

Integrating Research and Practice in Federal Law Enforcement: Secret Service Applications of Behavioral Science Expertise to Protect the President

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This paper discusses specific behavioral research needs by law enforcement and justice systems to guide forensic decision-making in areas of targeted violence. Continuing incidents of stalking, workplace violence, and threats to public figures underscore the importance of developing empirically based risk assessment and intervention strategies. Reviewing briefly the relevant literatures in these areas, this paper describes deficits in these literatures and the absence of a model for integrating research and practice in applied settings. The U.S. Secret Service Behavioral Research Program is explored as one example of how behavioral science expertise may be integrated with law enforcement responsibilities. Considerations associated with building behavioral research capacities in applied settings are examined in the context of differences in professional orientation, values, and access to information. Specific research directions to improve understanding of targeted violence are recommended along with suggestions for ways in which the psychology-law field may facilitate integration of research into practice. © 1998 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

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The United States Secret Service is a federal law enforcement agency that is unique for the manner in which it has integrated behavioral science and law research into its operational mandate to protect the President of the United States and other national and visiting world leaders.¹ Through the development of collaborative relationships with experts in various areas of psychology, psychiatry, sociology, and law, the Secret Service has drawn upon such expertise to develop a research agenda tailored to the Secret Service protective mission, as well as provide consultation concerning the assessment and management of certain threat cases. The purpose of this article is to illustrate how the integration of such behavioral, psychological, and legal expertise has benefited the Secret Service in assessing the risk of individuals who threaten the President and other protectees.

In addition, the article explores areas of behavioral science research on targeted violence² that are needed to improve the responsiveness of law enforcement and other non-forensic professionals in fulfilling their violence prevention responsibilities. Special issues and functions, derived from Secret Service experience, that are associated with integrating research in non-traditional, applied settings are discussed. The model developed by the Secret Service to incorporate behavioral science into its threat assessment function, as well as to design and conduct research of specific relevance to the Secret Service's law enforcement responsibilities, is one that can be tailored to other law enforcement settings, specifically those charged with responding to or preventing targeted violence. Research generated from this model will likely contribute to the field of forensic mental health decision-making in general.

THE PROBLEM OF TARGETED VIOLENCE

In 1984, *Behavioral Sciences & the Law* devoted a special issue to the topic of presidential assassination (Menninger, 1984). The forward for that issue contains the following quote from the 1969 Final Report of the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence:

Probably no other form of domestic violence—save civil war—causes more anguish and universal dismay among citizens than the murder of a respected national leader. Assassination, especially when the victim is a President, strikes at the heart of the democratic process. It enables one man to nullify the will of the people in a single, savage act. It touches the lives of all the people of a nation (Eisenhower, *et al.*, 1969, p. 120).

Today, nearly thirty years later, the significance of those words is even greater in the aftermath of two attempts on the life of President Ford, the attempted

¹ Secret Service protective responsibilities are defined in Title 18 of the United States Code, Sections 871, 879, and 3056. Secret Service protective jurisdiction includes the President of the United States, Vice President, and their families; visiting foreign heads of state; former Presidents and their immediate family members; and major candidates for, or successors to, the offices of President, Vice President, and their spouses. These individuals are referred to collectively as Secret Service protectees.

² For the purpose of this paper we define targeted violence as any violence in which the victim or intended victim is selected deliberately, in advance of the intended crime, and by virtue of their public status. This paper will focus specifically on public figure-directed violence, stalking, and incidents of workplace violence where the intended victim is targeted because of his or her position within a particular workplace setting (e.g., a manager attacked by a disgruntled former employee).

assassination of President Reagan by John Hinckley, Jr. and, in 1994, the firing of shots at the White House by Francisco Duran while President Clinton was in residence. Additionally, during this period, we have witnessed dramatic increases in other forms of violence directed at public figures, including celebrity stalking, threats directed toward members of Congress and other elected officials, bombings targeted toward judges, and an array of violence aimed at corporate executives. Clearly, the problem of targeted figure violence is continuing, with little reason for hope that this disturbing reality is short lived. To the contrary, this persistent pattern of targeted violence appears to have raised social consciousness about the scope and implications of this form of violence, leaving mental health, forensic, and criminal justice systems challenged to respond.

Law enforcement organizations have begun to develop and implement specialized units to investigate and handle specific forms of targeted violence, such as threat and stalking cases. For example, Lane (1992) describes the pioneering work of the Los Angeles Police Department in establishing a Threat Management Unit to manage criminal and noncriminal cases wherein individuals have demonstrated an obsessive fixation toward a specific person characterized by a pattern of unwanted visitation and/or threatening communications. Similarly, the U.S. Capitol Police have organized a threat assessment function to track and assist in the investigation of threatening communications and otherwise inappropriate interests directed toward members of Congress and their staffs (W. Livingood, personal communication, June 27, 1997). More recently, the United States Marshals Service has initiated systematic efforts to formulate a protective investigative function to analyze inappropriate communications to, and to evaluate and manage potential threats against federal judicial officials (T. Calhoun, personal communication, June 27, 1997). Each of these organizations has recognized that their mission extends well beyond purely investigative and enforcement responsibilities, to the much more daunting task of protection and the prevention of violence. In law enforcement, the increased demand for specialized expertise in protection matters has also spurred the emergence of professional organizations like the Association of Threat Assessment Professionals (ATAP) as a network to share experiences, collect data, and discuss intervention strategies for threat management and protection of public safety.

