

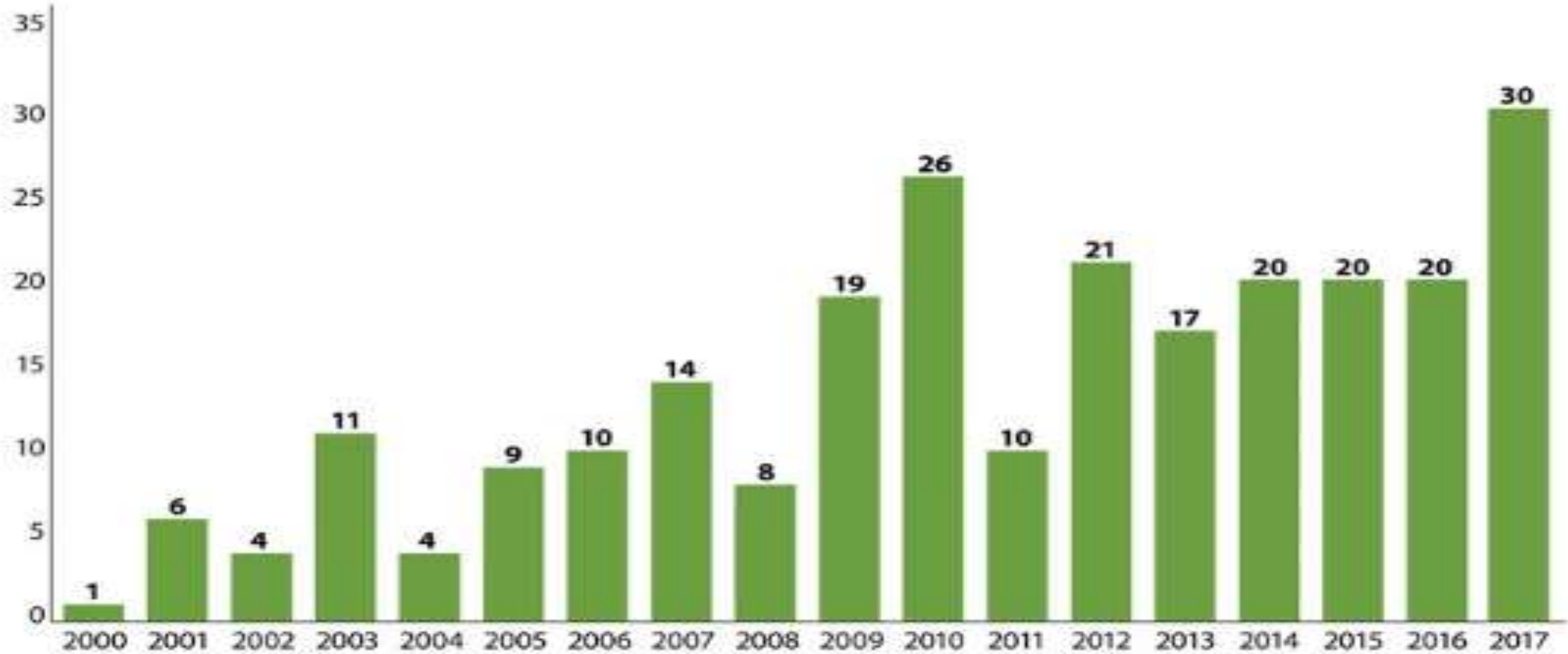
# The Pre-Attack Behaviors of Active Shooters



