes and 13 subthemes emerged.

Theme 1A: Police Chiefs Have Varied Definitions of Threat Assessment

Through the interviews, police chiefs provided varied definitions of "Threat Assessment." Some chiefs were very familiar with threat assessment models and practices based on their previous experiences and exposure to training and practical application within their current agency or a previous agency. Others were limited in

understanding threat assessment jargon; however, despite not knowing the terminology, they had some conceptual understanding of threat assessment practices after further discussion and explanation. Variations in understanding ranged from those who were significantly exposed and well-educated in threat assessment to those who were superficially aware. For example, one chief cited their personal experience working in a vice operation capacity, assessing the environment for threats and risks prior to serving a search warrant to determine how threats are posed and how they can be mitigated. Three subthemes emerge from the analysis.

Threat Assessment is Defined as Situational Awareness. Many of the participant chiefs identified threat assessment from the lens of situational awareness. Considering both how threats were perceived from the lens of managing a scene of a critical incident or in anticipation of harm at a high-risk encounter, such as serving a search warrant. Others understood threat management from the perspective of understanding human behavior and watching for warning signs that may be potential indicators of future violence.

One participant described threat assessment from the lens of situational awareness in high-risk encounters based on individual professional experiences:

> What it means to me is that we are looking at potential threats in our community. And like, that's kind of why, I say, it's something we've always done as part of a tactical team. You know, we do that regularly with any search warrant we're serving, or you know, any buys of narcotics. They do the same thing. They look at

> all the threats, how they're posed, how we address those, and what we can do to mitigate those risks.

Another stated that threat assessment was more of an everyday environmental consideration, “Threat Assessment occurs in every environment that we operate, not just in our communities when we answer calls for service, when we gather and collect and disseminate intelligence information about potential or ongoing threats.”

Some of the participants understood threat assessment as a means of identifying at-risk behaviors that could lead to a trajectory of violence. For example, one chief stated,

> We have to pay attention to what's happening there, so that we can stay ahead of the curve if you will, and have a plan to respond, if not, first and foremost, we have a plan to identify those factors that contribute to what you know, leading a person to become antisocial in their behavior and start committing crimes… and how can we prevent those things? How can we triage the symptoms, identify them, and refer people to, you know, whoever, or whatever entity or organization that can provide the services that maybe they're lacking or that they just need so that we can prevent violence.

The definition of threat assessment varied based on the professional experiences of each chief and the context in which they believed it was needed and used in their own communities. Through the lens of situational awareness, environmental conditions, high-risk encounters, or persons of concern, chiefs had varied responses on what they believed to be threat assessment.

Threat Assessment Defined as a Response to Violence. Chiefs described threat assessment as a response to violence, explaining how their police response to violent acts within their communities mitigated the opportunity for continued and further violence. Their responses included explanations of incidents where a crime of violence took place in one location in their community with the intent to commit additional acts of violence elsewhere, but were quickly and immediately halted due to an all-hands-on-deck or intelligence-led response. Some of the examples included domestic violence encounters and shootings within the community.

One of the participants articulated the prevention of further violence through this experience.

> Through the intelligence and the teamwork, they were able to, you know, prevent further violence from happening…The shooting occurred in one place, and there was a plan to go to the workplace and continue with the threat. However, you know, with the work of the people working, It was probably an all call out with everybody from the agency they were able to, you know, prevent the mass casualty incident that had previously been planned.

Another participant understood the connection between domestic-related crimes and the propensity for repeat and escalating violence to homicide in some of those circumstances. They stated:

> That is one of the bigger challenges that we have: repeat violence. We do get those calls considerably. We do make arrests routinely down here for stalking

> domestic violence related stalking as well. And unfortunately, we've even seen it go the distance, sadly. We've actually experienced several domestic violence homicides down here as well.

An all-hands-on-deck response to gunshots and violent crimes in progress was articulated by one participant as a means of mitigation: “We respond to the gunshots. We don't wait to necessarily for a whole group of people. If you're there and you hear them, then you go.”

Threat assessment was defined as a response to various violent encounters to mitigate future or continued violence. The participants had various experiences based on these encounters in their respective communities.

Varied Understanding of the Pathway to Violence. Each of the participants was asked about their understanding of the pathway to violence. Variations in responses included significant understanding to no understanding of what the model meant. However, with further dialogue, all the chiefs understood the pathway conceptually and had degrees of understanding of its meaning; some understood it deeply, sharing their professional experiences on how it applied to the prevention of targeted acts of violence, and were able to articulate those responses.

One participant explained the pathway to violent behaviors through adverse life experiences and the management of those over time. They said,

> You know the conditions that people experience throughout their lives, and how a person responds to those? And does it lead them to engage in antisocial behavior

> at an early age? And if it's never correctly identified and triaged and treated, then that person can continue to go down that wrong path and basically engage in behavior that is indicative of someone who is simply going to be a major threat to someone or society as a whole, depending on the situation.

One participant was able to share their experience regarding a person of concern who had escalated up the pathway to beyond the planning phase ultimately leading to the apprehension of weapons before an attack could occur, “And you know we were able to, in my opinion, they were able to clearly diffuse something that was well on its way to beyond the planning stages, we were able to interrupt it beyond the planning stage. We just bought ourselves some time until we find the guns.”

Another participant shared how their agency leverages intelligence information to determine where an individual is on the pathway to violence so that their officers can interrupt the trajectory. “It could be anything from related to a school shooting threat to exactly what you said. Maybe workplace violence. Somebody's going to be getting terminated. Regardless of what it is. There is an intake type process where we have analysts that are in-house here that will start to do a profile of the individual to determine if that threat exists, and you think of the process of how long, how far along. They are on a path to potential violence.”

Two participants had no knowledge of the pathway to violence terminology, however later in the interview shared their understanding of pathway behaviors,

conceptually. “I've heard that term. I don't know if I could explain it to you.” Another stated, “That one I'm not too familiar with.”

Participants had varied responses and levels of understanding of the pathway to violence model. All had some understanding by the end of the interviews. However, many others had a deeper understanding and clearly embraced and applied the process to the prevention of targeted acts of violence in their respective communities.

Theme 1B: Municipal Police Chiefs Perceive the Importance of Threat Assessment

Many of the Chiefs interviewed believed that threat assessment is important and mostly effective at preventing targeted acts of violence. Many shared their belief that threat assessment is a critical prevention tool and that it is beneficial to law enforcement, as cases with identified persons of concern are emerging in communities. Two subthemes emerged from the analysis:

Emergent Threat. Emergent threats do not discriminate and happen across the state, in all environments, demographics, areas, and communities. A participant expressed their belief that threat assessment is important and vital to having specific designated personnel, policies, standards, and processes in place to manage emergent threats in real time. “I really do. I think it's vital. You have to have threat assessment personnel. You have to have threat assessment standards and procedures, rules and regulations, and policies in place because, you know, it is a very, very different time in policing, and threats are becoming more frequent.”

Another participant shared their perspective that while threat assessment is important, it is not always successful in preventing targeted acts of violence. “So I think it's very important. I think it's very helpful. I think it's not a catch-all, it's not 100 percent, but it does it. It does serve its purpose. And I think there's times where because we have threat management we can prevent violence.”

Another participant articulated their belief that threat assessment is necessary, effective and important, however processes could always be improved: “So do I think it's necessary. Absolutely. Do I think it's effective, absolutely. Could it be more effective? Absolutely. You know, it's always a challenge.”

This quote from one of the participants summarizes beliefs about emergent violence in any community: “Targeted acts of violence can happen anywhere, at any time.” The majority of the Chiefs interviewed expressed this understanding of emergent threats and appropriate and immediate responses as very important.

Evolution of Policing. All participants had extensive experience in law enforcement, most of which was decades long. Over their career, many spoke of the evolution of policing and how management and prevention of crime in communities had changed due to the severity and frequency of crimes, as well as how technology has enhanced law enforcement’s ability to prevent crime. These thoughts were captured as the evolution of policing.

One participant stated, “The mass casualties are becoming more frequent, and the ideologies are becoming more frequent and growing, it seems. And it's just how we

operate and what's going on in the world today that's driven this. And we have to evolve with the times, and you know we have to change our aspect, how we look at things, and how we respond to different incidents."

Leveraging public and private partnerships and resources to prevent crime was also referenced in the concept of contemporary policing. A participant spoke of the need to connect the private sector businesses and organizations with law enforcement to enhance communication and create more successful threat management strategies. "So I firmly believe that it is invaluable in contemporary policing. The question is because you know, we gotta marry, we gotta catch up the concept to the capacity of organizations. Right? I think our organizations, most of our organizations, are built very similarly, and a successful threat assessment group doesn't look like any traditional law enforcement deployment. It brings about other partners that are non-law enforcement. And so you have to, kind of navigate that shift in philosophy to get number one internal buy-in and to make it, you know, be sustainable."

The vast and long tenured experiences of the participants interviewed contributed greatly to the understanding of the evolution of policing. All the Chiefs interviewed mentioned leveraging technology and communication to enhance modern-day policing efforts.

Theme 1C: Municipal Police Chiefs Have Varied Views on the Effectiveness of Threat Assessment

Many of the Chiefs interviewed believed that threat assessment is mostly effective at preventing targeted acts of violence. Many shared their belief that threat assessment is a critical prevention tool and that it is beneficial, but no one tool is 100% effective in preventing all targeted acts of violence. They acknowledged that prevention efforts are difficult to measure and remain cautiously optimistic that threat assessment is still a valuable method to combat targeted acts of violence in many cases. They also consistently reported how analytical work and leveraging technology to identify persons of concern are incredibly beneficial in establishing where persons of concern are on the pathway to violence. Three subthemes emerged from this theme.

Proactivity. All participants spoke at some point about proactive efforts they utilized to identify people of concern in their communities. Proactivity was defined differently by the Chiefs; some spoke of leveraging state and federal law enforcement resources and public-private partnerships, while others talked specifically about finding creative ways to stay connected to resources within the community through businesses and community members. While the efforts made were unique to agencies based on their resources, demographics, and agency size, the opportunity to be proactive toward violence prevention was the foundation of the conversation repeatedly.

A participant shared their perspective regarding what proactive measures should be taken for next steps, clearly connecting how each case and circumstance is as unique

as the individual being managed, requiring specific proactive planning towards prevention. “And from that, you know. Where? Where do we go from here? Do we offer mental health services? Is this an ideology thing that requires us to let the FBI know and work with them? And how we're going to handle this, maybe they have information.”

In another circumstance, a participant cited their experience with a specific person within the community that was addicted and continued to get arrested. In this circumstance, the Chief cited the opportunity to leverage their relationship with the mental health and drug court in their community to work toward a rehabilitative plan of prevention. “We've been successful with those with the alternative courts that we have especially mental Health Court and Drug Court. I know a young lady right now who goes to my church, and she's involved in a program, a court-ordered program, that is offered through our church, and she's a success story. But it was a long time coming with her. It was one of those phone calls to the State attorney, saying, Look, we're tired of the revolving door traditional court system. It's not helping her. We need to get her somewhere else, and fortunately, she consented, and we really got her on the right path for many years. She fell off the wagon and did another burglary. We got her back into another program, and now she's doing well.”

Chiefs leverage their resources and relationships to provide proactive measures to prevent violence and crime in their communities. Threat management strategies offer yet another opportunity for Chiefs and police agencies to identify persons of concern and interrupt their pathway toward additional at-risk or violent behaviors.

Intelligence Led. Participants within the study spoke at great length about the intelligence-led efforts their agencies make toward managing threats. Larger agencies with more resources identified various units and personnel dedicated exclusively to the process of threat management. Smaller agencies relied on neighboring resources. Some of the participants discussed having dedicated threat management teams and offered that their officers were part of a multidisciplinary team dedicated to threat management. Many of the participants discussed their use of technology, and analysts employed by the agency to help identify threat activity to prevent violence. Participants interviewed discussed how their standard practices involved follow-ups on tips and persons of concern immediately, doing background research, visiting the person's home, and interviewing people close to or connected to the individual for additional information. They spoke of systematic routing systems that led straight to intelligence divisions, routine briefings, and meetings with the team to analyze cases and review crime statistics that occurred within the previous 24 hours to ensure follow-ups are being conducted.