Likewise, the criminal justice system has organized to develop various legislative, policy and practice standards in response to growing concern over the problem of stalking behavior. Since 1990, virtually all states have enacted stalking statutes, and state and local police agencies have assumed related enforcement and protective duties. In 1993, the National Institute of Justice convened a multi-disciplinary group of legal, law enforcement, judicial, and victims' rights representatives to develop a model anti-stalking code for the states (National Institute of Justice [NIJ], 1993). As part of their background research, the group devoted extensive consideration to understanding and defining the problem of "stalking," recognizing that many different forms of threatening and harassing behavior are commonly assumed under this term.

These examples illustrate some of the attempts by law enforcement and other non-forensic professionals to build capacities to respond to evolving forms of targeted violence that threaten public safety and security. It is evident that public agencies and non-forensic practitioners are increasingly being asked to make what

are essentially forensic decisions about risk assessment, intervention, and prevention. Yet, in the case of law enforcement, most organizations do not possess the necessary knowledge or resources to adequately evaluate dangerousness, particularly where non-criminal justice information and data may be pertinent to the decision. Law enforcement professionals are well trained in areas of criminal investigation, but receive little formal instruction on behavioral, social, psychological, and psychiatric factors that may be useful in assessing and managing violent behavior (NIJ, 1993).

We believe that law enforcement entities could benefit considerably from behavioral science initiatives when attempting to address these various forms of targeted violence, although at present several obstacles must be overcome. A review of the relevant literatures on stalking, workplace violence, and public figure violence indicates that behavioral science research has yet to examine these issues in a thorough and systematic fashion, leaving law enforcement with few empirically and theoretically based options. Furthermore, there exists no widely-accepted model for integrating scientific research into practice in law enforcement settings, and what relevant findings do exist may often fail to reach the audiences that could benefit most from them.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON TARGETED VIOLENCE

Stalking

A brief review of the psychological and behavioral literature on stalking reveals little empirical analysis concerning target selection, stalking of public figures and celebrities, or the effectiveness of forensic and criminal justice interventions for specific types of stalking behavior. The majority of the literature is relatively recent, published predominantly since 1990, and includes issues of erotomanic stalking (e.g., Meloy, 1989; 1992b), erotomania and dangerousness (e.g., Menzies, Fedoroff, Green, & Isaacson, 1995), comparisons of erotomanic and other obsessional followers (e.g., Meloy & Gothard, 1995), identification and treatment of stalking victims (e.g., Dziegielewski & Roberts, 1995), and public policy responses (Anderson, 1993; McCann, 1995). Yet little research has attempted to discriminate between the various behaviors termed stalking and the differing circumstances, motivations, and objectives associated with each (Meloy, 1996). Further behavioral research is needed to help identify the extent to which differing law enforcement interventions are appropriate for the various forms of stalking behavior.

Workplace Violence

Similarly a brief review of the psychological and behavioral literature on workplace violence indicates considerable research published since 1994 (see e.g., VandenBos & Bulatao, 1996), with virtually no studies cited in the literature prior to 1991. Topics include issues of violence in particular work settings (e.g., Dignam & Fagan, 1996; Freeman, Fox, Burr, & Santasine, 1996; Shazer, 1996), causes of workplace violence (e.g., Baron & Neuman, 1996), and legal issues (Bernat, 1994;

Painter, 1991). Various articles have explored prevention and intervention strategies (e.g., Bush & O'Shea, 1996; Nicoletti & Spooner, 1996), but no evaluation research was found examining the effectiveness of prevention and intervention models in responding to and reducing the incidence of targeted violence in the workplace.

Presidential Assassination

As a highly specified form of targeted violence, there exists an extensive literature on presidential assassination (Fein & Vossekuil, 1993). Topics covered in this literature include broad overviews of assassination (e.g., Cooper, 1984; Kirkham, Levy, & Crotty, 1969); historical perspectives (e.g., Ford, 1985); assassination in America (e.g., Clarke, 1982; Crotty, 1971; McKinley, 1977); sociological studies (e.g., Wilkinson, 1970; 1976); and, psychological, psychiatric, and behavioral analyses (e.g., Heyman, 1984; Logan, Reuterfors, Bohn, & Clark, 1984; Rothstein, 1964; Weinstein & Lysterly, 1969). Despite the range of topics in this literature, a comprehensive review revealed only a few studies that have systematically examined factors related to assassination and other forms of public figure violence; discriminated between threatening communications and behavior; or, explored the characteristics and motivations of persons who select public figures as targets for approach, attack, or related behaviors.

The psychological and psychiatric literature on assassination has offered mostly retrospective case-study analyses of known assassins, emphasizing such characteristics as underlying inadequacies (Heyman, 1984), frustration (Clarke, 1981), self-loathing (Freedman, 1965), and pathological attachment (Meloy, 1992a; 1992b). Several studies have provided a quasi-psychoanalytic perspective of assassins, focusing on displaced rage against women (Rothstein, 1964), the absence of stable male figures during childhood (Hassel, 1974) and a strong sexual desire for their mothers (Abrahamsen, 1973). Largely lacking empirical or applied foundations, these studies contribute little toward an understanding of factors that may indicate increased risk for violence among persons who target public figures (for an exception, however, see Meloy's (1992a) study of Sirhan Sirhan). In short, such case studies may provide interesting speculation, but are of virtually no practical use to law enforcement organizations tasked with protecting public figures.