**SSA ANDRE SIMONS**  
**BEHAVIORAL ANALYSIS UNIT**  
**FBI**

**PHOENIX, AZ**  
**APRIL 26, 2019**

**Quick Look:** 250 Active Shooter Incidents in the United States From 2000 - 2017  
**Incidents Per Year**

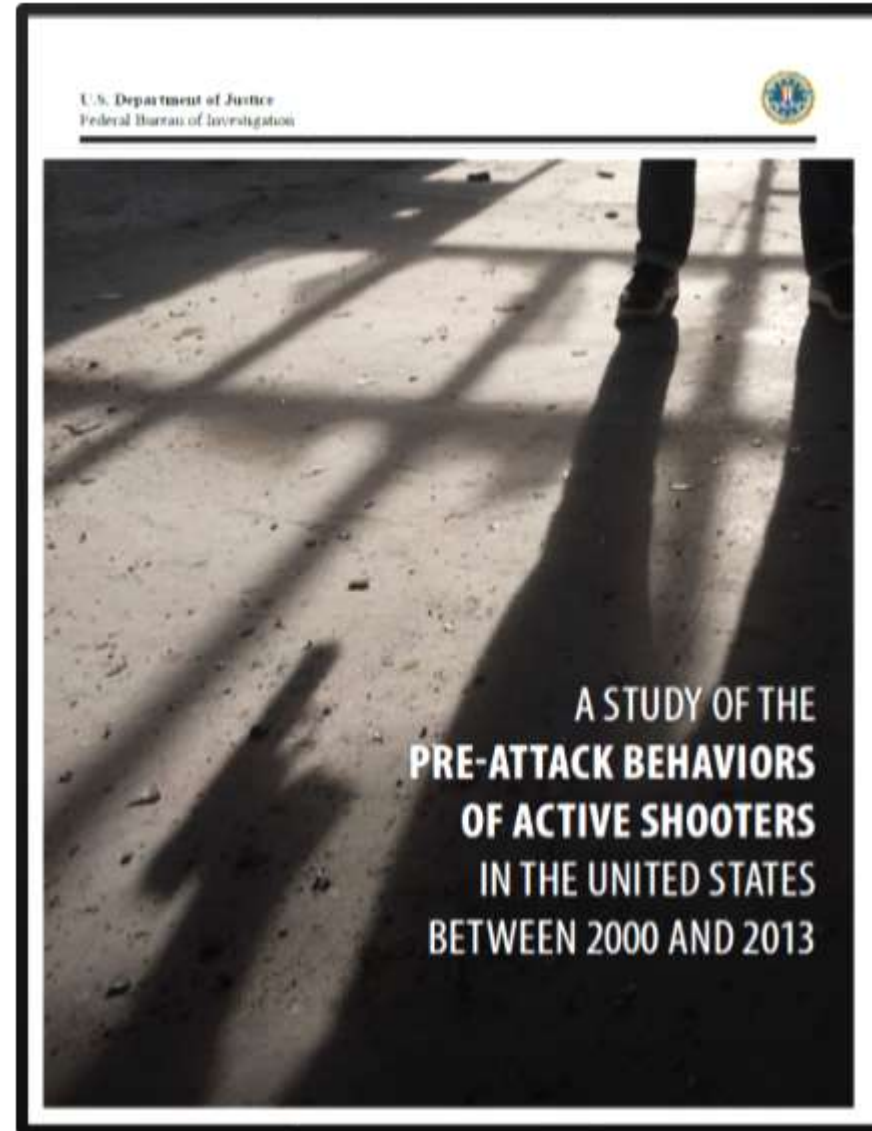


Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2017

2000 – 2009: **8.6/year**

2010 – 2017: **20.5/year**

Available at [FBI.gov](https://www.fbi.gov)