One Chief spoke about the process of how threats were received and the process for follow-ups, "We have an intelligence division here, an intelligence unit that actually covers all of that. So basically, when we would receive a threat, or it's brought to our attention. There's a designated process that we utilize to review any of the material that is here, and we'll interview. We'll go out and actually interview witnesses."

Another participating chief discussed how their intelligence-led efforts were able to thwart a potential targeted attack at a school. "We had a person who was threatening,

to shoot up a school or blow up the school in an actually very affluent area. Our Criminal Intelligence Bureau did a very thorough investigation, and was able to intercept enough information and correspondence to do a search on a person's house, found the guns and the bombs, and I did, in fact, arrest that person, find a manifesto and plans. That person was federally prosecuted, and it is in prison."

Intelligence led efforts were commonly referenced by the participants clearly identifying that Chiefs are leveraging technology, analysts, and scanning for threats as part of a daily practice to follow up on threats immediately. These efforts were commonly discussed through many of the interviews.

Across Jurisdictions. Consistently across all participants, Chiefs referenced tremendous value in regular communication with other jurisdictions, citing their positive experiences with local, county, state, and federal partners. Many stated how they conducted routine meetings with consistent information sharing of person(s) of concern that were considered shared citizens in various jurisdictions, eg, schools, workplaces, and communities (and sometimes with a countywide, statewide, or federal nexus). Many cited their experiences relative to how these prearranged and fostered relationships with neighboring jurisdictions paid big dividends when the need for shared resources emerged.

One participating chief stated the importance of these relationships, "The other thing that is extremely important for us is the relationship that we have from our surrounding law enforcement agencies."

Another participant discussed the importance of nurturing these relationships, “Yeah, I mean, you know, I'm a firm believer in everything we do is about relationships. And so you have to build those good, strong, positive relationships before incidents like this happen? So we have incredibly strong, open, and friendly relationships with all of our State and Federal partners, as well as our local law enforcement.”

Having established relationships aids in the coordination of managing critical incidents after the fact, and one participating Chief offered the following information in that regard, “So it takes a lot of coordination. And you can't do that during a mass casualty event. So we make sure that we build those relationships ahead of time. So that we get that information flow. And you know it's seamless.”

The participating Chiefs unanimously agreed that having strong, consistent, established relationships with clear and frequent communication was critical to success in managing events both before and after the crisis. All the Chiefs cited their success stories in partnership. They agreed that no one agency can, or should attempt to, manage a targeted act of violence crisis, or a person of concern case with a shared citizen nexus, alone.

Theme 1D: Municipal Police Chiefs See Threat Assessment as New to Municipalities

Chiefs in municipalities recognize the need to explore their policing practices and implement new strategies that will aid in the prevention of certain types of crime. These efforts include threat management through ongoing case management and monitoring of people of concern as they emerge in their communities. Chiefs are leveraging technology

and assigning personnel for these specific cases and responsibilities. Two subthemes emerged from this research.

New Management. Chiefs expressed their understanding that threats happening in real time offer opportunities for immediate and actionable responses based on imminence. Clearly, when an identified "crime" is being committed, action can be taken by law enforcement to intervene through arrest. Additional actionable mental health-related calls can sometimes result in mandatory, temporary detention through the Statewide "Baker Act" process. However, when statutory elements are not met for arrest or mental health detention, some of the participating Chiefs shared their thoughts on new management strategies for persons of concern who emerge in their communities with threatening or at-risk behaviors. Many of the Chiefs referenced the Florida State law regarding Risk Protection Orders (RPO), a temporary ex parte order, as a means of seizing firearms from identified persons of concern who have presented at-risk behaviors and are known to have possession of firearms. Many articulated how they have streamlined the process of obtaining RPOs and have incorporated legal resources into the mix to ensure legal expectations have been met. The Chiefs, who referenced using RPOs as a means of management, articulated that they found great value in the process as a new means of management of persons of concern. One chief shared their experience related to the process, "We'll let them know when the RPO has been signed, and the behavioral health officers will go out there and serve them. So we just switched to that. Otherwise, the RPOs could be served by any of the officers in the district, and the one officer

assigned to the legal unit is ultimately responsible for obtaining the RPO, getting the weapons, and then the tickler dates with the year timeline of returning or notifying. I still have your weapon. All that stuff, they are still responsible for that."

Another participating chief described his thoughts on frequency and intensity of targeted acts of violence, prompting the need to manage these cases in new and unique ways: "The mass casualties are becoming more frequent, and the ideologies are becoming more frequent and growing, it seems. And it's just how we operate and what's going on in the world today that's driven this. And we have to evolve with the times, and you know we have to change our aspect, and how we look at things, and how we respond to different incidents."

Chiefs understood that advances in technology and frequency and intensity of threats prompt a need for a deeper understanding of threat management. They also expressed that management of persons of concern, who present on a trajectory upward on the pathway to violence, requires new strategies and processes, such as rehabilitative efforts, psychological support, and immediate intervention. One chief expressed the thought in this way, "You must understand what the person's trajectory is in order to interrupt it, so if it's a matter of reeling them in. Or maybe they need to be on some type of medication, and then just preventing them from getting tools that help carry out whatever you suspect that they might want to carry out."

Overall, many of the Chiefs articulated the need for new management expectations for these very nuanced cases involving people who exhibit concerning and

at-risk behaviors. They recognize that gone are the days when road patrol officers declared a call or situation unactionable and turned a blind eye while responding to the next dispatched call. Chiefs understand that threat cases require strategic and specific management measures to interrupt the potential for an upward trajectory on the pathway to violence.

New Monitoring. A subtheme of new methods in monitoring also emerged from this theme. Chiefs referenced the use of analysts and technology to monitor the behaviors of persons of concern who emerge in their respective communities. They also spoke to the specific routine processes they are taking within their agencies to ensure that no person of concern is missed and that all contributing team members are part of the intervention and safety planning process.

As stated by one chief, tracking mental health interventions is a critical part of ongoing monitoring in their agency, “We do have crime analysts here. We have one. I would like to eventually get to kind of keep track of how many people we’re Baker acting, and then, more importantly, following up on those to see if we can track them properly and consistently.”

Another chief spoke to the consistent monitoring through regularly scheduled meetings with key stakeholders from different police agencies to manage cases with shared citizens that emerge, that have the potential for repeat or escalating violence, such as domestic violence cases. “They meet every morning and every Monday morning, they go through the cases, and they can see domestic violence cases that may be occurring if

their workplace may be in the city, but they live in the county, so they meet like in that area."

Working in concert with the local state attorney was also referenced by a participating chief during my interviews. Having solid working relationships with common objectives to manage and monitor person(s) of concern is a best practice. "We have a really good state attorney that believes in the monitoring."

Even after the person of concern is no longer an imminent threat, ongoing monitoring as part of threat management was identified as important by one of the Chiefs, "One of the biggest pieces is the follow up just because someone may be, you know, successfully off ramped today doesn't mean they can't get back in that ramp three years from now. And what is, what does the system look like to have some degree of systemic follow-up?"

Another chief stated how their ongoing monitoring prevented a school shooting from occurring, "We received information, and we dispatched out those detectives very quickly. They worked hard to find out if the threat was credible, and once they learned that it was, they stayed on that individual. And you know we, because we had dedicated individuals and knew what to look for 24/7 on what to do. We were able to prevent, you know, a school shooting from happening."

New methods of ongoing monitoring of individuals who exhibit threatening or at-risk behaviors were determined to be critical to effective threat management practices.

Many of the Chiefs shared their personal experiences regarding these efforts and their effectiveness in their communities.

Theme 1E: Municipal Police Chiefs Do Not See Threat Assessment as One Size Fits All

Variations in response to incidents and investigations exist based on multiple factors, including but not limited to, imminence of threat, resources available, jurisdictional considerations, types of incidents, and community characteristics. The Chiefs interviewed shared mixed experiences regarding their communities, and how all this impacts their ability and need for response to identify, manage, and monitor persons of concern. A strong common denominator existed among Chiefs, as they collectively asserted that leveraging their relationships with neighboring jurisdictions, county, state, and federal partners, and public and private entities made for the most successful outcomes in threat assessment and management. Three subthemes emerged from this data.

Based Upon Jurisdiction. When discussing how jurisdictional considerations impact threat management and training, one of the participants spoke to how large-scale events inside their community impact training expectations for the agency, “Where we're located, we do a lot of dignitary protection. And so all of this falls directly in line with that line of thinking. And a lot of those type events. A lot of the mass casualty type events… We have some football teams here. You know, that have drawn very large crowds. So you know, when you do those things, you know best practices include, you

know, real-life, scenario-based training. And I just think that's such a big part of what we do. Tabletop, you know, exercises. We do those regularly here with a number of different events."

In discussions about how dignitaries reside within their jurisdiction, those considerations also impact threat management and include collaboration with neighboring jurisdictions to include federal partners, as stated by another chief, "We have rare stalking cases. If we do have a stalking sometimes it's linked and more tied to the domestic violence type cases, and then very seldom because we end up housing... I think we have… It's forever changing, but at one point, I believe we had 3 or 4 Federal judges, so there would be some stalking cases, but we wouldn't work them. Some of the bigger agencies, like the Secret Service or FBI, would loop us into it, but they would be the ones working those cases."

Another chief cited their experience about how those with criminal intent do not adhere to jurisdictional boundaries. Thus, the need for shared communication and collaboration among law enforcement partners in different jurisdictions, "I think… can it be more robust? Without a doubt! And we need to continue to do that because everyone knows that bad guys don't necessarily have jurisdictional boundaries, and I will tell you, the attacker from Pulse came from Fort Pierce, and so he wasn't even in our AOR. So that was not even it. He wasn't even on our radar. So that means that anybody can traverse any locale and basically launch an attack."

Lastly, one chief shared their experience regarding communication among those who intend to commit targeted acts of violence and the areas that are most vulnerable to an attack: “They talk about places to launch mass casualty attacks. And that's movie theaters, libraries, public places, restaurants. It's basically anywhere in any town, U.S.A. So no matter where we are, anything could happen.”

Overall, Chiefs recognized the need for communication among jurisdictions regardless of boundaries but also shared their personal perspectives on how specific needs within their own jurisdictions impact their ability to identify, manage and monitor person(s) of concern within their respective jurisdictions.

Based Upon Resources. Through many interviews, Chiefs discussed their perspective of how resources were either plentiful in larger agencies, moderate or adequate in medium-sized agencies, or lacking in smaller agencies. Consistently, larger agencies reported having multiple specialized teams and units dedicated to intelligence, investigations, mental health, and school resource officers. Medium-sized agencies had more resources than small agencies, but still admitted to having less dedicated staff for specific investigations, such as threat management. Smaller agencies, however, spoke about limited staffing and limited financial resources, but also had less need for a dedicated person to do this work due to minimal calls for service in this regard. Collectively, all the Chiefs interviewed had a specific plan for threats and identified persons of concern in their respective communities. Many spoke about shared resources

depending on the nexus to a neighboring jurisdiction, a school, a county, or a federal law enforcement jurisdiction.

"And being a small agency, we're gonna do what we possibly can do in the very beginning. And then we are going to have to rely on State County assets and other departments to come in and help out."

Policies and procedures related to threats were considered incredibly important regardless of agency size or apparent need, "I understand that it's sometimes easier for me, with a bigger agency, to get some of that done with the resources that we have available, and then sometimes much tougher for smaller agencies to get that done. But it's something that you really can't sweep under the rug. You really have to understand these concepts, and you have to apply them. Then, you have to have policies and procedures in place. To verify that you know that there's verification, again, verification of what it is you're doing and how you're doing it."