Much of the behavioral literature on assassination shows similar shortcomings. Only a few studies have been conducted on assassination and related topics, and some have suffered from methodological weaknesses (Fein & Vossekuil, 1993). For example, Fein & Vossekuil (1993) note that several studies have relied on secondary sources for their data (e.g., Hastings 1965a, 1965b, 1965c, 1965d, as cited in Fein & Vossekuil, 1993). Moreover, studies that have used primary source data to examine and predict assassination behaviors have relied on proxies for that behavior such as written or verbal threats (Logan, *et al.*, 1984; Weinstein & Lysterly, 1969), which some results (Dietz, Matthews, VanDuyne, *et al.*, 1991; Meloy & Gothard, 1995) suggest may not be positively related to assassination attempts (Fein & Vossekuil, 1993).

There are some notable exceptions in the behavioral literature on assassination, including several studies that have examined the characteristics and behaviors of “White House cases” (i.e., individuals who, upon appearing at the White House with a request to see the President, are referred by the Secret Service for psychiatric evaluation because of symptoms or behaviors displayed at the time of their visit; Hoffman, 1943; Sebastiani & Foy, 1965; Shore, *et al.*, 1985). Findings from the studies of White House cases showed the majority of individuals seeking an audience with the President were white males in their early 40’s, unemployed, and divorced, separated, or never married. Although their reasons for wanting to see the President spanned a broad range of issues—from alerting the President about alien invasions to presenting a plan to end the Cold War—most White House cases presented with paranoid delusions and similar psychotic symptomatology (Hoffman, 1943; Logan, *et al.*, 1984; Sebastiani & Foy, 1965; Shore, *et al.*, 1985). In these studies the authors concluded that few, if any, of the subjects presented an increased danger to the life or safety of the President based on their psychiatric symptoms (Logan, *et al.*, 1984; Sebastiani & Foy, 1965).

Although potentially informative in helping to identify individuals who are likely to attempt to approach or see the President, the findings from these studies characterize only a small subgroup of those persons targeting public figures. Moreover, these individuals represent only those persons whose behavior or demeanor at the White House raised enough concern among Secret Service agents and officers who interviewed the subject to merit a psychiatric referral. As Shore and colleagues (1985) acknowledge, the findings tell us nothing about those individuals who show up at the White House but appear “normal” enough to avoid such a referral, appear at other locations such as speeches or campaign rallies, are arrested by the Secret Service on the basis of threats they made against the President,³ or actually try to attack a public figure.

Public Figure-Directed Violence

Very few studies make up the literature on public figure violence. Among these there exist few empirically-based studies, and no systematic examinations of methods to prevent assassination and other attacks against public figures. One exception is the work of Dietz and his colleagues on threatening and other inappropriate letters to Hollywood celebrities (Dietz, Matthews, Van Duyne, *et al.*, 1991) and to members of Congress (Dietz, Matthews, Martell, *cf.* Stewart, 1991). These studies represent the first systematic investigations into the relationship between threats and approach behavior, and as such make a significant contribution to the study of public figure-directed violence. Dietz and his colleagues provide an analysis of the characteristics of letters written to Hollywood celebrities and members of Congress, as well as of factors that differentiate subjects who tried to approach their target from those who did not.

The most noteworthy and illustrative finding from this work is that among subjects who wrote to Hollywood celebrities, there was no relationship between

³ 18 USC 871 and 879 make it a felony violation to threaten the life of the President, successors to the Presidency, and other persons protected by the Secret Service.

threats in the letters and attempts to approach the target. Those subjects who threatened were no more or less likely to try to see their target than were those who did not threaten (Dietz, Matthews, Van Duyne, *et al.*, 1991). Among subjects who wrote to members of Congress, there was a negative relationship between threats and approach behavior, such that subjects who threatened appeared less likely to approach than those who did not (Dietz, Matthews, Martell, *et al.*, 1991). These findings would appear to refute the commonly-held notion that those who threaten public figures pose the greatest danger, a concept that is ripe for further empirical inquiry. These data suggest that those charged with preventing violence against public figures should not assume that individuals who do not threaten are of little or no concern.

Of course, there are overwhelming obstacles that impede efforts to empirically test strategies to prevent targeted violence. Perhaps most basic is the lack of any generally agreed-upon conceptualization of these forms of violence as targeted violence. Meaningful reporting of their incidence is thereby problematic and, as a result, research is unable to identify common underlying factors that may transcend manifestations of targeted violence. Another barrier to successful prevention research is the lack of any realistic type of control group. For obvious ethical, moral, and legal reasons, once organizations implement preventive or intervention strategies, it is unlikely that they will withhold them in order to conduct scientific outcome research. Nor are inferred control groups readily available. Due to definitional problems associated with these forms of violence and ambiguity concerning the reasons for target selection, a rationale for what would constitute appropriate control groups is lacking.

These are precisely the same barriers that stand in the way of most behavioral science prevention research. Nevertheless, such research has been accomplished in other areas, usually due to tenacity and creativity on the part of researchers. It is this same commitment from the behavioral science research community that will ultimately overcome the barriers to the research needed by law enforcement and other organizations faced with these forms of violence.

