

“Adolescent Homicidal Threat Assessment: Findings of a Newly Developed Instrument”




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The Objectives of this Presentation:

-  Explain the survey findings regarding adolescent homicidal threat assessment
- Explain the survey findings regarding protective factors that prevent adolescent homicide
- Describe how the survey findings can be integrated into practice as an LPC

CONTENT WARNING!!

- The presentation contains non-graphic information about variables associated with adolescents who are at high risk of becoming a school shooter. As a participant, you are allowed to exit the presentation without any consequence or embarrassment if you experience discomfort.

Presenter Background

- Over 25 years of experience conducting evaluations on students who have threatened violence (homicide) against students and/or school personnel (400+ evaluations).
- As a part of these evaluations with the threatening student, Dr. Moore regularly collaborates with school administration and provides intervention plans for risk reduction. Dr. Moore has designed an assessment process that he has and currently uses with teachers and parents (of the student who made a threat) in the 400+ evaluations.
- Forensic experience, provided expert witness testimony in court cases, and is a consultant for a forensic service firm. He has conducted risk/threat/return to service evaluations for Amazon. He has taught assessment in counseling and practicum/internship for more than 15 years, with special focus on homicidal assessment integrated into the courses.
- Held a counseling license (early it was certified professional counselor in TN) since 1986 and currently has the LPC-MHSP (TN) with the approved supervisor endorsement. He has 15 full-time years of teaching experience in counseling programs (2) both of which were CACREP-accredited.

Rationale for Instrument Development: What does the Dog do with the Car after the Dog “Catches” it?



Rationale for Instrument Development (Two Inventories):

- These two inventories were developed for professional usage on adolescents who have made a homicidal threat but have not carried it out (most school shooters had warning signs).
- This research aims to create a theory of adolescent premeditated homicide (how do adolescents become school shooters?).
- School shooters are psychologically different from “garden variety” adolescent killers. Premeditative vs. Reactive. See Marie Randazzo’s research.

One Assessment, Two Inventories

- Risk Inventory, Risk Reduction Inventory
- Risk Inventory: 57 Items
- Risk Reduction Inventory: 23 Items
- Assessment Process (next slide)

Assessment Process

- Teachers: 2-5 complete the Risk Inventory
- Parents: Complete the same Risk Inventory
- Interview Student for 60-75 minutes with parent/s present
- Write 4-6 page integrative report making recommendations to the Disciplinary Hearing Authority (DHA):
- Form more information on the DHA see <https://tsba.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/2022-Student-Discipline-Guide.pdf>

Objective 1: Explain the survey findings regarding adolescent homicidal threat assessment

Findings: Demographics

- Respondents: N=146
(37 did not complete the entire survey for a total of 183)
- Demographics: 81% Female, 18% Male, 1% Non-binary/Not Say
- Age: 44 years old (M)
- Professional Identification: Two largest groups: LPCs and School Counselors. Others include school principals, psychologists, psychiatrists, LCSWs, and LMFTs.
- 4 Major Regions (Midwest, Northeast, South, West): Although not a stratified sample by the US region, all 4 regions are represented with approximately 45% in the southeast region.
- 57 Items (Risk Factors) 23 Items (Risk Reduction)
- Please rate the importance of factors that are important in assessing risk (or reduces risk) once a student makes a homicidal threat.

Findings: Psychometric Properties Risk Inventory (Reliability)

- Rated the importance of factors from “Not Important” to “Extremely Important” (scale 1 to 5)
- Cronbach’s alpha α (Risk)= .96 (very good)
- Max Score: 285
- Mean = 214
 - SD: 29 (1 SD=243/84th %tile, 2 SD 272 98th %tile)
 - Negatively Skewed—Most respondents found most of the items Very Important or Extremely Important

Findings: Psychometric Properties

Validity: Content Validity, Construct Validity--Principal Component Analysis, Item Discrimination

- Content Validity: Respondents treated as “Experts” based upon license and experience assessing homicidality
- Construct Validity
 - Principal Component Analysis (groupings, not in order of importance)
 - **14 Factors (Scales) Found:**
 - Trauma: Psychological, Social, Neuropsychological
 - School Maladjustment
 - Emotional Issues (sad, suicidal, etc.)
 - Emotional Indifference
 - Expressing Hatred
 - Fear by Others
 - Family Dysfunction (parental detachment)

14 Factors (cont.)

- Aggression
- Narcissism
- Violence Interest
- Mental Health Diagnosis
- Gun Access
- Secretive
- Cruelty to Animals

Item Discrimination: Most Important Items

- Tier 1: Strongest Areas (endorsed by nearly all as being very or extremely important, Mean = 4.56) (7 items)
 - Making a Hitlist
 - Cruelty to Animals
 - Gun Access
 - Making Threats on Social Media
 - Drawing images or writing letters of killing someone
 - Having No Remorse
 - Known to Need Help