Resources played a significant role in chief's perceptions of threat management in their agencies. However, while some cited having challenges with staffing and financial resources, they still articulated a plan for response in threat management related cases.

Based Upon Community Characteristics. Community characteristics emerged as an area that influenced the chiefs' perspectives on threat management. Agencies within affluent communities, regardless of size, shared how the use of technology and gates assisted in fortifying those areas, mitigating some of their threat management concerns. Meanwhile, jurisdictions that held mental health receiving facilities within their

jurisdiction were charged with managing persons of concern upon their release. Community characteristics were present in many of the responses and included considerations for shopping malls, stadiums, airports, churches, businesses, and schools situated within the jurisdiction. Additional considerations were granted to political officials and dignitaries who either resided or worked inside the agency's jurisdiction.

A chief from an affluent jurisdiction cited their experience leveraging public-private partnerships to combat threat management challenges: "One of the things that's totally unique about this area is even our public-private partnerships with our security companies and groups in the area. We have a lot of high-end gated communities."

Another chief also discussed an intervention effort through the development of a mental health drop-in center within their jurisdiction to assist with cases involving persons experiencing mental illness. "So as far as the mental illness. Well, we're going in a new direction. We're actually building a drop-in center and bringing in the partners that are good and trained, like hopefully, like you eventually someday, that understand the mental illness more than we do, because, you know, come on, we're cops. So we're wearing so many hats, and mental illness is starting to take a toll not only on us helping them, but on our officers. Now you know their mental illness is starting. But with us, being a transient city, we seem to have individuals who kind of show up here sometimes, and try to get them the help they need. And that's, I think, with our drop-in center, one of the things we're going to be reaching out to is some of our community partners who are not in law enforcement and have the expertise in that area."

Challenges related to the release of mental health patients within their jurisdiction were cited by one chief, “We also have a mental health facility that's in our jurisdiction. They are receiving and releasing mental health patients.”

Community characteristics impact the way police Chiefs perceive and respond to threat management and cases with person(s) of concern that emerge within their jurisdiction and communities. Resources aid with fortification and mitigation efforts but sometimes police jurisdictions must manage persons within their communities that make their way there due to mental health services that are situated inside their jurisdiction.

Research Question 2: What Are Their Views On The Adoption Of Daily Police Practices To Prevent Targeted Acts Of Violence In Municipal Settings In Florida?

Upon interviewing the 15 Chiefs with the ten structured questions and in response to research question 2, an additional five themes and 10 subthemes were captured in the summary below. Some of the themes and subthemes may appear redundant; however, those redundancies speak to the importance, as perceived by police Chiefs in municipal settings, of communication, collaboration, and relationships in effective threat management practices.

Theme 2A: Municipal Police Chiefs Do Not Agree About What Training Officers Should Receive

The Chiefs had various responses to training expectations for their staff based primarily on their community needs, size, and resources. A philosophical understanding of the benefits of threat management aided in the chief’s level of commitment to training.

Responses to training were inconsistent among the Chiefs, with some leveraging large amounts of training into specialized groups that practiced threat management regularly within the agency as part of their assignment, while others received limited or no training for those with fewer resources or those with these designated duties. Many of the Chiefs agreed that training is a priority and that they were currently seeking training methods to better develop their staff. Two subthemes emerged from this research.

Varied Upon Importance Chief Places Upon Prevention. In this example, an expressed interest in training specific employees about threat management practices was exercised. Those officers who performed the function were sent to specialized training. However, other agency members, such as front-line patrol officers, may have only received limited online training. “I think there was like some type of mandatory, like online threat type class that everybody went through, but like most online training, you know, that doesn't really, you only digest so much in an online environment, especially when it's not interactive. With our threat response unit, we did have them as part of our yearly block training to explain what they're doing and why they're doing it, and how it's different from everything else that's being done. And then, when risk protection orders came out, we did a lot of training for everyone, and we've chosen the model where everything goes through our threat response unit.”

Another specific example spoke to how the agency’s school resource officers receive training in threat assessment and management as part of a multidisciplinary threat management team assigned to the school. Additional day shift police officers were

afforded some level of training on threat management, as well. “Our school resource officers are. We only have one school in our jurisdiction. However, she has gone to threat assessment training through the school board, and any of our day shift officers that I have. I've entitled them to also try to go through that same training.”

Training guidelines and expectations were discussed, but not in a formal way. One chief expressed his thoughts on how opportunities for process refinement existed within their agency. “Yeah, I would say that we do. But they can get better, and we need to make sure that we put it on our radar at least a minimum on an annual basis to where we keep it 1st and foremost. But then again, it's informally on our radar, any, you know, because of the way we're small and everybody knows what's going on. And so the constant exchange of information is happening so, but I think the way to get better with it is to maybe be a little more formal with it and to have designated, you know, policy review times when we do in-service training.”

The police Chiefs interviewed varied in their training expectations related to threat assessment and threat management. Some offered specific training offerings based on assignment, others had less formal processes, and many expressed their intent to adopt more formal and routine training for officers within their agencies.

Varied Upon Philosophical Understanding of Threat Assessment and Potential for Targeted Acts of Violence in Their Community. The perceptions of police Chiefs interviewed in this study were impacted by their philosophical understanding of threat management. Specific priorities related to threat assessment and

threat management included mandatory training for officers and special investigations teams, as well as the adoption of processes that route persons of concern directly to intelligence or threat management teams or units within the organization. Additionally, Chiefs believe that enlisting the support of the community to report incidents of persons of concern aids police agencies in the prevention of targeted violence. Creating a culture of trust among the community and providing reporting mechanisms also creates opportunities for law enforcement intervention.

Fundamentally, Chiefs who possess a deeper understanding of threat management asserted that training at the patrol level would yield the greatest results for intercepting a person of concern with potential trajectory at-risk behaviors before they ever had the opportunity to commit a targeted act of violence. One example of this response from a participating chief was expressed in this way, “So we have that going as well, where they train patrol and whoever wants to be part of that team on specific information, so that if you were to stop someone and things weren't adding up. These people have another layer of training that they can look at something and go. This is what you're looking at here, and this is who you need to call.”

Many of the Chiefs interviewed expressed a desire to adopt additional training practices toward threat assessment and threat management. One chief shared his thoughts regarding how incidents that have occurred in the past shape the way police agencies refine processes and make changes and training additions and adjustments based on need. “And when we've seen things that have happened, and we've taken steps to firm up the

security of our own territories that we police, that we oversee the better that we're going to be. We never give up on trying to find new ways of improving what we do."

Community trust and agency transparency were touted as significant contributors to receiving information from the community by one of the Chiefs interviewed, "Without that community partnership and the 21st century policing models of that… But you know, trust, legitimacy, and transparency are probably one of the first three that are on there for 21st-century policing. There's policy, development, community oversight, mental health, and wellness. They're all in there. But for the most part, if your community trusts you and they trust you with information, we can actually get a lot of information from our community."

Chiefs who had a deeper understanding of the benefits of threat management toward the prevention of targeted acts of violence implemented training for patrol-level ranks to ensure all sworn members of the agency knew how to identify at-risk behaviors in individuals and who to route them to when they were intercepted. This deeper philosophical understanding was felt agency-wide and aided in supporting safety through the prevention of targeted violence in communities.

Theme 2B: Municipal Police Chiefs View Communication With Neighboring Jurisdictions, the State, and Federal Law Enforcement Agencies as Essential

Fostering, developing, and maintaining strong working relationships with local, state, and federal partners, as well as leveraging public and private partnerships with clinical services, were critical and common themes among all the police chiefs

interviewed. Agency size had some impact on the degree of dependence on these relationships, but all those interviewed agreed on the importance and value of these relationships. Two subthemes emerged from this data.

Partnerships are Proactive. Intentional and routine meetings with key stakeholders were discussed as a mandatory practice in one chief's interview: "We have quarterly meetings with all the heads of agencies, including our state attorney, and even local, you know, surrounding county sheriffs. We bring everybody to the table once a quarter. I have a regular meeting with the sheriff, you know, and that's a weekly meeting, and then you know, State Attorney, and I talk pretty much every day, as well as our federal partners. It's more the task force officers who are meeting with them. But I make a point, and they make a point of, you know, making sure that their directors or their heads and I are talking and familiar with each other as well. Again, it's just all about building those relationships before an event happens."

Relationships with neighboring jurisdictions were also discussed beyond the scope of conversation and meetings and into joint trainings, enhancing the practical application of prevention strategies, "Our plan involves all of those agencies. If we were to experience any kind of a threat or mass casualty. And then we've actually participated in some training exercises with the other agencies in the area that we constantly learn from each other."

All the Chiefs interviewed discussed the importance of maintaining relationships with neighboring jurisdictions to ensure continuity of response and deconfliction, toward

the greatest opportunity for a successful outcome. “I'm a firm believer that everything we do is about relationships. And so you have to build those good, strong, positive relationships before incidents like this happen? So we have incredibly strong, open, and friendly relationships with all of our State and Federal partners, as well as our local law enforcement.”

Across the board, Chiefs interviewed for this research study all agreed that fostering and maintaining positive working relationships with neighboring jurisdictions is a best practice to elicit the most positive possible outcome. As referenced earlier, targeted acts of violence can occur anywhere at any time and those with criminal intent do not adhere to jurisdictional boundaries. Having established and prearranged points of contact and regular meetings with key stakeholders provided the most successful outcomes.

Leveraging Mental Health Interventions. Leveraging mental health interventions for persons of concern exhibiting signs of mental illness emerged routinely in the interviews. Some Chiefs interviewed spoke of robust processes involving clinical staff embedded within their agencies. Others, with fewer resources, offered solutions through public and private partnerships to provide interventions. Collectively, Chiefs recognized the need for mental health support in both the public and private spaces and spoke about the methods they utilized in their respective jurisdictions.

A participating chief referenced their connection to a local private mental health provider to offer clinicians who partner with officers on mental illness-related calls for

service. “We partner with what's called the ‘A’ center, here, the ‘A’ Mental Health Center, and they provide the clinicians. But it's basically one clinician per shift.”

Another chief shared a situation involving a family who needed support for their teenage daughter, who was constantly reported to police with problems related to her substance abuse. The agency was able to assist with her needs and provide her support by leveraging resources within the community. “We had a young adult who was 19 years of age. I believe she was at the time in narcotics use, and mental illnesses that she had verified and been diagnosed with, and the father was calling repetitively. She needed help. She was in a very dangerous relationship. They developed a file on her, and finally, after probably no less than a dozen calls for service and more where they've rescued her, Baker acted or hospitalized her, she got her basic medical care. She's now in inpatient treatment, and we understand to be thriving. So we've had successes like that where we finally walked the family through.”

Finally, one chief shared the experience of their agency as it relates to responses to persons with mental illness. The agency partners police officers and psychological clinical staff under the umbrella of a larger unit that works exclusively with these populations in need. “We have a unit that pairs a sworn officer with a clinician, and the unit is overseen by a sworn captain and a doctor. We have a doctor on our staff and a psychologist, and she oversees the clinicians. Now we do have what we term high utilizers. Those are our repetitive baker acts or mental health services that we're

constantly having to respond out to people's homes and they will develop a case file on them and try to implement services."

Chiefs shared the varied ways they are working within the community to assist individuals with mental health challenges. Agencies with more resources and personnel have clinical staff embedded in their departments, while agencies with fewer resources are leveraging public-private partnerships within their communities to serve this population. In both scenarios, individuals in need are receiving services, and law enforcement has stepped in to be a proactive part of the solution.

Theme 2C: Municipal Police Chiefs Adapt Threat Assessment Practices Based Upon Their Available Resources

While some Chiefs have dedicated threat assessment teams, units, and detectives in place to manage various types of threats, others described having no specific teams in place but instead leveraging internal personnel and neighboring jurisdictions for support for escalating persons of concern. These practices were primarily attributed to limited financial and staffing resources combined with community needs. Many of the Chiefs referenced cases they were able to mitigate by using their specific threat assessment and management processes. Two subthemes emerged from this research.