Summary

It is clear that many areas of research in psychology and law could be used to enhance forensic decision-making in law enforcement settings. The need for behavioral research in these settings has become even more pressing in the face of increasing demands on federal, state, and local law enforcement entities to assess risk and prevent targeted violence. The sharp growth in nationwide chapters of ATAP, for example, certainly underscores a keen interest for such guidance and direction among professionals who have the responsibility to assess and manage threatening behavior. Despite this need, deficits in targeted violence research, as well as the lack of a model for integrating such research into law enforcement tasks and responsibilities, have precluded both widespread application of relevant findings and effective responsiveness by the behavioral research field to address additional law enforcement needs.

The Secret Service has attempted to bridge this gap by incorporating existing behavioral research and clinical expertise into its protective intelligence operations

and by stimulating more operationally relevant research through the creation of an internal research capacity. What follows is a discussion of the Secret Service's model for integrating research into its risk assessment and case management practices, challenges associated with incorporating behavioral science research into a federal law enforcement agency, and suggestions for applying this model to other law enforcement and organizational settings.

INTEGRATION OF RESEARCH INTO THE SECRET SERVICE

The primary mission of the Secret Service is to provide protection for the President and other selected national leaders. Although Secret Service responsibilities are clearly defined as federal law enforcement in nature, the organization faces some rather unique challenges as it carries out its protective mandate. Unlike most other law enforcement agencies, whose activities are reactive in nature, the Secret Service is responsible for the *prevention* of a very specific and rare type of crime.⁴ Secret Service protective responsibilities encompass both physical security measures as well as the investigation of threatening communications and behaviors in order to prevent violent acts from being directed against the President and other protectees. This latter function is referred to as the Secret Service's protective intelligence mission.

The Secret Service protective intelligence program involves: (a) identifying subjects who may pose a risk to one or more Secret Service protectees, (b) investigating the circumstances in which the threat occurred and the individual histories of the persons who may have made or posed the perceived threat, (c) evaluating the mental status of the subject, (d) assessing both the likelihood and the severity of risk posed by the subject, and (e) implementing case management-type interventions aimed at managing those subjects who have been evaluated by the Secret Service as presenting a danger to Secret Service protectees. Each of these activities requires discriminant decision making, and each is the potential subject of rigorous social and behavioral science research. The protective intelligence goal of the Secret Service is very simply to ensure the safety of the President, Vice President, and other public officials through the prevention of violent behavior—a goal that crosses professional boundaries and draws extensively upon legal and behavioral science research.

The Assessment Task and the Need for Applied Research

Originally, the impetus for incorporating behavioral science research into Secret Service protective investigations and case management stemmed from the historically high proportion of threat cases referred to the Secret Service that included a history of previous mental illness, forensic evaluation and treatment contacts, and/or current psychiatric symptoms as part of the presenting circumstances. Given

⁴ In addition to protective responsibilities, the Secret Service is charged with the investigation of financial crimes in the areas of financial institution fraud, counterfeit, access device fraud, telecommunications and computer fraud, and forgery.

this experience, Secret Service agents have been required to routinely evaluate the extent to which subjects' mental history and current functioning may impact their likelihood of posing a danger to Secret Service protectees. Essentially, the Secret Service must conduct a very specialized assessment of dangerousness—that is, dangerousness toward the President or other protectee—based on consideration of a range of risk factors that often include significant clinical data. Recognizing the need for professional expertise related to a thorough understanding of mental illness in general, and familiarity with clinical and forensic practice standards for risk assessment in particular, the Secret Service turned to the behavioral sciences as a resource to assist with investigative decision-making and inform policy.

As previously mentioned, however, the literature on assassination and public figure-directed violence provided little work that was of direct relevance to, and operationally useful for, agents assigned the daily task of investigating and evaluating numerous individuals for the risk they may pose to the President or other Secret Service protectees. Specifically, psychological and behavioral research has yet to identify objective, quantifiable factors that are valid predictors of dangerousness toward our nation's leaders. Although the Dietz research (Dietz, Matthews, *et al.*, 1991; Dietz, Matthews, VanDuyne, *et al.*, 1991) demonstrates remarkably well the potential ways in which behavioral science research could guide Secret Service decision-making by confirming or disconfirming assumptions that agents use in the performance of their duties, this work was not conducted until the late 1980's. The publication of the Dietz studies in 1991 represents one of the few examples in the behavioral science literature that has direct relevance to the protective mission of the Secret Service.

Developing an Organizational Research Capacity: Collaboration with the Institute of Medicine

In 1980 the Secret Service contracted with the Institute of Medicine (IOM) to jointly sponsor an invitational conference of behavioral scientists and clinicians. The goal of the conference was to review Secret Service concerns relative to predicting assassination behavior and to explore ways in which the behavioral science disciplines could assist the Secret Service in handling persons who threaten or pose a threat to Secret Service protectees. Conferees addressed such issues as dangerousness and limitations in the prediction of violent behavior; the management of dangerous persons, including legal and ethical considerations; strengthening relationships between the Secret Service and the mental health community; and research opportunities to enhance protective responsibilities and related agent training requirements (Takeuchi, Solomon, & Menninger, 1981). Subsequently, in 1982 the Secret Service again collaborated with the Institute of Medicine to further explore: (a) the development of an internal research program that would facilitate the most effective identification and assessment of presidential threateners; (b) training for special agents to assess and manage the considerable number of mentally ill subjects; and (c) formalized liaison between the Secret Service and the mental health professions in support of protective intelligence activities (IOM, 1984). These interactions with the Institute of Medicine provided the framework

for a very positive and productive collaboration between the Secret Service and the behavioral science and forensic disciplines, one that has contributed significantly to Secret Service protective intelligence operations and enhanced overall understanding about assassination and public figure-directed violence.

