

# Explore link between mass shootings, domestic abuse

**By Eugene M. Hyman**

"Nature is healing" was the mantra in the early lockdown months. It was a small silver lining to be found in COVID-19's dark cloud, a temporary benefit of an unfortunate circumstance. The skies cleared, animal and plant life thrived.

I made peace with the fact that these benefits wouldn't last past the lockdowns' lifting. But when it came to the mass shooting events that seemed to largely fade from sight, I dreaded what a "return to normal" looked like.

Then news came that a gunman killed nine people and himself. The Bay Area's deadliest mass shooting in history, here in Santa Clara County. I was shocked by the tragedy but not by reports that the perpetrator had a known history of domestic violence.

Most mass shooters are domestic abusers. A 2020 analysis by Bloomberg found that almost 60% of mass shooting incidents between 2014 and 2019 involved a perpetrator who was a domestic abuser and that nearly half had a history of abuse.

Some of the deadliest mass shootings in our community were committed by domestic abusers, according to The Mercury News' reporting, and their families account for a significant portion of their victims. In 1986, 28-year-old David Welch was upset over his breakup with his 16-year-old girlfriend, so he killed her and five of her relatives and friends. In 1988, Richard Wade Farley shot and killed seven people, motivated by an obsession with his female colleague who didn't return his advances.

It seems logical to conclude that more should be done to curb domestic abusers in the early stages of violence if we'd like to stop mass shootings. The correlation is too great to be ignored.

In my time overseeing a domestic violence court, serial abusers seemed to exhibit in greater numbers the sort of indifference toward life that would lead them to commit more violent acts.

So what do we do about it? How can we make it so this tragedy is not in vain? What legislative actions and reforms can be undertaken to prevent this sort of thing from happening?

The sad truth is that we can't expect much at this juncture, because we still fail to understand the problem. Maybe we've even actively ignored

it. We need to study that link before we start pitching cure-alls; not all domestic abusers will become mass shooters, nor are all mass shooters domestic abusers. Identifying the strong correlation isn't enough when we don't know why it matters, how we can use it, or what we can do about it.

What we can do is start actually trying to understand. We shouldn't have to rely on domestic violence coalitions or interest groups to fund studies on this subject. There should be teams publicly dedicated to it year round. If the studies can't identify any meaning to the correlation, at least we'll know. If we understand the problem better, we might have the means to do something about it.

And we need to act fast, because it's likely that the pandemic will have only made things worse. Law enforcement agencies polled by NBC News at the outset of the pandemic reported an increase in domestic violence reports. This report struck me as particularly foreboding when I discovered the truth about mass shooting statistics in 2020 - that the numbers hadn't dropped after all, and despite an early dip in April had actually picked up the pace to make it the deadliest year for gun violence in decades.

So domestic violence is likely increasing because of the pandemic, and mass shootings are rising despite it. That silver lining was never there in the first place.

We can't afford to ignore the strong link between domestic abuse and mass shootings. Everything's opening back up, and everyone's eager to make up for lost time. Whatever intervening steps we take must be taken swiftly.

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