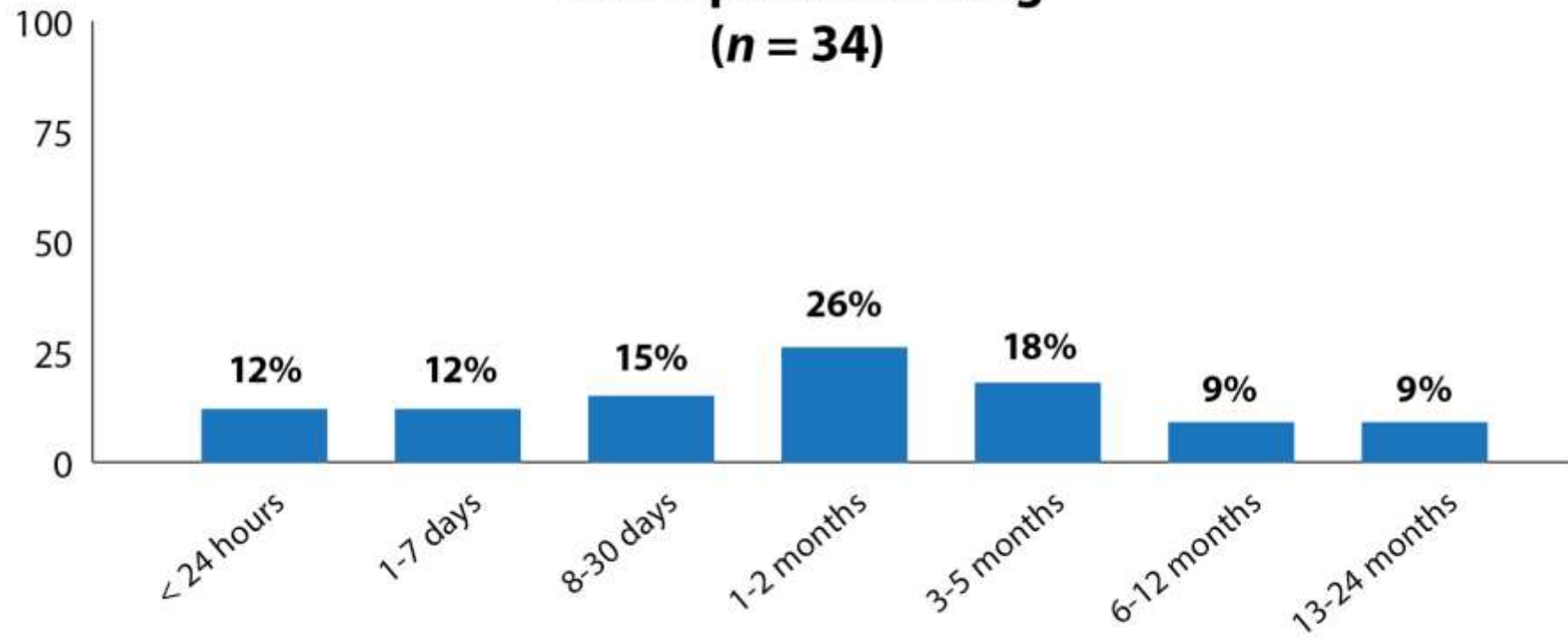
## Key finding



Active shooters take time to plan and prepare for the attack.

FIGURE 6

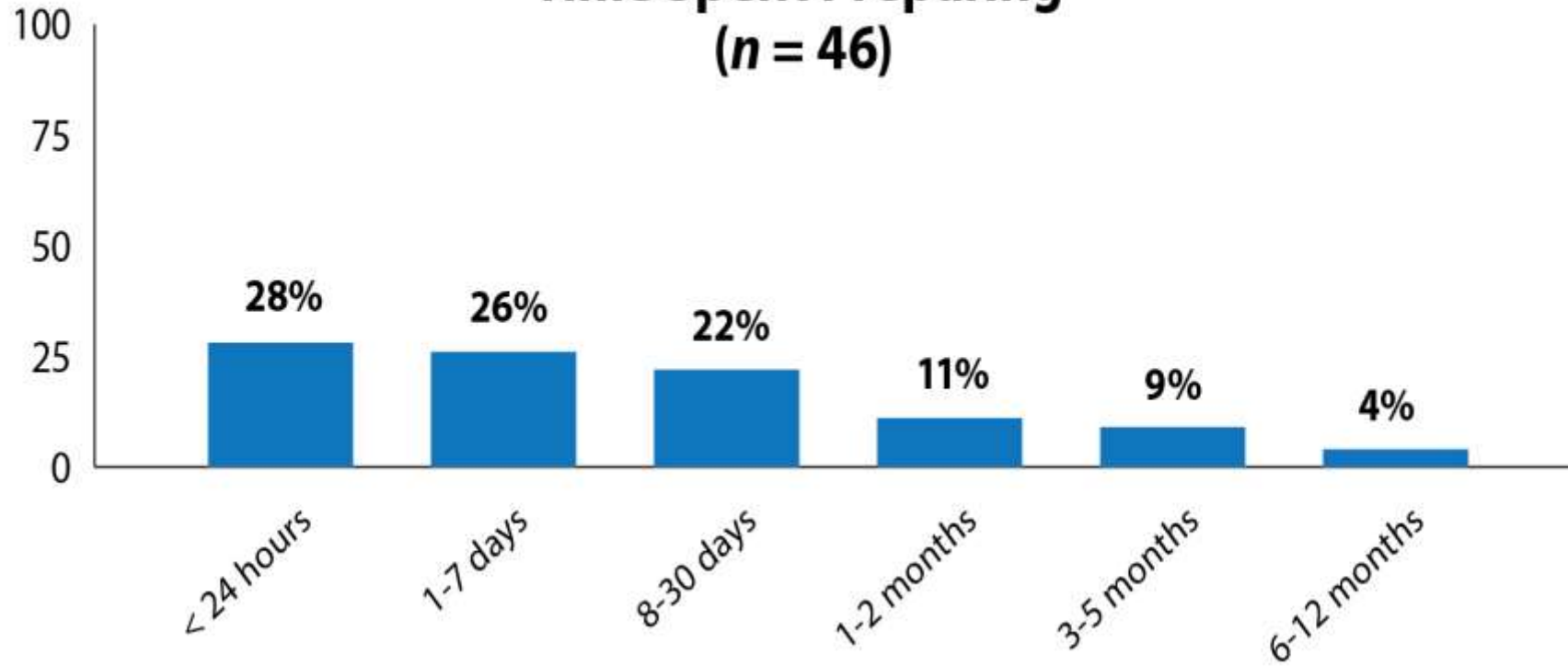
### Time Spent Planning (*n* = 34)



\*Does not sum to 100% due to rounding.