The Research Structure and Agenda

Out of the IOM conference, the Secret Service developed a Behavioral Research Program that is charged with conducting behavioral and psycho-legal research to support its protective intelligence mission. Consistent with this functional responsibility, the Behavioral Research Program today addresses a broad array of topics and issues, including: (a) assessing the risk of individuals who target the President and other public officials; (b) studying factors that influence agents' decision-making with respect to evaluating risk posed by presidential threateners; (c) examining attitudes of mental health practitioners towards the Secret Service and the effects of such attitudes on reporting threats against the President; and, (d) investigating the impact of mental health law and policy on Secret Service investigative processes.

Several overarching principles guide research developed and conducted at the Secret Service. First, the research focus is concerned with the conceptualization of violence directed at public figures as a unique case of violent behavior that deserves specialized research and design approaches. In addition, Secret Service researchers (internal staff together with consultants and collaborators from academia) look for ways to operationalize questions about the identification, assessment, and management of threats against public figures in such a manner as to stimulate focused, applied research directions. Throughout the development and implementation of new research projects, the research program strives to ensure that its study of specific issues is grounded in proper theoretical and empirical foundations and that its methods and findings adhere to the standards of scientific peer review. Moreover, the Secret Service is committed to connecting Secret Service behavioral research interests and processes with relevant, larger-scale research in the domains of psychology, public policy, and law.

Integration Challenges and Solutions

Although Secret Service research objectives are relatively straight-forward, the practical and logistical realities associated with achieving them are not. First and foremost, the Secret Service is a federal law enforcement agency charged with highly specialized, time sensitive, and very focused responsibilities. Within such a context, promoting an organizational culture that truly understands how to effectively incorporate and apply fundamental social science research does not come easily. Just like any other organization or industry, the Secret Service is faced with competing priorities for resources. Simply stated, the dilemma is whether to invest finite resources and energies in longer range research initiatives with uncertain outcomes, or to invest in programs and technology that appear to offer far more tangible and immediate payoffs.

Despite these challenges, and with significant “growing pains” along the way, the Secret Service has been able to integrate the contributions of the behavioral sciences into a foundation for examining and refining its investigative risk assessment policies and practices. The success of the behavioral research program in this regard has been its unwavering insistence and reliance upon a collaborative research-practice model. Special agents and researchers, both internal Secret Service staff and external consultants, work together to identify practical study questions, prioritize areas of inquiry, design study methodologies, collect and analyze data, and disseminate research findings. Agents play a key role in ensuring that relevant investigative, risk assessment, and case management concerns are brought forward for study and their participation in research design and data collection lends internal credibility to the importance of incorporating study findings into practice. Similarly, research staff and scholars from the academic and scientific communities ensure that principles of scientific integrity guide the research process and are instrumental in protecting the external validity of the data and findings according to rigorous standards of peer review. Together, agents and researchers collaborate to target research findings and implications for Secret Service operational needs as well as for forensic and clinical practitioners who may benefit from the work.

Research Advisory Committee

Central to this collaborative model between agents and researchers has been the formation of a Research Advisory Committee (the Committee) to the Secret Service, a multi-disciplinary group consisting of researchers, academicians, and clinicians recognized for their work in forensic psychology and psychiatry, risk assessment, violent behavior, and mental health law and policy.⁵ Their role within the Secret Service has been to support the Behavioral Research Program and internal research staff by facilitating linkage with external scientific, academic, and organizational resources that can support Secret Service protective intelligence activities. The Committee functions in a consultative capacity with respect to planning and development of a long-term research agenda and goals; and individual members participate with Secret Service research staff in the design and conduct of various studies, the presentation of study findings in scientific forums, and the preparation of manuscripts for publication.

The Committee members provide regular input concerning areas of behavioral science research and mental health law and policy that are pertinent to the Secret Service protective mission. Among their many contributions to the organization, they offer a source of expertise for critical and objective review of Secret Service threat assessment and case management practices. They engage the Secret Service in healthy debate about the scientific merit of study methods proposed to examine operational issues, and above all they have steadfastly encouraged an acceptance within the Secret Service of commitment to the philosophy that external review

⁵ Research Advisory Committee members include Paul S. Appelbaum, M.D.; Robert Cancro, M.D.; Joel A. Dvoskin, Ph.D.; Robert A. Fein, Ph.D.; W. Walter Menninger, M.D.; John Monahan, Ph.D.; Edward P. Mulvey, Ph.D.; Gordon L. Neligh, M.D.; Robert T. M. Phillipps, M.D., Ph.D.; and Henry J. Steadman, Ph.D.

and scientific scrutiny are assets to the organization, rather than liabilities or intrusions to the law enforcement process.

