Chapter 4

A Qualitative Approach to Understanding Active Shooters

Sarah E. Daly
St. Vincent College, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter examines biographical information about the shooters in the context of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory. By using a qualitative approach to search for patterns and themes, this study offers a comprehensive evaluation of the presence or absence of many important factors that are found in the reporting of active and mass shooters. Rather than focusing on one major contributing factor, this chapter describes a number of factors, offers descriptive, specific accounts about individual shooters, and organizes a wealth of information from over 1200 news articles, books, and journals into a concise study for future research and evaluation.
INTRODUCTION

This study aims to use Bronfenbrenner’s (1989, 1977) theory of ecological systems to classify, organize, and evaluate the information in a comprehensive, multilevel way that allows for a greater understanding of influences on behavior and development. Inspired and influenced by the works of both Vygotski and Lewin, Bronfenbrenner’s contributions to developmental psychology were important because they examined the interconnected, bidirectional flow of environment and person. The ecological systems model highlights individual-level traits and the ways that they may affect development through interactions with the people and settings on a stage influenced by culture, historical developments, life transitions, and time.

Traditional criminological theory has certainly recognized how individual characteristics and social influences affect criminality by contrasting trait theories and social theories. Trait theories, from as far back as Lombroso’s first edition of Criminal Man in 1876, criminologists sought to explain how biological traits affected and influenced criminality. Since then, the work of the Gluecks (1950), Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990), and others has focused on the development of theories to explain how individual traits can lead to criminal behavior. The focus on individual traits, as opposed to purely social influences, looks much like the resource and demand traits from Bronfenbrenner’s theory. Yet, social theories like Sutherland’s (1933) differential association theory or Akers’ (1994) social learning theory stress the important of external stimuli and their influence on criminal behavior. Like Bronfenbrenner’s theory, these social theories of criminal behavior examine the ways in which people (regardless of individual traits or differences) are led to criminal behavior through those around them.

By bringing Bronfenbrenner’s (1989, 1977) theory of ecological systems and applying it to deviant behavior, the theory attempts to combine both individual and social traits that criminologists have been exploring for decades. The emphasis on individual traits in conjunction with the interaction of person and environment allows us to better explain rare, violent behavior in the context of multilevel variables. It also allows for not simple a nature versus nurture debate, but an inductive evaluation of nature’s developmental influence in conjunction with nurture that occurs over time and the life course.

As such, using this theory of ecological systems helps us to evaluate and organize the information available about the shooters so that we can understand the interactive nature of multilevel influences as it pertains to human development. This chapter will provide an overview of the data as it pertains to the individual shooters. The emergent themes and patterns of the data are described in detail and offered with specific examples and descriptions that support the research.
Opportunistic Detection Methods for Emotion-Aware Smartphone Applications
www.igi-global.com/chapter/opportunistic-detection-methods-for-emotion-aware-smartphone-applications/153421?camid=4v1a

The Reorganisation of Gangs in New Zealand
www.igi-global.com/chapter/the-reorganisation-of-gangs-in-new-zealand/145544?camid=4v1a