Defined by Need. Participating Chiefs within this study identified clearly identified processes and plans to manage persons of concern to mitigate ongoing threats to the community. This process included the use of Risk Protection Orders (RPOs) in certain circumstances. As these cases are nuanced and unique, one of the Chiefs

described how the process works in their agency, based on the needs of the person of concern. “They identify them. They deal with that particular call, but then they also, you know, write them up in the sense of they create a file for them. They do follow up with all of them, making sure that they're getting the medication. They're taking their medication. If they have guns and stuff, they certainly note that and deal with that. If you know they're heavily involved with a lot of the risk protection orders that we do with our legal advisor, and we work through those. And we've had great success in identifying and mitigating a lot of those risks before they ever get off the ground.”

Another case cited, from the lens of the chief at one agency, described how Officers identify those members of the community who have had repeat calls for service at the same residence. If mental illness is suspected in these circumstances, the officer can begin the referral process for services. “They have a referral process. That's most of the way that they get their caseload, is that patrol will realize we've been out at this house 3 times in a row. Or we've got this crazy email alleging, you know, aggressive or perceived wrongdoing behavior to the individual, like somebody keeps breaking into my house, but there's no signs of a forced entry, and they're constantly calling the police to report a burglary or something, and we know that there's no one coming through the outlet. Then they see if they can get them services in the home.”

Additional resources from neighboring jurisdictions, such as Sheriff's Offices with existing behavioral response teams or units, were also described as often utilized for specific cases where agency resources are not readily available. “The local sheriff's

office, they do, they have a pretty elaborate behavioral health unit, and we have leaned on them, contacted them, and had them respond out here to incidents that we felt needed that interaction and interjection. They can kind of do an assessment to somebody that we were in contact with, and try to follow them and follow up with them, open up a case on their end, and just, you know, kind of keep an eye on it because we, we think that eventually there, there may be an issue or a problem."

Chiefs have clearly identified processes for response to persons of concern based on the need and circumstances. In some cases, the Chiefs interviewed have relied on neighboring resources for additional support.

Defined by Resources. An agency chief described how officers and clinicians are paired to respond to calls for service for people having mental health episodes. Their response offers not only a pair of professionals but also allows for a telehealth call with a doctor from a neighboring mental health facility to assist with the interview and assessment in real time. "So basically, they supply 3 clinicians. It may be from a pool of 6 or 8 clinicians, but they provide primarily, you know, one or 2 that are familiar with what they do and how they do it, and they ride with our officers. During the call, you know, for the calls, they have direct access through some soft technology that we use. They can kind of pipe in to an actual psychologist, a doctor, at the A center. So the doctor can actually do the Baker act and save, you know, officers from having to do that as well."

Limited resources in some jurisdictions were challenging for some Chiefs, but additional resources were provided by neighboring jurisdictions with more resources, according to a participating chief. “I know other agencies have the behavioral health unit. Unfortunately, we do not have that. We don't have the manpower or the resources to have that. So we are relying on other agencies to kind of help us out.”

Available resources are challenging for some agencies and more readily available for others. This is largely based on agency size. However, Chiefs described alternative measures they can take through partnerships and neighboring resources to achieve success.

Theme 2D: Municipal Police Chiefs Have a Plan to Prevent and Respond to Targeted Acts of Violence

Chiefs offered varied responses regarding prevention and response efforts to targeted acts of violence. However, many of the Chiefs stated that they trained and prepared for these types of events. Many stated they had existing clear policies and robust training, while others stated they had procedures in place for an all-officer response. Some Chiefs stated that their plans involved calling out a larger neighboring jurisdiction for support, but that they were working through enhancing training, policy, and process refinements to enhance their existing policies and procedures. Consistently, Chiefs with schools inside their jurisdictions offered clearly delineated responses to threats of active threat events in schools within their jurisdiction. Two subthemes emerged from this data.

Differing Policies. A chief identified his active assailant plan as an operational plan as they work toward a more clearly defined policy to be implemented. In this circumstance, the Chief stated their response model includes an all-officer response. “We have put together a certain operating plan, if you will, of response until we can finalize all of those policies. Then, the operational response clearly states any active shooter involvement. We all respond.”

Another chief described having a specific policy related to the management of threats and threat assessments. In this agency, detectives are assigned to the case for an immediate response. However, they are looking to make adjustments and refinements to their existing policy. “And then, when it comes to just the threat assessments, obviously the detectives that are involved in follow up and going out and deploying and responding to… They do have training. They do have training and experience in that aspect. We also have a threat assessment policy and procedures. We do have them in place, but we're in the process right now of looking at those and seeing what changes need to be done, and what tweaks need to be made.”

Another chief cited how important it is to have clearly identified processes for the management of threats in modern-day policing due to the frequency of threats received. “I really do. I think it's vital. You have to have threat assessment personnel. You have to have threat, assessment standards and procedures, rules and regulations, and policy in place, because, you know…it is a very, very different time in policing. The threats are becoming more frequent.”

A specific incident that highlighted how their team worked to identify, assess, manage, and mitigate a threat occurred in one example provided by a participating chief: “They had an agenda that they were going to go on a spree and kill people, and do some really, really bad things. And as a result of our response to that incident, the planned homicides… they were unable to uncover this. Their master plan was a pretty elaborate master plan to do a lot of harm to a lot of people.”

Policies regarding school-based responses, lockdowns, and immediate response and entry into schools were a consistent theme cited by multiple police Chiefs in their interviews, “So I would say, we do have a good robust plan down here for something similar. We've had a couple of near misses, I would say, or close calls we did have. We have active shooter threats from time to time at our high school. We just had one in the last few months that made the news, but the deployment was flawless. Officers immediately, the SROs who were in schools, they immediately started moving through, ensuring that the lockdown was complete.”

Policies and procedures for responding to threats in real time vary based on jurisdiction and resources. All the Chiefs interviewed identified a plan; however, those plans were different, under review, or being actively developed.

Consistency with Schools in Their Communities. Interviews with the Chiefs consistently revealed how school-based threats were routinely met with the establishment and deployment of multidisciplinary teams, continuity of practices, safety planning, shared resources, and current policies and procedures in place. Police agencies within this

research differed only in types of schools (public, private, and charter), grade levels in each jurisdiction (elementary, middle, high, and higher education), the total quantity of schools in each jurisdiction, and who was ultimately responsible for policing them. All the Chiefs interviewed who had identified schools within their jurisdiction were able to offer some insight into how school-based threats are handled within their own jurisdictions.

Communication among school staff and assigned SROs is critical to the management and monitoring of identified students with ongoing behavioral issues. “And then, you know, they know their kids. I guess I should say that they kind of follow them. So when they get expelled from our school, there's a school in a nearby town that seems to take all the ones that get expelled. And I guess it's like an alternative school, and they'll go and let the guy know there, hey, this kid brought a gun to school, and this is why he's coming to your school.”

In another case, a chief shared a story of a student who threatened to commit a school shooting. In this circumstance, a thorough investigation thwarted the event from occurring. “Yeah, we did. We had a person who was threatening to shoot up a school or blow up the school. In an actually, a very affluent area, our Criminal Intelligence Bureau did a very thorough investigation, and was able to intercept enough information and correspondence to do a search on a person's house, found the guns and the bombs, and I did, in fact, arrest that person, find a manifesto and plans. That person was federally prosecuted, and it is in prison.”

Another identified best practice consisted of training school resource officers with specific skills in investigations to assist with school-based threats, as cited by another chief: “We actually implemented a program where we trained our SROs to become detectives so that they could do those minor cases. You know, because some of them are just. They're dead to rights, like what's occurring, and they don't need to wait on a detective, because they have all the information. That's maybe a matter of taking one statement and filing the case. So we have 11 SROs. And now they've all been converted to detectives to handle those types of minor cases as well.”

Annual multi-agency trainings were conducted within many of the jurisdictions of the Chiefs interviewed. A specific example of those types of training was highlighted by another participating chief, “We do participate annually in exercises dedicated to this from a school standpoint. Our sheriff's office will do a multi-agency event. We will attend that event, and they'll pick a school to go to. Then, we'll be, you know, part of that and at different levels. The you know, the actual hands on operational level, where you're out sweating and being the ones you know, running through the drills to, you know, be in more back reserve command post operating and operating from the command level, so that we get the full scope of what that an experience like that would look like.”

Chiefs in municipal environments are consistently training and preparing for active assailant incidents in the schools across the state. They are also participating in threat assessments through SROs assigned at the schools. Among all the Chiefs

interviewed in this study who had schools in their jurisdiction, this remained a consistent theme.

Theme 2E: Municipal Police Chiefs Leverage Resources and Partnerships to Manage and Monitor Identified Individuals

All the Chiefs interviewed consistently reported on the importance and significance of maintaining strong working relationships through active and frequent communication with their neighboring jurisdictions. Many spoke of the benefit of incorporating public and private partners into these frequent meetings to communicate and share information, as bringing in additional layers served as a force multiplier in intelligence among the law enforcement community. Two subthemes emerged from this data.

Consistent, Good Communication Among Jurisdictions. Good communication was a recurring theme throughout this study. Chiefs identified communication among jurisdictions as a critical piece of achieving successful outcomes in the management of threats. Many stated which avenues and methods they used to communicate with other jurisdictions, including regularly scheduled meetings and information sharing through fusion centers.

One chief shared his experience about the importance of communication before the critical incident takes place. “I’m a firm believer that everything we do is about relationships. And so you have to build those good, strong, positive relationships before

incidents like this happen? So we have incredibly strong, open, and friendly relationships with all of our State and Federal partners, as well as our local law enforcement."

Jurisdictional boundaries are not known to criminals; hence, there is a need for shared information within jurisdictions, as recognized by this participating chief. "I think the one thing I would add, and it came to my mind when I was just saying the last answer, is you know, there are no fences around our cities and stuff. So I think things like this happen when someone really stands out as a being a potential future threat. I think the communication with surrounding agencies is critical."

Large regularly scheduled meetings for collaboration, deconfliction, and information sharing exist with partnerships represented from the local, state, and federal levels in one of the jurisdictions identified within this study. This level of communication is a best practice in the mitigation of threats in communities. "The communication level is just uncanny, and we not only have our law enforcement groups at the higher end of the agencies, but at all levels of detectives, and we have, generally have over a hundred members that attend these meetings. And it's basically all the law enforcement agencies, their command staff, individuals, as well as Federal agencies, Secret Service, FBI, DEA, ATF, and we discuss what's going on in our communities, as well as any potential threats that may be out there. Even the Coast Guard and other federal agencies attend these meetings. So there's a great level of communication that goes on."

Shared citizens can also erupt into persons of concern in communities. Sharing information through active communication can aid in intervention strategies and

mitigation of criminal behaviors before they have the opportunity to be realized, as identified by another chief interviewed, “Because, as you know, something could be happening in a city next to you with this person where they were FIR (Field Interview Report), or maybe, the detectives know something that somebody else doesn't know. But I think the communication piece with threat management is definitely important with your surrounding agencies.”

Chiefs agree that shared communication among jurisdictions is critical to successful outcomes when identifying, managing, and monitoring persons of concern within communities.

Solid Relationships with Partners. Relationships among law enforcement agencies, schools, businesses, public and private partnerships, and the community were also a recurring theme within this study. Chiefs recognize that agencies are always better when paired together with others in crime prevention. They also consistently recognized that building these relationships requires consistent communication and intentional networking. The scene of the incident is never the best place to exchange business cards for the first time. Instead, relationships should be fostered, long-established, and nurtured over time.