Examples of Research Benefits to Secret Service Operations

The evolution of research within the Secret Service has been guided by specific operational priorities that could best be informed by behavioral and psycho-legal research. For each of these issues, the Secret Service has reviewed existing literature and collaborated with its advisory members and other external scholars to develop original, empirical research that would address these operational questions. In each case, findings have been used to refine Secret Service practices and to contribute information to the broader behavioral science, mental health, and legal fields.

Enhancing Evaluations of Risk

One crucial operational issue for the Secret Service is to determine empirically the most important factors related to a person's potential for violence against a protectee. A theoretically based framework to facilitate the most efficient collection of investigative information and to guide the analysis of that data is of fundamental value, as every threat against the President must be investigated by the Secret Service to render an evaluation of dangerousness to protectees. To explore these specialized risk assessment needs, the Secret Service embarked upon a program of research designed to comprehensively study threatening behavior directed toward its protectees. The goal of this research is to identify objective factors that could assist agents in their investigative decision-making. The findings from this effort have potential relevance both for the growing field of public figure protection and for risk assessment generally.

A major thrust of this research program has been the Exceptional Case Study Project (ECSP), a comprehensive analysis of persons who have either attacked, or successfully approached with lethal means, a target who was selected by virtue of their public status. This work is the first comprehensive effort to study the communication patterns, behavior, planning, thinking, mental status, and motivations of individuals who have engaged in attack or approach related behaviors, independent of whether they may have threatened their intended target. The methodology has included exhaustive reviews and coding of investigative files and archival records, and in-depth interviews with a subsample of the study's subject population, yielding an extensive quantitative and qualitative database of information on individuals who have attacked or nearly attacked public figures.

Preliminary findings from the ECSP have been used to supplement the factors currently used by agents in evaluating subjects' risk. For example, findings have suggested that greater emphasis be placed on behavior-based assessments versus assessments of threatening statements (Vossekuil & Fein, 1997). The data provide insight into the importance of evaluating such factors as subject motives, planning behaviors, and feelings of desperation and hopelessness as indicators of attack related behavior. Findings have also affirmed that the use of physical security measures for presidential protection serves as a deterrent to persons contemplating approaching the President or other protected officials. As the data analyses are

finalized, we anticipate that this research will offer applied value to other law enforcement agencies with protective responsibilities and to researchers who are concerned about understanding and preventing this and other forms of targeted violence. Moreover, ECSP study findings may also be used to shape future research on this topic in such areas as target selection, planning behavior, communication of threats, and the relationship between psychiatric symptoms and public figure violence.

Notification of Threats and Other Dangerous Behavior

Another operational issue central to the Service's ability to effectively assess threats against the President is the need to ensure notification to the Secret Service about persons who may be at risk for violence against its protectees. One area of focus for the Secret Service has been to learn more about mental health professionals' knowledge and attitudes relative to reporting case information to the Secret Service, and about the legal framework that governs their ability to do so, given that so many Secret Service cases have revealed a history of contact with the mental health system. To examine this issue, empirical research was implemented to determine under what conditions mental health practitioners would be inclined to notify the Service about a patient who may have threatened to harm the President.

The findings from this project emphasized the importance of professional values and biases in shaping behaviors and decision-making concerning reports of threats against the President (Coggins, Steadman, & Veysey, 1996). The results showed that mental health professionals' perceptions about the Secret Service in particular, and law enforcement in general, drive their willingness to notify the Secret Service about a potential threat case. These perceptions were also reported as influencing whether clinicians were inclined to cooperate with an ongoing investigation by disclosing records or sharing case information, irrespective of patient consent or statutory provisions authorizing such disclosure. Findings also showed the potential benefits of education to the mental health community regarding the Secret Service protective responsibilities in increasing clinicians' willingness to work with the Secret Service (Coggins, *et al.*, 1996).

The practical significance of this research is that the findings have been instrumental in defining key elements of Secret Service liaison with the mental health community in order to increase understanding about the Secret Service protective intelligence mission and to promote cooperation with Secret Service risk assessment functions. Further research is needed with an emphasis on finding more effective ways to forge collaboration between mental health, criminal justice, law, and policy professionals. One research priority within the discipline should be to increase understanding about professional values and differences, for the purpose of increasing cooperation so that common solutions to shared problems across disciplines may be explored.

Balancing Patient Confidentiality and Investigative Needs

In addition to threat referrals from the mental health community, the Secret Service routinely seeks access to patient mental health information in order to evaluate risk potential and determine appropriate case management strategies. Despite receiving patient consent to release psychiatric information and records in

a majority of cases, Secret Service access to records is often initially denied. Given the time sensitivity of Secret Service threat assessment and protective responsibilities, research was undertaken to explore the bases for delays and problems with access to medical and psychiatric records. In the initial phase of this research, Secret Service agents were surveyed concerning the frequency and nature of the problems they experienced in obtaining records for patients who had provided written consent authorizing disclosure of such records to the Secret Service. The findings revealed several major obstacles, including the complexity of the state mental health laws that govern medical records confidentiality, the lack of clinicians' familiarity with the Secret Service protective mission, and misunderstandings concerning the legitimacy of the Service's need for psychiatric information (Coggins, Shields, & Robbins, 1995).