FIGURE 7

### Time Spent Preparing (*n* = 46)



## Key finding



The FBI could only verify that 25% of active shooters in the study had ever been diagnosed with a mental illness.

## Key finding



In the year preceding the attack, active shooters were typically experiencing multiple stressors (avg 3.6).



**TABLE 1: STRESSORS**

<b>Stressors</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
Mental health	39	62
Financial strain	31	49
Job related	22	35
Conflicts with friends/peers	18	29
Marital problems	17	27
Abuse of illicit drugs/alcohol	14	22
Other (e.g. caregiving responsibilities)	14	22
Conflict at school	14	22
Physical injury	13	21
Conflict with parents	11	18
Conflict with other family members	10	16
Sexual stress/frustration	8	13
Criminal problems	7	11
Civil problems	6	10
Death of friend/relative	4	6
None	1	2

## Key finding



On average, each active shooter displayed between *four and five* concerning behaviors over time.

**TABLE 2: CONCERNING BEHAVIORS**

<b>Concerning Behavior</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
Mental health	39	62
Interpersonal interactions	36	57
Leakage	35	56
Quality of thinking or communication	34	54
Work performance*	11	46
School performance**	5	42
Threats/confrontations	22	35
Anger	21	33
Physical aggression	21	33
Risk-taking	13	21
Firearm behavior	13	21
Violent media usage	12	19
Weight/eating	8	13
Drug abuse	8	13
Impulsivity	7	11
Alcohol abuse	6	10
Physical health	6	10
Other (e.g. idolizing criminals)	5	8
Sexual behavior	4	6
Quality of sleep	3	5
Hygiene/appearance	2	3

## Key finding



When concerning behavior was observed, the most common response was:

- communicate directly to the active shooter (83%)
- do nothing (54%)
- advise non-law enforcement authority (51%)
- advise law enforcement (41%)

## Key finding



In those cases where the active shooter's primary grievance could be identified, the most common grievances were related to an adverse interpersonal or employment action against the shooter.

TABLE 4: PRIMARY GRIEVANCE

Primary Grievance	Number	%
Adverse interpersonal action against the shooter	21	33
Adverse employment action against the shooter	10	16
Other (e.g. general hatred of others)	6	10
Adverse governmental action against the shooter	3	5
Adverse academic action against the shooter	2	3
Adverse financial action against the shooter	2	3
Domestic	2	3
Hate crime	2	3
Ideology/extremism	2	3
Unknown	13	21





# A STUDY OF THE PRE-ATTACK BEHAVIORS OF ACTIVE SHOOTERS IN THE UNITED STATES *BETWEEN 2000 AND 2013*

## QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE – FBI BEHAVIORAL ANALYSIS UNIT (BAU)

### REMINDERS

- There is no one “profile” of an active shooter.
- There is no single warning sign, checklist, or algorithm for assessing behaviors that identifies a prospective active shooter.
- While impossible to predict violent behavior, it is possible to prevent some attacks via effective threat assessment and management strategies.

### ACTIVE SHOOTER DEMOGRAPHICS

The **63** active shooters in the sample did not appear to be readily identifiable prior to the attack *based on demographics alone*.

The youngest active shooter was 12 yoa and the oldest was 88 yoa with an average age of **37.8** years.

**94%** were male and only **6%** were female.

Among active shooters age 18 and older, **44%** were employed and **38%** were unemployed.

**24%** had at least some military experience.

**57%** were single at the time of the offense.

**13%** were married; **13%** were divorced; **11%** were partnered but not married; **6%** were separated.

**35%** had adult criminal convictions prior to the event.

**62%** had a history of acting in an abusive, harassing or oppressive

### STRESSORS

Active shooters experienced multiple stressors (with an average of **3.6** separate stressors) in the year prior to the attack. The stressors reported included:

**62%** Mental health

**49%** Financial strain

**35%** Job-related stressors

**29%** Conflict with friends/peers

**27%** Marital problems

**22%** Abuse of illicit drugs/alcohol

**22%** Other (e.g., caregiving responsibilities)

**22%** Conflict at school

# Challenges & Opportunities



- How can we best operationalize and use these findings to inform prevention efforts?
- How do we best educate and empower bystanders, especially parents, family, and teens?
- How do we make prevention a community effort?



# BAU's Behavioral Threat Assessment Center (BTAC)



FBI, ATF, NCIS, USCP  
Accessible via BAU Field Coordinators