A chief cited trust, legitimacy, and transparency as key factors in modern-day policing that aid in reporting criminal behavior to authorities, “But you know, trust, legitimacy, and transparency are probably one of the first three that are on there for 21st-century policing. There's policy, development, community oversight, mental health, and

wellness. They're all in there. But for the most part, if your community trusts you and they trust you with information, we can actually we can get a lot of information from our community."

One chief expressed the importance of strong relationships between clinical staff and law enforcement in preventing crime and violence. "I think in my experience, sadly, a lot of the cases that would fall under the umbrella of a BTAM (Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management) often have to deal with mental health issues, or those folks suffering from acute mental health issues, and illnesses. And so we have co-responder teams here. Actually, we have a co-responder unit that consists of currently four officers and four mental health clinicians that ride together, and, as you can imagine, their sole purpose is to deal with those acute cases of mental health calls follow, ups all with the intent of better serving our community right to make sure that people are being Baker acted when need be referred to other resources."

Another chief discussed how their agency started a co-responder model to manage threat cases, again highlighting the importance of public and private partnerships to thwart incidents. In this case, officers responded to manage a mental health situation that escalated quickly to violence. "It's so frequent that we started a co-responder model. We're trying to hire a clinician currently, that's going to ride with a police officer every day as their only assignment, because it is just, it's absolutely, very frequent as soon as yesterday. Somebody came home to their Airbnb, and there was a guy in the Airbnb, and the guy would not surrender. So, Swat had to be called out, and it just turned out that the

guy obviously has some mental illness over the weekend. We had someone who was schizophrenic and obviously on some type of synthetic drug, and he was attacking people. An officer had to use a taser on him."

Chiefs consistently recognized the need for positive, strong, established relationships among key stakeholders to manage threats in their community. Many cited specific examples of how those relationships have been instrumental in preventing crime and thwarting targeted acts of violence.

Summary

A total of 15 Municipal Chiefs from various jurisdictions throughout the State of Florida participated in qualitative interviews to answer two research questions related to threat assessment. After careful consideration of coding their responses, five themes and 13 subthemes emerged from Research Question 1, and 5 themes and 10 subthemes emerged from Research Question 2. The following themes and subthemes were recorded and analyzed within this chapter, presented here in Table 3.

Table 3

Themes and Subthemes

Themes	Subthemes
Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of law enforcement executives, specifically police Chiefs, of threat assessment practices?	
Theme 1A: Police Chiefs Have Varied Definitions of Threat Assessment	Threat Assessment is Defined as Situational Awareness
	Threat Assessment Defined as Response to Violence
	Varied Understanding of the Pathway to Violence
Theme 1B	Emergent Threat
	Evolution of Policing
Theme 1C	Proactivity
	Intelligence Led
	Across Jurisdiction
Theme 1D	New Management
	New Monitoring
Theme 1E	Based Upon Jurisdiction
	Based Upon Resources
	Based Upon Community Characteristics
Research Question 2 - What are their views on the adoption of daily police practices to prevent targeted acts of violence in municipal settings in Florida?	
Theme 2A	Varied Upon Importance Chief Places Upon Prevention
	Varied Upon Philosophical Understanding of Threat Assessment
Theme 2B	Partnerships are Proactive
	Leveraging Mental Health Interventions
Theme 2C	Defined by Need
	Defined by Resources
Theme 2D	Differing Policies
	Consistency with Schools in Their Communities
Theme 2E	Consistent, Good Communication Among Jurisdictions
	Solid Relationships with Partners
Note: 10 total themes.	

The interpretation of these findings is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Targeted acts of violence are a constant threat present anywhere people frequent, and typically begin and end in minutes. The general problem is that while law enforcement nationwide is aware of the dangers of targeted acts of violence, policing is often reactionary, not fully adopting the preventative benefits offered by threat assessment and management practices, particularly in municipal settings. The specific problem is that without the buy-in of the municipal police chiefs, threat assessment practices aimed at preventing targeted acts of violence are unlikely to be adopted by municipal police departments. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how threat assessment practices have been beneficial in preventing acts of targeted violence and how police chiefs perceive these practices in municipal settings in Florida. I answered the following research questions.

RQ1: What are the perceptions of law enforcement executives, specifically, police chiefs or executive level designees, of threat assessment practices?

RQ2: What are their views on the adoption of daily police practices to prevent targeted acts of violence in municipal settings in Florida?

Interpretation of the Findings

In the following sections, I will interpret the findings. These include two major themes and 10 subthemes.

Theme 1A: Police Chiefs Have Varied Definitions of Threat Assessment

The first theme discovered in the analysis was: Police chiefs have varied definitions of threat assessment. The literature presents a fairly consistent definition of threat assessment. According to the Department of Homeland Security (2021), threat assessment is defined as a collection of proactive practices designed toward prevention through identification, assessment, and management of threatening or concerning behaviors before a violent act has occurred. A similar definition from the Association of Threat Assessment Professionals (n.d.) states that threat assessment is a fact-based method of assessment and investigation that focuses on thought patterns and behaviors of a person to determine to what extent they are moving toward an attack on a specific target. According to Bergkamp et al. (2022), the primary focus of threat assessment processes is to identify the level of risk and threat imminence posed by a person of concern.

Unlike the literature, police chiefs had varied definitions of threat assessment. For example, chiefs identified threat assessment as situational awareness, citing experiences such as high-risk encounters or large-scale events, and believed that threat assessment was identifying immediate and emergent threats on the scene of an incident in real time. One chief referenced his experience as a SWAT team member and discussed using threat assessment in this context to determine risk and safety before making entry into a residence.

Additionally, police chiefs defined threat assessment as a response to violence. Chiefs cited their personal experiences on incidents where, through their immediate response to incidents of violence that had just occurred or were happening in real time, they were able to thwart additional violence from occurring. This perception of the definition of threat assessment is likely due to the understanding of, and methods used toward, the prevention of risk, danger, and officer safety, versus threat assessment from the lens of evaluating behaviors in people of concern prior to a critical incident. Threat assessment, as defined in the literature, is a new form of prevention that has not been frequently used in traditional policing environments. Situational awareness is foundational to law enforcement because officer safety is richly ingrained into the psyche of police officers from the very beginning of their careers.

Lastly, police chiefs had varied understandings of the pathway to violence. According to the literature, the pathway to violence model, developed by Calhoun and Weston (2003), states that individuals who commit targeted acts of violence follow a recognizable pathway to violence. This six-stage process begins with a grievance (real or perceived) held by the perpetrator, stemming from some sense of humiliation, anger, blame, or sense of loss. Subsequent stages up the pathway include violent ideation, research and planning the attack, pre-attack preparation, probing and breaches, and lastly the final attack (Calhoun & Weston, 2003; Florida Department of Law Enforcement, n.d.; Hope, 2018; Okada et al,2020). Many of the chiefs could effectively articulate the pathway to violent behaviors, while others had never heard of the term. This suggests that

understanding pathway behaviors that lead to assessment, management, monitoring, and ultimately interruption of this trajectory behavior, as well as mitigation of people of concern presenting on the pathway, may not be commonly known among all municipal law enforcement agencies.

Researchers should consider additional methods to reach law enforcement officers and executives with information about threat assessment from the behavioral identification and mitigation perspective to educate them on these practices. Practitioners could benefit from these teachings by learning new and progressive ways to manage people of concern in communities before they ever get the opportunity to commit a targeted act of violence.

Theme 1B: Municipal Police Chiefs Perceive the Importance of Threat Assessment

The second theme identified through the research analysis was: Municipal police chiefs perceive the importance of threat assessment. The literature is consistent with police chiefs' perceptions of the importance of threat assessment as a significant means of prevention. According to Jones and Gray (2020), threat assessment is recognized by law enforcement agencies as a research-based, proactive solution to prevent targeted acts of violence and mass attacks. The future of law enforcement should include the use of threat management, philosophically and contextually, leveraging the professional analysis of the trained law enforcement officer on a multidisciplinary team to provide insight into the investigative understanding of the criminal mind while partnering with other trained professionals to identify trajectory behaviors on the pathway to violence (Jones & Gray,

2020). Threat management efforts are necessary in multiple investigative areas, including domestic violence, stalking, school violence, dignitary, executive, and celebrity protection, hostage situations, product tampering, and extortion (Bergkamp et al., 2022; Hinman & Cook, 2002). Using effective threat assessment practices to identify, assess, and manage these threats can prevent these acts from occurring (Bohenkamp et al.,2020; Gibson et al.,2020; Hope, 2018).

The chiefs interviewed shared similar perspectives on the degree of importance suggested by the literature. Two additional subthemes emerged from this analysis, including importance as they relate to emergent threats and the evolution of policing.

Chiefs agreed that emergent threats occur in every jurisdiction regardless of size, demographics, area, or community. Also offering that threat assessment is critically important to policing and that standards, processes, policy, and procedures must be in place within their agencies because, from their perspective, threats are increasing in frequency and intensity. They also stated they believe threat assessment and management processes within their police agencies could be improved. Many offered how they were refining processes, adding personnel, and implementing training to ensure their agencies were prepared to mitigate threats in their respective communities.

Secondly, many of the chiefs interviewed spoke about the evolution of policing. The literature is also consistent with their thought processes. According to the research, threat assessment and management is an evolving field of knowledge and expertise in prevention and requires employing a philosophical shift in law enforcement intervention

efforts (American Psychological Association, n.d.; Hinman & Cook, 2002; Ngo, 2019). All the chiefs interviewed had extensive experience (longer than 20 years) in law enforcement and witnessed how policing strategies had changed over time. They viewed threat assessment and management as a new process for traditional law enforcement in a municipal setting, for preventing crime by identifying at-risk or repeat behaviors by individuals and leveraging resources for intervention. Many cited how domestic violence encounters, stalking cases, and repeat calls with mentally ill persons are prevalent in their communities. They viewed threat management as a means of getting ahead of those cases to mitigate the potential for future violence.

Emergent threats and the evolution of policing are very real prospects for police chiefs to consider. Their mindfulness of both was primarily attributed to the ongoing training and communication they receive related to these topics. Chiefs today have more exposure to information related to these topics through online training, networking opportunities, and publications through police executive memberships. Researchers and subject matter experts should consider how best to share information on threat management strategies from the practitioner's perspective. Continuing to share strategies on how best to mitigate people of concern with at-risk or concerning behaviors will aid agencies in applying these principles. Practitioners should work toward training their staff, from the line level, to ensure they have exposure to the conceptual and philosophical understanding of what threat management is, what behaviors of concern to look for, and how best to refer or intervene when presented with these cases.

Theme 1C: Municipal Police Chiefs Have Varied Views on the Effectiveness of Threat Assessment

The third theme from the analysis was: Municipal police chiefs have varied views on the effectiveness of threat assessment. The literature on threat assessment effectiveness states that effective strategies exist for many threatening behaviors, but are as unique in application as the people they are intended to manage. Specifically, information about the subject's motivation, intentions, mental health status, and ability to carry out a threat is critical to developing a threat management plan (Geurts et al., 2018). Interventions developed by threat management teams must be based on the needs of the person of concern and adjusted accordingly based on their effectiveness (Randazzo & Cameron, 2012). The imminence of the threat and the context of the threat take on greater consideration when assessing someone who has only recently expressed interest, for example, during a volatile termination process with a previous employer. These elements must also be included in the threat management plan and safety planning implementation.

Three subthemes were consistently identified through this theme: proactivity, intelligence-led, and across jurisdictions. In the context of how police chiefs perceive effectiveness in threat assessment, many assert that threat assessment is effective, but that it is not a 100% foolproof method of preventing all targeted acts of violence. Many of the chiefs spoke of their proactive efforts through their established threat management teams internal to their agencies with specialized training to manage threats within the community through their intelligence and/or criminal investigations divisions, or their

school resource officers for school-based threats. Many cited leveraging assigned analysts as a critical part of agency effectiveness in threat management, as they conduct workups on identified people of concern, monitor social media, and aid in appropriate responses to mitigate their trajectory behaviors. Several chiefs cited specific examples where these intelligence-led efforts were able to thwart potential attacks in their community.