These findings led to the design of a comprehensive review of state mental health statutes in the areas of confidential records, privileged communications, informed consent, and duty to warn. The purpose of this extensive legal research was to ensure that Secret Service informed consent forms and request for records procedures are consistent with state laws protecting patient privacy. The product of this research was a comprehensive guide to state statutes governing confidential records, privileged communications, and duty to warn or protect, prepared for Secret Service agent use (Coggins & Macdonald, 1996b). Presentation of this research in various settings (e.g., Coggins & Macdonald, 1996a) yielded considerable and valuable feedback from clinicians and mental health policy makers on the broad need for this information in the mental health, criminal justice, and forensic fields. Efforts are currently being made to publish this work so that it will be accessible to forensic and clinical practitioners.

Recommendations for Integrating Research and Practice in Applied Settings

Applications of behavioral science research and practice within the Secret Service provide only a few examples of critical areas wherein scholarly work may be tailored to effectively address relevant and important social problems that are of broad public and professional concern. While the protective mission, and therefore the research needs, of the Secret Service are highly specialized and unique, the Secret Service is not at all unique among law enforcement agencies in its need for scientifically valid and empirically generated findings to shape operational policy and practice. There exist a myriad of problems and issues throughout the law enforcement community that could benefit from systematic behavioral research and from improved dissemination and application of relevant findings.

Analysis of the development of a successful research capacity at the Secret Service suggests that a number of non-traditional research activities may be necessary to establish a foundation for effective linkage between research and practice in applied settings. Specifically, these strategies encourage understanding between disciplines and facilitate communication across professional roles in ways that offer concrete benefit to an organization's needs. For example, one important function of the research program at the Secret Service is to monitor the literature from relevant behavioral science, clinical, and mental health law disciplines to

identify studies from these settings that may be generalizable to aspects of the protective mission of the Secret Service. Secret Service research staff then interpret significant research implications in the context of operational concerns and disseminate the information in non-technical language to appropriate entities within the organization. This effort is instrumental in stimulating the development of Secret Service studies tailored to specialized, applied problems that are not likely to be the focus of study outside of the organization.

The Secret Service research function is also responsible for implementing mechanisms within the organization that will appropriately identify and define research for study to maximize responsiveness to operational requirements. Although this component of the Secret Service research program relies heavily on input from agents and direction from executives in the Secret Service hierarchy, the translation of operational problems into viable study questions and research methods is a critical contribution of the internal research staff and external consultants. Reviewing the literature for application to organizational issues, identifying operational problems that are appropriate for empirical study, and translating applied questions into research projects, all reflect a focus that is admittedly less essential in scholarly and academic settings, such that its value may be altogether overlooked. A likely consequence of this lack of attention could be a series of missed opportunities for the behavioral science and law field to advance scientific contribution in key areas of our expertise. If so, much relevant psychology-law research may fail to adequately or fully connect in practical ways to address real world concerns.

Improving Cross-Disciplinary Collaboration

One objective is to explore ways in which the field can reasonably assume a more proactive leadership role in terms of appropriately "marketing" research and its findings to consumers, as well as stimulating dialogue from applied settings about topics that should influence directions for future study. This role should also include conveying principles of social science research that are fundamental to an informed and critical review of the quality of a study and the relevance of its findings to specific practical purposes. Behavioral scientists can provide guidance relative to such concepts as interpreting study findings, evaluating generalizability, recognizing study limitations, and forming appropriate conclusions from quantitative versus qualitative data. Lessons learned from experiences at the Secret Service have made it clear that it is the responsibility of behavioral scientists and researchers to educate other professionals about the application of behavioral science research to settings outside academia. Furthermore, the field of psychology and law must be able to demonstrate the value of its research in such tangible terms as operational efficiency, manpower and other resource conservation, and policy development, unless or until it is able to do so, the discipline will likely be *less than* fully effective in maximising potential contributors. By the same token, we encourage law enforcement and other organizations to seek out the expertise of researchers and scholars who can design research to address organizational needs and questions even if specifically relevant research has yet to be conducted.

Another, and perhaps far more important objective, is to invest energies in systematically examining the obstacles to more effective collaboration between

behavioral science and justice systems. While research coming out of the psychology-law discipline generally offers direct application to, and implications for, a number of professional constituencies (e.g., lawyers, judges, court systems, law enforcement), integration into practice is not always consistently achieved. Likewise, the agenda for mental health and law research seems neither heavily influenced by applied organizational problems nor cohesively organized around public policy priorities. Again, experiences at the Secret Service, supported by empirical findings from research examining clinicians' attitudes about law enforcement (Coggins, *et al.*, 1996), suggest that issues of differing professional orientations, values, training, access to information, and agendas are at the heart of why these systems do not readily connect, despite their common interests and objectives (e.g., violence prevention). Until these barriers are fully identified and understood, the field will be ineffective at implementing strategies to overcome the resistance that too often stifles collaborative interdisciplinary scholarship. Considerably more focused research is needed in the area of professional relationships, roles, values, and mechanisms for liaison and communication.

Suggestions for Research Publication and Dissemination

With advances in research and scholarship in violence risk assessment, some recent attention has focused on pragmatic issues that explore ways for new knowledge to be effectively communicated and incorporated into clinical policy and practice (see Borum, 1996; Grisso & Tomkins, 1996; Monahan & Steadman, 1996; Schopp, 1996). Similarly, in forensic psychiatry, practical concerns surrounding the duties, roles, and ethical responsibilities of forensic evaluators in the justice system have been examined (e.g., Appelbaum, 1996). Moreover, a few articles are beginning to emerge, albeit in the non-scientific literature, dealing with the assessment and management of public figure and other forms of targeted violence (e.g., Lane, 1992; Fein, Vossekuil, & Holden, 1995). These types of contributions stand to change dramatically a number of prevailing beliefs about risk assessment and case management in various contexts, along with refining understanding about how clinical and forensic expertise may be informative in non-traditional applications.

