

Crime scene behaviors of rampage shooters: Developing investigative and reconstructive models

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Rampage shooting incidents present sensational acts of multiple homicide that disproportionately engender fear and garner attention in the context of homicides overall. Much like commercial airline accidents vis-a-vis motor vehicle collisions, the human response to these exceedingly rare tragedies is unwarranted, yet it exists. Perhaps the central reason that mass shooting incidents engender such fear and attention is the utter feeling of lack of control that many people experience in response to the news of such tragedies. Each year in the United States, there are an average of 18 incidents of mass murder by firearm with an average of 85 victims killed plus many more wounded. While shocking, these incidents account for less than one percent of all homicides by firearm annually, and the 35-year total from 1976 through 2010 equates to about two-and-a-half months worth of firearms homicides overall. Still, they engender an inordinate level of fear, concern, and political attention. Recent mass shooting incidents have reignited a national debate on gun control, school security, and mental health. For forensic investigators, rampage shootings pose particular challenges associated with the number of casualties, the number of rounds fired, and the likely contamination of the crime scene by victims, bystanders, witnesses, and first responders. Due to the rarity of such events, investigators are unlikely to have any prior experience with the forensic investigation and reconstruction of a rampage shooting, but will be called upon to perform under tremendous political and societal pressure to determine what happened and provide answers quickly. To that end, this research seeks to explore the crime scene behaviours of rampage shooters for the purpose of developing investigative and reconstructive models based on behaviour patterns common to these offenders.

Biography

Michael A. Knox is a forensic science and criminology consultant who specializes in firearms, ballistics, and shooting incident reconstruction. He served 15 years in law enforcement. He holds a B.S. in Mechanical Engineering and an M.S. in Forensic Science and is currently working on a Ph.D. in Criminal Justice. He has taught forensic investigations to officials on four continents and has testified numerous times as an expert witness in state and federal courts in five states.

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