Item Discrimination: Tier 2 (endorsed by most as being very or extremely important, Mean = 4.2) (11 items)

- Researching bomb-making materials
- Has changed over the past year
- Has a mental health diagnosis
- Emotionally shutdown
- Suicidal
- Making derogatory comments about a specific demographic
- Making comments that they hate people
- Withdrawn from Family
- Family withdrawn from adolescent
- Others have expressed that they are afraid of the adolescent
- Professionals (counselors, etc.) fear that they will do something bad

Objective 2: Explain the survey findings regarding protective factors that prevent adolescent homicide

Findings: Psychometric Properties **Risk Reduction** Inventory (Reliability)

- Rated the importance of factors from “Not Important” to “Extremely Important” (scale 1 to 5)
- Cronbach’s alpha α (Risk)= .91 (very good)
- Max Score: 115
- Mean = 3.7, SD = .44 (converted score)
- Mean = 85, SD = 13.2 (raw score)
 - 1 SD=98.2/84th %tile, 2 SD 114.4 98th %tile)
 - Negatively Skewed—Most respondents found most of the items Important to Extremely Important

Findings: Psychometric Properties

Validity: Content Validity, Construct Validity--Principal Component Analysis, Item Discrimination

- Content Validity: Respondents treated as “Experts” based upon license and experience assessing homicidality
- Construct Validity
 - Principal Component Analysis (groupings, not in order of importance)
 - **6 Factors (Scales) Found:**
 - Prosocial Activities
 - Spiritual/Religious Activities
 - Manners
 - Self-control/Adult connection
 - Peer-Adult Relationships
 - School Performance

Item Discrimination: Most Important Items

- **Tier 1: Mean item of 4 or higher, Very Important to Extremely Important (7 items)**
 - Relationship with Adults
 - Emotional Regulation
 - Taking Responsibility for Self
 - Prosocial Activities
 - Extracurricular Activities
 - Having Vocational Goals
 - Relationship with Parents

Item Discrimination: Most Important Items

Tier 2=Mean item of 3.5-3.9, Important (13 items)

- Problem-solving skills
- Volunteering
- No/few disciplinary problems
- Having a personal competency
- Relates with a cross-section of peers
- Positive relationship with teachers
- Polite toward adults
- Polite toward peers
- Apologizes

Tier 2 cont.

- Active in Youth Group
- Shows leadership skills
- Involved in school sports
- Involved in community sports

Tiers 3 and 4

Tier 3 Mean=3.37, Important (2 items)

- Religious/Spiritual
- Involved in FCA/Bible Club, etc.

Tier 4 Mean=2.53, Somewhat Important (1 item)

- GPA
- Largest Standard Deviations were in the 3 religiously-based items—the distribution was bimodal—respondents either rated them Very Important to Extremely Important or Not Important to Somewhat Important.

Objective 3: Describe how the survey findings can be integrated into practice as an LPC

Disclaimer. The two instruments and the findings should be interpreted and applied cautiously. While results tend to stabilize after 100 samples, the sample size has not reached 300, which would be considered falling in the “good” range for an instrument. Sample sizes in test and inventory development are widely debated with more conservative estimates being five respondents per item (285 for the Risk inventory and 115 for the Risk Reduction Inventory) to 300 per inventory (less focused upon the number of items). Using the 5-item model, the Risk Reduction Inventory has reached the “acceptable range.”

Never rely upon one instrument; rather, combine mental status data, clinical impressions, inventories, observations, and so forth when making clinical decisions.

If you are licensed and have screened someone for homicide (MSE, etc.),
your opinion is needed!




Objective 3 cont.

Q&A

- Although the findings are a bit tentative, what did you glean from the findings?
- Instead of looking for 1 or 2 variables (e.g., trauma, family influences, gender, race, etc.) to identify at-risk youth, is it possible that identification and risk determination is a multivariable, multi-rater process?
- Is it possible to reduce the risk of a student moving from making a threat to carrying it out?
- Which variables are missing and how would you assess it?

Review of Objectives

-  Explain the survey findings regarding adolescent homicidal threat assessment
- Explain the survey findings regarding protective factors that prevent adolescent homicide
- Describe how the survey findings can be integrated into practice as an LPC

Resources and References



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A photograph of four students in a library setting. A young man in a grey t-shirt is smiling and looking towards a woman with glasses who is holding a piece of paper. Another woman is partially visible in the foreground, and a fourth student is in the background. They are gathered around a table with a laptop and books. The background is filled with bookshelves. A semi-transparent blue diagonal bar is overlaid on the left side of the image, and a semi-transparent red horizontal bar is at the bottom.

Thank you for
attending! I hope
something presented
here is meaningful and
applicable to your
work.

Rob Moore