From these examples in the literature, we have formulated the following suggestions, intended to encourage continued research directions, publication, and dissemination to respond to a broader range of problems and professional constituencies than have heretofore been evident in the literature:

- As a practical matter, the general preference within the scientific community for rigorous experimental studies may reduce the likelihood that researchers, strongly motivated by the ability to publish, will engage in more applied, quasi-experimental research. Though such studies may have less appeal to traditional journals, they may have far greater practical benefit to organizations. As such, one appropriate goal may be for the psychology-law discipline to strike a better balance between purely theoretical studies and research that offers more immediate and direct practical applications.
- Second, insofar as law and behavioral science journals have a multi-disciplinary focus, editors should consider encouraging more applied research, perhaps by

including sections on a regular basis that are devoted to organizational or other practically relevant applications (see e.g., Wiener, 1997).

- Third, the psychology-law field should strive to improve the means by which professionals outside of the academic disciplines can gain access to academic research findings. Possible strategies include: (a) encouraging journals to publish digests of articles, translated into non-technical terms, for dissemination to law enforcement, other professionals, and in some cases the general public; and (b) permitting authors to prepare non-technical versions of their published research for secondary publication in targeted forums such as criminal justice or law enforcement newsletters so that research will have greater relevance and application to applied settings.

Suggestions for Education and Training in Psychology/Law/Criminal Justice

Graduate training curricula in both behavioral science and criminal justice disciplines can be used to promote an early appreciation for the value of interdisciplinary collaboration and the potential richness of information, resources, and expertise that are associated with this model. Specifically, graduate training in mental health, law, and criminal justice/law enforcement should include required course work in issues and methods that span these disciplines in order to introduce students to different perspectives and professional orientations before they begin their career tracks. Academic institutions should also seek out criminal justice and law enforcement placements for internships, externships, fellowships, and other field placements in order to expose students to the realities, both positive and negative, of working in such non-clinical settings. Over time, this emphasis may well increase understanding about shared objectives, as well as foster familiarity with the ways in which other disciplines can inform one's own.

In addition, we believe that greater academic emphasis should be placed on organizational applications of research. Required courses in organizational consultation and applied research would provide students with knowledge of ways in which organizations and systems use and benefit from research, and would offer insight about areas where additional research is needed. Training in this regard should focus on developing effective consultation skills in order to design applied studies, meaningfully interpret and disseminate findings to professional audiences, and/or build internal research capacities to support broad organizational missions. As traditional employment and funding opportunities for behavioral scientists and clinicians become more difficult to sustain, such consultative opportunities will become increasingly important to the economic future of mental health professionals, whether they are practitioners, researchers, or academicians.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

In spite of the relative success of agencies like the Secret Service that have demonstrated a commitment to build and implement a behavioral science research capacity into their organizational structure and operations, integrating research and

practice in applied settings remains a very difficult and sometimes overwhelming challenge. While the Secret Service has been willing to seek outside expertise, expose itself to criticism, and make operational changes based on research findings, these advances have not come easily or without a price. To the contrary, even with a seventeen year investment in behavioral science research and collaboration to inform protective intelligence policy and operations, receptivity for science behavioral research throughout the Secret Service culture is not uniform. Questions continue to arise concerning program direction, clarity of role, overall value, and placement within the organization. Career development and growth opportunities for internal research staff are limited and fall outside of the framework of competitive career tracks for peers in the scientific community. There are considerable limitations on conducting applied research that is also of interest to other professionals in the field—the operational mission always takes precedence over academic or scientific interest to the researcher in determining study priorities. There are also obvious restrictions on publishing any work that is internally sensitive to the Secret Service protective mission. These issues constitute just some of the perplexing problems that face organizations like the Secret Service, as well as the researchers and scientists who work for and consult with these organizations. Unfortunately, we are unaware of simple solutions, and we suspect that the dilemmas at the Secret Service are quite illustrative of the kinds of realities that will confront many organizations and systems who are potential consumers of behavioral science and law research.

With respect to public policy for preventing targeted violence, several important research foci are needed to guide law enforcement in fulfilling their responsibilities: (a) better definitions of the nature of the problem and the specific behaviors associated with certain types of targeted violence; (b) data to describe predictive and antecedent factors associated with targeted violence to inform risk assessment and related investigative practice; (c) clearer delineation of the role and potential contribution of different disciplines (e.g., forensic, clinical, criminal justice) to the process of responding to targeted violence; and (d) evaluation of the effectiveness of existing law enforcement, forensic, and case management strategies in protecting victims from these forms of focused violence.

With an applied framework for pursuing this research agenda and with resolve to forge multi-disciplinary collaborations to address these important problems, we are hopeful that clinical, forensic, and mental health legal expertise can be effectively integrated into the needs of justice systems to advance research-based standards for practice. We are confident that lessons learned and shared by the Secret Service will provide insight for specific ways in which behavioral science researchers and scholars can provide leadership and direction to this important area.

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