3-5-2019

Kids Killing Kids: Mental Illness, Adolescence, and Mass Murder

Levi Cragun
Utah State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/roch

Part of the Sociology Commons

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/roch/105
Introduction
Are rates of mental illness higher in adolescents who commit mass violence compared to other adolescents? Are rates of mental illness higher among adolescents who commit mass murder compared to adults who commit mass murder?

Mass murder has proven to be a phenomenon that we can’t predict. Typical reasons for committing violence may not suffice in instances of mass killing, and many have suggested mental illness as a possible causative factor. Looking at publicly-available data, our research looks for correlation between mass murder and mental illness.

Mental illness is not normally linked to violent behavior in adults. However, the difference in brain development between adolescents and adults could impact that link to violence in mentally ill adolescents.

Preliminary Results
Preliminary findings suggest a high percentage of mentally ill offenders among both adolescent mass murderers, and detained adolescent males in juvenile detention centers.

Separating Dr. Stone’s data by adolescent perpetrator shows 79% of adolescent mass murderers had a mental illness. Colins, et al. shows a similar percentage in detained violent offenders (see Table 1 & Figure 2).

Results & Future Methods
While preliminary findings are inconclusive, we believe that using a different methodology will provide more answers and less ambiguity in results. For future research, we will use a portion of Dr. Michael Stone’s data set of mass murders from 1994 to 2014 from his work Mass Murder, Mental Illness, and Men. Our research will determine if mental illness is present based on statements of an official mental illness diagnosis.

Conclusion
In conclusion, we suggest that more research needs to be completed to find any correlations between mental illness, adolescents, and mass violence. Current literature lacks definitional consistency, along with clear methodology. These findings can help us better understand the mass violence phenomenon, especially in the case of adolescent perpetrators. Understanding these events could help us improve both therapy practices for this demographic and school policies related to violence.

Table 1- Mental Illness in Detained Youth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Property</th>
<th>Violent</th>
<th>Versatile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Any Illness</td>
<td>94.3%</td>
<td>65.4%</td>
<td>82.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent Offenses mean</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance Offenses mean</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>.3</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Colins, et al. studied adolescent property, violent, and versatile offender mental illness rates. High mental illness rates were found in all three categories.