Many of the chiefs stated that they believed in threat management as an effective means of prevention, and they trained their entire agency on identification and referral to these specialized divisions for follow-up measures. Some chiefs spoke of having limited resources and discussed having little need for threat management, sharing their thoughts on how threat assessment and management in their communities may be effective but not commonly practiced. The size of the agency was not a correlating factor of the perception or the use of threat management strategies however, as chiefs in identified small agencies leveraged outside resources, and community support (such as churches, the state attorney's office, and mental health centers) for additional mitigation strategies for identified persons of concern in their communities. Effectiveness and use were based more on the philosophical understanding and belief of the chief, not the agency size or the amount of resources they could apply to these processes.

Sharing threat management information through routine meetings across jurisdictions was also a best practice among chiefs for enhancing the effectiveness of threat management strategies. Many of the chiefs cited their experiences with

deconfliction and information sharing regarding so-called shared citizens or those individuals of concern who cross jurisdictional boundaries throughout their daily travels.

Many of the chiefs who strongly believed in the effectiveness of threat assessment also shared experiences of targeted acts of violence in their community at some point in their career (not necessarily while they worked for their current agency). This real experience shared by the chiefs gave them a different perspective on threat assessment and its effectiveness. Many shared stories of how these strategies helped thwart potential targeted acts of violence in their communities. Others shared impactful experiences of how targeted acts were committed, and the subsequent forensic analysis of those cases revealed clues that were missed that could have aided in prevention. These experiences were impactful on their perspective and the importance of the implementation of these efforts within their agencies.

Researchers should consider how police chiefs perceive effectiveness in threat management, and how those with personal experiences can aid other leaders in understanding its overall effectiveness based on their experiences. Practitioners should consider sharing information with their colleagues about best practices, sharing anecdotal experiences, and offering support and training to neighboring jurisdictions with limited resources.

Theme 1D: Municipal Police Chiefs See Threat Assessment as New to Municipalities

The fourth theme from the data was: Municipal police chiefs see threat assessment as new to municipalities. Two subthemes were also developed upon further

data review: new management and new monitoring. The research was mixed on this topic. The history of threat assessment dates back to the protection of United States Presidents after the assassination of President McKinley by an aggrieved anarchist in 1901. Threat assessment and threat management have been used for decades to prevent targeted acts of violence while leveraging an intelligence gathering approach to combat this problem (Clemmow et al., 2022). The Los Angeles Police Department created its threat management unit in 1989 after the stalking and murder of a celebrity, Rebecca Shafer, creating a need for law enforcement to involve themselves more intimately in managing persons of concern (Department of Homeland Security, 2024; Gelles et al., 2002). However, modern-day research touts threat management as an evolving field of knowledge and expertise in prevention, requiring a philosophical shift in law enforcement response and intervention (American Psychological Association, n.d.; Hinman & Cook, 2002; Ngo, 2019).

Chiefs tend to agree with the newness of threat management in traditional, municipal policing environments. Many felt that modern-day challenges in policing developed with the advent of social media, online threats, school-based violence, and targeted acts of violence in communities and places where people gather, thus prompting the immediate need for implementation of these processes. Discussions with the Chiefs on this topic led to talk of policing strategies of yesteryear, such as law enforcement responses and follow-ups to only actionable cases (e.g., cases that would require interventions through arrest or mental health detentions). Today's threat assessment and

management prevention models afford law enforcement additional strategies for intervention through mitigation efforts such as leveraging public and private partnerships and support through mental health resources, clergy and churches, other local resources, and safety planning.

Most of the Chiefs also discussed risk protection orders as an effective alternative to mitigate threats. This new Florida State Law affords law enforcement officers another layer of intervention to prevent violence through the safe removal of firearms from the possession of known persons of concern with threatening behaviors and ideation. With the evolution of threat management as an effective means of preventing targeted acts of violence, Chiefs also recognized the need for new management and monitoring to ensure no person of concern slips through the cracks. Chiefs spoke of the opportunity to leverage technology to assist in monitoring behaviors such as monitoring social media, utilizing license plate readers, and other technologies to monitor stalking behaviors. Chiefs also gave specific examples of monitoring police data to alert them to repeated Baker Act interactions, visits to the same residence, domestic violence encounters with the same suspects, stalking related incidents, and incidents involving school threats.

While threat management is a decades-old process for protecting political dignitaries and celebrities, interviews with many of the participating Chiefs suggest it is a new concept to municipal policing in Florida. Law enforcement has traditionally reacted to incidents with actionable enforcement strategies within the scope of their duties to protect the public and preserve the peace. While prevention efforts in law enforcement

are a significant part of protecting and serving, threat assessment is nuanced and unique to each individual of concern, based on their specific behaviors and opportunities for mitigation. Researchers should know that new threat management methods and monitoring of persons of concern are effective in community-level policing. Practitioners should know that existing research supports their efforts and may enhance their ability to garner additional funding to support these efforts.

Theme 1E: Municipal Police Chiefs Do Not See Threat Assessment as One Size Fits All

The fifth and final theme for RQ1 was "municipal Chiefs do not see threat assessment as one size fits all." Three subthemes were identified within this theme: Based on jurisdiction, based on resources, and based on community characteristics.

The research supports this belief. Various agencies and jurisdictions form different threat management priorities based on their jurisdiction, resources, and community characteristics. For example, the research states that the Los Angeles Police Department Threat Management Unit is committed to its threat management work to combat stalking, requiring ongoing focus on local and world events, which shaped their expectations of the resources needed to manage the various threat-related challenges (Meloy & Hoffman, 2021). The Federal Bureau of Investigation reports that their number one priority is to defend the United States from terrorist attacks, requiring their focus to remain on domestic terrorism as it continues to trend upward over the last 25 years

(Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2023). One way in which they both accomplish their mission is through threat assessment practices.

Government agencies, including the Department of Homeland Security, The Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Secret Service (NTAC- National Threat Assessment Center) offer significant teachings to local-level law enforcement on how best to identify and aggressively target these individuals and groups that threaten the safety of communities and schools all over the United States (National Threat Assessment Center, 2018). American Schools have been home to the most tragically memorable incidents of targeted violence and are among the most impactful to public policy and heightened urgency for law enforcement response and threat management (Bergkamp et al.,2022; Hendrix et al., 2022). This represents another area where law enforcement must make special considerations and accommodations related to threat management and special protection efforts for vulnerable populations. The research suggests that depending on the location and the safety priorities, one size of threat management does not fit all.

The participating chief's perceptions aligned with this research. Variations in responses to incidents and investigations were based on factors such as the imminence of threat, available resources, jurisdictional considerations, types of incidents, and community characteristics. For example, Chiefs noted how large-scale events with dignitary protection elements in their jurisdiction impacted their training and response expectations for the agency. Another cited how judges residing within the police

jurisdiction, who sometimes receive threats or stalking incidents, created special considerations for threat management and communication with federal partners. Law enforcement partnerships on threat management elements are critical in both situations. Chiefs spoke about their relationship with schools in their communities, how threat assessment and management remain a priority, and how participating in annual lockdown drills, active assailant trainings, and regular participation in threat assessment teams within the schools is imperative for success. The Chiefs agreed that communication with neighboring jurisdictions was necessary, as those with criminal intent do not recognize jurisdictional boundaries. They also discussed how each specific environment and jurisdiction required unique measures to keep their communities safe.

Mental health facilities located within the jurisdictional boundaries of some of the Chiefs impact their communities in both positive and negative ways. Chiefs report that having a mental health facility within their jurisdiction allows for immediate transport to resources for those suffering from a mental health-related issue. Conversely, facilities release people with concerning behaviors from those same facilities back into the community, regardless of their residency location or homelessness. This often creates ongoing challenges for the local police.

Chiefs recognize threat management as a priority and adjust according to the specific needs in their respective communities. Historical challenges related to targeted acts of violence and missed opportunities to prevent incidents have clearly shaped the way that police Chiefs fortify, train, communicate, plan, collaborate, and prepare.

Researchers need to know that the threat picture varies in each policing environment and requires special considerations based on types of threats, jurisdictional considerations, daily operations, scheduled events, large-scale events, community considerations, and available resources. Practitioners already understand and utilize resources that are made available to them through federal partners, neighboring jurisdictions, and public-private partnerships.

Theme 2A: Municipal Police Chiefs Do Not Agree About What Training Officers Should Receive

The second research question prompted responses that led to the first theme, "Municipal police Chiefs do not agree about what training officers should receive."

The literature offered some insight and some agreement on this theme. Training and preparing police officers on threat assessment and management will enhance safety and security for all (Hinman & Cook, 2002; Jones & Gray, 2020; Muffler, 2020). When speaking about the vast responsibilities of police Chiefs, the International Association of Police Chiefs offered the complexities of being the top cop. Chiefs must develop strategic plans, achieve goals through measurable outcomes, write and enforce policy and procedure, and stay abreast of advancements in technology and techniques to prevent crime and harm (International Association of Police Chiefs, Strategic Planning, 2021). Police leadership models the way for others to follow through clearly identified processes, training, clarity of expectations, management support, consistency, and professionalism (Shjarback, 2022). The Federal Bureau of Investigation discusses

challenges experienced by municipal police forces, including call volume, building relationships with the community, and the need to move quickly from call to call (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2016). When untrained police officers are given information about a person who may potentially commit a crime in the future, their authority and responsibility can become cloudy, often prompting no call to action (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2016; Meloy & Hoffman, 2021). This research suggests that each law enforcement leader has a mountain of responsibility that impacts and influences the officers, the training they receive, and how they respond to the priorities and needs of their respective communities. It also suggests that officers who perceive situations as unactionable (E.g., a case or call that leads to no probable cause for arrest or Baker Act) may prompt no action by an untrained officer.

Chiefs interviewed had various responses to whether and how their officers were trained in threat assessment and threat management. Some Chiefs trained their entire agency from patrol to leadership, including specialty assigned units and school-based officers, on behaviors of concern to look for and how best to report them to the appropriate investigator. Others had trained only those assigned to the specialty units investigating the threats or people of concern. Most of those represented advised their officers had received some form of threat management training, likely offered online or in briefings, but no formal training or processes were identified. Those who had not yet formally trained their staff in threat management shared their desire to make this a training priority upon conclusion of their interview.

Subthemes for this theme varied based on the importance the chief placed on prevention and varied based on their philosophical understanding of threat assessment and the potential for targeted acts of violence in their community. For example, Chiefs who spoke about their agency receiving training and adopting processes on how best to identify and route persons of concern to the appropriate investigator shared a deeper understanding of threat management, consistently sharing experiences where crimes had been thwarted due to their use. Many of the Chiefs interviewed had multiple high-risk encounter experiences, such as exposure to mass casualty incidents and targeted acts of violence in their communities. Chiefs who openly shared these personal/professional experiences seemed to embrace threat management training on a deeper level, further impacting their philosophical understanding of the benefit of training their officers.

Additionally, Chiefs with schools inside their jurisdictions shared their experiences of working on prevention-based training in the schools (response to active shooter drills in their community, training with neighboring jurisdictions on school-based threats, and ongoing training of their SROs on threat assessment through placement on multidisciplinary teams), which impacted their desire to provide advanced training to their specialty units as well. As an aside, it should be noted that every chief interviewed had trained their officers and their agencies on active threat response protocols. Most of the Chiefs identified large-scale exercise training participation and annual training for their officers, especially as it relates to school-based responses. Participation in active

assailant and active threat training came up consistently in each of the interviews conducted.

Chiefs in varying jurisdictions are charged with specific challenges based on their community needs. In this research, exposure to critical incidents, specifically targeted acts of violence within the span of their career, seemingly influenced a chief's desire to provide advanced training in threat management to their officers. Researchers need to understand that threat assessment training in law enforcement agencies may be based on community needs, resources, and the philosophical understanding of threat management. Practitioners need to understand how threat management training is likely beneficial at serving communities regardless of need and resources, as threats that lead to targeted acts of violence can happen anywhere, at any time.

Theme 2B: Municipal Police Chiefs View Communication With Neighboring Jurisdictions, the State, and Federal Law Enforcement Agencies as Essential

The second theme that emerged from this data analysis was “municipal police Chiefs view communication with neighboring jurisdictions, the state, and federal law enforcement agencies as essential.” The literature suggests this also aligns with the perceptions of the Chiefs interviewed. Two subthemes also support this analysis: Partnerships are proactive, and leveraging mental health interventions.

Experienced threat managers recognize the need for ongoing communication and collaboration with stakeholders, ongoing training for community members, target hardening, threat assessments, risk assessments, lockdown drills, community engagement

through messaging, safety planning and publicly accessible mechanisms for reporting with assigned personnel to respond to these reports in real time (Clarke & Eck, n.d.; Silva, 2021). Having established communication and partnerships with neighboring jurisdictions and stakeholders who can contribute valuable information to the overall assessment, offers valuable solutions to the management of people of concern. Threat management teams involve multiple agencies and systems to investigate and manage persons of concern and work to mitigate grievances, identify risk factors and protective factors and interview to solve problems including strategies that increase the safety to a specific target (Calhoun & Weston, 2015; Cornell & Heilbrun,2016; Fein et al.,1995; Florida Department of Law Enforcement, n.d.; National Threat Assessment Center, 2018).

Leveraging mental health resources requires collaboration and cooperation through public and private partnerships. Mental illness does not discriminate among communities, and typically, police agencies are the first to answer the call when a person is having a mental health crisis. Law enforcement officers respond and often serve as a primary connection to psychiatric services (Olivero, 1990; McTackett & Thomas, 2017; Schriver, 2021). Having established and trained partners within the community proves to be effective when law enforcement officers are faced with people of concern having a mental health crisis.

The Chiefs' perspectives align with the research. Throughout the interviews, the participating Chiefs spoke about the importance of proactively fostering, developing, and

maintaining communication with neighboring jurisdictions, state and federal law enforcement partners, schools, and local public and private partnerships that offer resources and services. These relationships are nurtured with frequent communication, regular meetings, and clearly defined processes with stakeholders' understanding, jurisdictional considerations, and the benefits of sharing information. Chiefs also spoke about regularly scheduled meetings involving their state attorney, sheriffs' offices, and federal agencies, and ensuring their relationships are well established long before the scene of the crisis. The Chiefs interviewed spoke about their relationships with neighboring jurisdictions, connections to their leadership, and their subordinates' parallel connections to the patrol level. Many also offered that their agency participates in the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force, providing them with an immediate federal nexus when criminal considerations rise to that level.

Leveraging mental health services as intervention strategies to intervene, manage, and monitor people of concern was also a common strategy employed by most of the Chiefs interviewed. Chiefs from larger agencies had ample resources with robust processes and clinical staff embedded within their police organizational structure. Others with fewer resources leveraged public and private partnerships from the community, mental health centers, schools, the state attorney, and the churches in their community. Size seemingly had no impact on an agency's ability to meet the mental health needs of its community.

Historically, law enforcement has recognized the need for partnerships to successfully prevent and suppress crime in communities. Chiefs recognize the need to seek ongoing communication and relationship building proactively, understanding that they will always be more effective when working together.

Researchers should understand how leveraging public and private partnerships contributes to threat management and the prevention of targeted acts of violence. Practitioners should understand how working in lock step with mental health resources aids in the mitigation of at-risk behaviors in persons of concern.

Theme 2C: Municipal Police Chiefs Adapt Threat Assessment Practices Based Upon Their Available Resources

The third theme for Research Question 2 was identified as "municipal police Chiefs adopt threat assessment practices based upon their available resources."

The identified subthemes for this theme were defined by need and by resources. The literature supports some of the perspectives provided by the Chiefs, but offers a contradiction to their perspective related to the sharing or siloing of information. For example, while some chiefs have dedicated threat assessment teams, units, and detectives assigned to manage people of concern within their jurisdiction, others shared that they do not have specifically trained and dedicated employees within their agency. Those who advised that they do not have dedicated personnel for this work expressed their lack of resources and lack of need to dedicate to this effort. They did, however, share that they

rely on neighboring jurisdictions, such as their County, State, and Federal law enforcement partners, to assist as occasional cases of persons of concern arise.

Chiefs may be unaware of free threat management resources and training made available through the Florida Department of Law Enforcement. In recent years, Florida's Governor Ron DeSantis asserted his vision for Florida to become a national leader in intelligence-led policing by establishing a comprehensive threat assessment strategy. At his direction, then serving FDLE Commissioner Rick Swearingen, led a team that established a threat analysis strategy, ensuring that every government entity cooperates through coordinated efforts in the identification and intervention of persons of concern determined to be on the pathway to violence (States News Service, 2019). The Florida Department of Law Enforcement subsequently created (BTAM) Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management training and processes offered to all law enforcement agencies within the State (Florida Department of Law Enforcement, n.d.). These teams apply relevant scientific research and structured professional judgment tools and strategies for operational guidance and implementation in law enforcement to identify, assess, and manage persons of concern to prevent targeted acts of violence (Florida Department of Law Enforcement, n.d.). According to the Governor's plan, Florida will lead a national prevention effort through established threat assessment techniques delivered via the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, the Criminal Justice Standards and Training Commission, and the Regional Domestic Security Task Force to aid law enforcement agencies in implementing their threat assessment strategies (States News

Service, 2019). Florida is primed to set the benchmark for leveraging threat management as a true prevention strategy.

According to the literature, threat management processes are commonly underutilized in policing environments due to siloing valuable information relevant to the threat assessment process by schools, mental health professionals, the courts, other agencies, and friends and family members of the person of concern (Schildkraut et al., 2022).

Chiefs shared their own perspectives about how threat assessment and threat management strategies are being implemented and shared throughout communities to prevent targeted acts of violence. Many of the Chiefs spoke of their ongoing communication with neighboring jurisdictions, additional support received and offered from the same, and how these efforts are working to thwart crimes before they have the opportunity to occur. While the existing research suggests that siloing often occurs relative to threat management, the Chiefs reported that communication is alive, well, and ongoing.

Based on this study, researchers need to know that threat assessment and threat management practices are being utilized in law enforcement agencies to prevent targeted acts of violence in communities in Florida through specialized units who receive specific training, shared resources through county and state agencies who receive specialized training, and through federal partnerships with advanced and specialized training. Practitioners need to know that free resources exist to support these efforts and that threat

management toward the prevention of targeted acts of violence remains a priority in the State of Florida.

Theme 2D: Municipal Police Chiefs Have a Plan to Prevent and Respond to Targeted Acts of Violence

The fourth theme identified from this research is "Municipal Chiefs have a plan to prevent and respond to targeted acts of violence." This theme provided information for two subthemes: Differing policies and defined by resources.

Researchers address targeted acts of violence from both the risk management stage prior to the opportunity for the targeted act and the subsequent response if the targeted act occurs. Risk management to prevent targeted acts of violence requires multiple methods to reduce the opportunity for perpetrators to escalate up the pathway to violence. These efforts are accomplished in various ways and are not singularly based. Prevention methods must match the imminence of the behaviors of concern and the expedience of the intervention need (Meloy et al.,2012). The gathering of information toward the critical analysis of what was communicated and how, the corroboration of facts, the individual's behavior, and the progression of behaviors demonstrated by the accused may be the movement from the development of the idea to action. Intervention is imperative to preventing violence, and strategic case management can make the difference to prevent a tragedy (Okada et al.,2020; Randazzo & Cameron, 2012; Reddy et al., 2001). One study identified how completed mass shootings made up for 17% of incident outcomes of 546 targeted acts of violence cases reviewed; the pre-attack

behaviors of those mass shootings brought to life the important factors that serve as predictors of future violence, requiring swift and strategic intervention (Silva, 2021).

In the State of Florida, through the implementation of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act, laws governing the improvements of school climates by expanding mental health supports for students, reducing gun violence on school campuses, enacting red flag laws, and mandating assigned police officers or armed guardians and threat assessment teams on every single campus have changed the way that Florida manages their persons of concern in schools (Florida Department of Education, 2018).

Chiefs interviewed referenced their personal/ professional experiences in several of the targeted acts of violence that occurred inside the State of Florida, including incidents on school campuses. Their perspectives on those incidents significantly shaped their leadership priorities related to threat management.

Participating Chiefs offered varied responses regarding prevention and response efforts to targeted acts of violence. However, every chief interviewed had a plan and process in place. All the Chiefs interviewed discussed how their agencies had received training in active assailant response. Chiefs with schools inside their jurisdictions shared how they trained at the schools, often with neighboring agencies. Some Chiefs offered that their policies need additional modification and shaping, while others shared their robust processes, assigned special teams, and specifically trained responses. Several Chiefs shared that they have a policy relative to conducting threat assessments, but those

responses were inconsistent among the Chiefs. Policy and procedures and responses to threats occurring in real time varied based on jurisdiction and resources; however, all the Chiefs interviewed in this study had a plan. One consistent theme among the Chiefs interviewed revealed that school-based threats and active assailant procedures were consistent. Interviews with the Chiefs who had schools within their jurisdiction reported that their assigned School Resource Officers were part of the schools' multidisciplinary teams, had received threat assessment and threat management training, and had conducted investigations and safety planning for identified students or persons of concern on campuses. Chiefs shared over multiple interviews how their agencies and their officers were instrumental in providing interventions at their schools that potentially stopped a targeted act of violence. Many of the chiefs spoke of how their agency participated in annual multi-agency trainings at the schools to prepare for responses with neighboring jurisdictions should an active assailant incident occur at the school inside their jurisdictions. This data supports that consistent threat assessment and active assailant response prevention practices are occurring in schools in municipal environments within the State of Florida.

Researchers need to know that consistent threat assessment practices are occurring in schools across the state, regardless of jurisdiction, and municipal police Chiefs are training their officers for active assailant responses in schools. Practitioners need to know that these same strategies, while slightly nuanced and different from schools due to the challenges of not having a ready-to-assemble multidisciplinary threat

management team, could be applied to people of concern outside of the school-based setting and inside their communities.

Theme 2E: Municipal Police Chiefs Leverage Resources and Partnerships to Manage and Monitor Identified Individuals

The final theme for RQ 2 was identified as "municipal Chiefs leverage resources and partnerships to manage and monitor identified individuals." This theme established two subthemes: Consistent, good communication among jurisdictions and solid relationships with partners.

Literature offers support to this research. For example, researchers believe that management of threats in real time to reduce risk and mitigate escalation requires multiple layers of appropriate response (Campbell et al., 2022; Turner & Gelles, 2012). Methods in contemporary threat management, such as violence risk assessment, structured professional judgement, understanding and application of the pathway to violence, situational crime prevention, and participation in multidisciplinary threat management teams, are best practices for strategies employed but require consistent management and monitoring to prevent violent behaviors (Calhoun & Weston, 2003).

According to the Department of Justice, ten golden rules for effective contemporary threat management include recognizing the need for threat management processes, assigning responsibility to case management, providing training, documenting cases well, collaborating with other agencies, using valid threat management strategies intelligently and flexibly, communicating professionally and competently with those

parties impacted and managing cases appropriately (Calhoun & Weston, 2006). This research speaks to the need for ongoing, professional, multi-layered levels of communication among Chiefs toward preventing targeted acts of violence, leveraging threat management strategies.

Chiefs shared their perspectives about the value of solid communication among jurisdictions, identifying ongoing communication as a critical piece of achieving successful outcomes. Chiefs shared the avenues and methods they used to communicate with other jurisdictions, including regularly scheduled meetings and information sharing through fusion centers. Frequently, Chiefs cited how their identified people of concern were also shared citizens to other jurisdictions, to include schools, workplaces, shopping centers, airports, etc., and the sharing of information with neighboring jurisdictions allowed for awareness of concerning behaviors of persons who traveled to various spaces outside their jurisdiction. Some Chiefs offered that regularly scheduled meetings among local, county, state, and federal partners, as well as other stakeholders, such as the state attorney's office, offered tremendous value in threat management cases. Chiefs also offered how their co-responder model aided in managing threat cases, again highlighting the importance and benefits of public and private partnerships to thwart targeted acts of violence.

These solid relationships with partners in public and private spaces, such as law enforcement agencies, schools, businesses, mental health resources, and public and private partnerships, were also a recurring theme within this study. Chiefs recognized that

communication is key among stakeholders and that it all starts with partnerships. Some Chiefs offered that establishing trust within their communities was an equally important element, as citizens who trust the police will be more apt to report information that they perceive as concerning behavior. They also recognized that establishing trust was just the foundation of community reporting. Chiefs identified that training the public on what to report and how to report was critical to the process as well. Chiefs cited specific and varied reporting mechanisms in their communities, providing police employees on the receiving end of the report, as another layer to ensure public safety. Best practices in threat management and the prevention of targeted acts of violence were highlighted by many of the Chiefs interviewed. Chiefs believe that identified processes within police jurisdictions begin with foundational community trust in the police among reporters who are trained on what to look for, followed by identified and advertised reporting mechanisms that the public can access easily that are routed to trained teams ready to receive and respond to these reports, who will then follow up on the assessment and management of the person of concern. Communication, Positive established relationships among stakeholders, and clearly defined processes were key elements defined in this theme.

Researchers need to know that successful threat management requires communication founded on solid relationships among key stakeholders such as law enforcement, public and private businesses, partnerships, and the public.

Practitioners understand the need for these relationships and should continue their work to establish clearly defined processes, train the public on what and how to report, and have trained and designated personnel for next steps in the threat assessment and management process.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations in the study included the sample of Chiefs interviewed. Ideally, I wanted to have a balanced number of small, medium and large agency Chiefs to interview in (5) quadrants from all over the state, broken down by Panhandle, North, Central, West, and South Florida, hypothesizing that the area of the state and the size of the agency may impact study outcomes. As it turned out, garnering equal numbers of participation from Chiefs within those specific parameters (small, medium, and large agencies) was challenging. The Chiefs who participated represented the following demographics within the state: (5) small agencies – less than 50 sworn officers; (2) medium-sized agencies – greater than 50 sworn officers but less than 100 sworn; and (8) large agencies – 100 or greater sworn officers. The participating areas represented from the state included (4) South Florida, (4) Central Florida, (3) West Florida, (2) North Florida, and (2) Panhandle of Florida. Police Chiefs are incredibly busy and tasked with a million and one responsibilities in their role. I was grateful to have 15 participants to aid in the completion of this research. The outcomes revealed rich data that can be used to further develop strong threat management processes with the State of Florida.

Recommendations for Future Research

During the finalization of this study, Florida State University experienced a targeted act of violence inside its campus community, committed by a probable person of concern. In real time, I witnessed how jurisdictions truly practiced what they preached, working together to eliminate the threat, following up to investigate the crimes committed, and attempting to restore the campus community. While this targeted act of violence did not occur in a municipal jurisdiction, the Tallahassee Police Department quickly responded to assist in all the work that needed to be done. Witnessing Florida State University Police Department, Tallahassee Police Department, and Lee County Sheriff's Office work together, with State and Federal partners, prompted the thought regarding additional opportunities for research. Additional research should be conducted on how partnerships within law enforcement agencies and clinical supports have been effective in thwarting threats within communities and how these established relationships among jurisdictions and public and private partnerships prevent targeted acts of violence within communities.

Implications for Change

I am grateful to have conducted this research into this vitally important topic. I remain hopeful that this research will aid law enforcement agencies in understanding the need for threat management training and practices in all communities, regardless of size or jurisdiction, to prevent targeted acts of violence.

Implications for Practice

Opportunities exist for clearly defined training and processes to be developed to educate the public on identifying and reporting concerning behaviors in our communities. Additionally, opportunities exist for law enforcement agencies to have specially trained and prepared personnel dedicated to this work. These combined efforts can aid in keeping our communities safe in the future by potentially preventing the next targeted act of violence. The State of Florida remains a benchmark-setting agency in the nation on threat management, as the support of our Governor and State officials has clearly made threat management a legislative priority. Chiefs of police in municipal environments recognize the importance of these practices and continue to pave the way for the application of these practices to prevent targeted acts of violence in their communities.

Implications for Theory

Based on the theories I encountered and referenced in my literature review, I recognized that Kurt Lewin's Behavioral Equation Theory did not account for human response to intervention and variations in mental health and mental illness. These factors significantly impact the ability to change a person's behavior regardless of the environment. Hence, there is a need for unique mitigation strategies in managing persons of concern.

Implications for Social Change

Trust in the police is a foundational element for reporting concerning behaviors to police. Implications for social change include continued relationship-building within

communities, between the public and the police, to solidify that foundation of trust further. Society, as a whole, should also understand that crime prevention is a community-based concern and that all hands on deck will garner the best outcomes.

Conclusion

Throughout this research process, I have felt so incredibly grateful to learn about the proactive measures leaders in the State of Florida take to prevent and deter targeted acts of violence in our communities. Chiefs interviewed within this study demonstrated tremendous professionalism, expertise, and HEART in their responses and are clearly dedicated to protecting, serving, and preventing crime in their communities. As a Florida native, I could not be prouder or feel safer living in this great state. Researchers have real opportunities to learn from the practices of Florida Police Chiefs for shared strategies toward the prevention of targeted acts of violence and share these efforts with other states in the nation. Practitioners in the law enforcement arena should continue to train and develop their people, and to learn, grow, and participate in threat management strategies as prevention models. Threat management truly is the evolution of policing.

Lastly, as I put the finishing touches on this research study, I found the exploration experience through this research enlightening and encouraging. I hope this research will benefit both the practitioner and the researcher, and that together we can stop the next targeted act of violence long before it happens. Based on these findings, I will present these outcomes to law enforcement leaders in Florida. I also intend to create

a summary white paper of this research to deliver to law enforcement leaders nationwide through police publications.

We are ALWAYS better… together.

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Appendix A: Florida Police Chiefs Association - Communication

Date:

Florida Police Chiefs Association
2636 Mitcham Drive
Tallahassee, Florida 32308

Dear Executive Director,

My name is Robin Griffin-Kitzerow and I currently serve as a Deputy Chief of Police in the State of Florida. I am a member in good standing of the Florida Police Chief's Association, and I am a doctoral candidate in Forensic Psychology through Walden University.

I am writing to request participation from members of the Florida Police Chief's Association as part of my research related to my doctoral program. The area of study within my research is related to threat assessment and management in municipal police departments. Specifically, I am interested in conducting research through interviews of police Chiefs from small, medium, and large police agencies in Florida and will focus on their understanding and relationship with threat management. For the purpose of this study, I have identified small (0-50), medium (51-100) and large (101+) agencies by the number of sworn personnel assigned.

The interview will consist of structured questions and should take no more than one hour via virtual communication or in person. The interview will be recorded, transcribed and coded to identify common themes amongst participants. Upon conclusion of my research, I will send a letter with all the identified themes and conclusions that I have reached based on the findings. I am seeking participation from (15) total municipal police Chiefs from the entire State of Florida as location within the state may impact outcomes. All participants will be provided with an identifier for purposes of organization of the study, however all participants personal and agency identifiers will

remain anonymous within the study. All information gathered will remain under secure protocols as mandated by the University. I've provided the link to the interest survey below for ease in forwarding to the Florida Police Chiefs membership. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to me.

I am looking forward to working with the Florida Police Chiefs Association and the membership to contribute to the existing literature on threat management in municipal policing environments. As a fifth-generation Florida native and a 31-year law enforcement officer, I am eager to continue to contribute to the ongoing safety and security that is provided by our law enforcement leadership in our great state. I am seeking identified participants from the membership no later than ***November 15, 2024.***

Respectfully,

Robin Griffin-Kitzerow
Deputy Chief of Police,
University of Central Florida Police Department
Walden University PhD Candidate
XXX@gmail.com
XXX@waldenu.edu
XXX@ucf.edu
XXX-XXX-XXXX

Appendix B: Survey Invitation

You are invited to share your views for a study titled: Perceptions of Police Executives of Threat Assessment Practices in Municipal Level Policing

- One 60 minute interview that will be audio-recorded (no video recording)
- To protect your privacy, the published study will not share any names or details that identify you

Interviews will take place during January and February.

Volunteers must meet these requirements:

- You are a municipal police chief.
- You hold this title in the State of Florida.
- You are a certified police officer.
- You have been employed in this role for more than 12 months.

To participate, please click the following link:

[link]

You can also contact the researcher directly at XXX@waldenu.edu or XXX-XXX-XXXX

Appendix C: Interest Survey

Thank you for your interest in participating in an interview exploring how threat assessment practices have been beneficial in preventing acts of targeted violence and how police Chiefs perceive these practices in municipal settings in Florida. I am Robin Griffin-Kitzerow and I am a Deputy Chief of Police, and PhD student at Walden University. By participating in this study and engaging in a one-on-one interview you can help fellow law enforcement leaders learn more about the benefits of adopting threat assessment practices and processes within their organization and community.

To participate in this study, you must be able to answer "yes" to the following questions:

1. Are you a municipal police chief (or designated police executive responsible for higher-level policy and process development and implementation)?
2. Do you hold this title in the State of Florida?
3. Are you a certified police officer?
4. Have you been employed in this role for more than 12 months?

To read the informed consent form, agree to participate, and to schedule your interview, please click the button below.

[NEXT]

Appendix D: Qualitative Interview Questions

RQ1: What are the perceptions of law enforcement executives (police Chiefs or executive level designees) of threat assessment practices?

1. How long have you been in law enforcement, and please tell me about your experiences?

2. How long have you been an executive in law enforcement, and in what areas have you led / commanded?

3. Have you ever heard of the term threat assessment, if so what does this term mean to you? Can you explain the pathway to violence?

4. In your community, with what frequency do you have any cases that involved stalking, severely mentally ill, repeat calls for domestic violence or threats with identified victims? Please explain.

5. If you have a designated victim advocate, does he or she share information and intelligence (when there is potential for future harm) with your detectives and vice versa? What does that process look like? If you do not have a victim advocate, do you have any other key assigned personnel that acts as a liaison to victims in your community? Please explain.

RQ2: What are their views on the adoption into daily police practices to prevent targeted acts of violence in municipal settings in Florida?

1. Do you have a designated team for follow up or management on threats and if so who is on your team and what types of calls do they respond to?

2. Have you ever experienced a mass casualty incident or act of targeted violence in your community? (yes or no) If not, do you have a policy and / or plan for response to these types of events? What does that policy say? Have you ever prevented a mass casualty incident or targeted act of violence?

3. Has your agency ever been trained on threat assessment practices? If so, how long is the training and what key elements are present for a law enforcement management and response to these types of cases?

4. Based on the information you have about threat assessment practices; do you believe threat assessment and threat management is an effective means of preventing targeted violence? Why or why not? If you do not have threat assessment practices in place, is there a reason?

5. Thank you for your insight and for taking the time to talk to me today. Do you have any additional comments, thoughts or things you would like to share about your experiences relative to managing threats using a prevention-based approach? Are there any other thoughts you would like to offer?

Appendix E: Pathway to Violence

Levels of pathway behaviors	Movement
Attack	Escalation 
Probing and Breaches	
Pre-Attack Preparation	
Research and Planning the Attack	
Violent Ideation	
Grievance	De-Escalation

Adapted from the Pathway to Workplace and Campus Targeted or Intended Violence by;

F.S. Calhoun and S.W. Weston (2003)