Philadelphia had 46 neighborhood mass shootings over 10 years, team finds

November 18 2019

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The definition of mass shooting varies widely depending upon the information sources that are used. In a new study published online in the journal *Preventive Medicine*, a research team led by Temple's Jessica H.

Beard, MD, MPH, standardized the defining features of neighborhood mass shootings using police department data, then examined media coverage of the shooting incidents.

The team, led by Dr. Beard, Assistant Professor of Surgery in the Division of Trauma and Surgical Critical Care at the Lewis Katz School of Medicine at Temple University (LKSOM), examined 15,672 firearm assaults reported to the Philadelphia Police Department between January 1, 2006 and December 31, 2015 and looked at the time, date, and location of the incidents; and demographics and mortality of the victims. The researchers determined that three variables were most relevant to a standardized definition of "neighborhood mass shooting": distance between shootings, time between shootings, and total number of victims. Specifically, they defined a neighborhood mass shooting as one that involves four or more victims shot in a one-hour window within 100 meters (about a city block).

Based on those criteria, during the 10 study years, Philadelphia experienced 46 neighborhood mass shootings that injured or killed 212 individuals. Other findings associated with those 46 incidents included:

- The victims tended to be black (85.9%), male (76.4%) and were an average age of 24.
- Of the 212 individuals who were shot in these incidents, 29 (13.7%) died.
- The events took place in 41 distinct census block groups (of 1,337 in the city).

"There is no standard definition of a mass shooting," Dr. Beard said. "Our team sought to devise one that acknowledges conventional definitions but is more inclusive and also considers the impact on communities. We found that there were 46 neighborhood mass shootings in Philadelphia from 2006-2015; for comparison's sake, there were 41

traditionally defined mass shooting events in the country during that time period, according to Mother Jones."

The research team examined how the 46 mass shooting events were reported in public news media, using three full-text newspaper and television transcript databases of local, regional and national media outlets. Examination of reporting within four days of each mass shooting event revealed:

- There were 183 total media reports.
- Seven (15%) of these incidents received no identifiable media coverage.
- The 31 victims of the no-coverage events tended to be black (84%) and 25 years old or younger (61%).
- None of these seven unreported events had any fatalities.
- Of the remaining 39 incidents that did receive coverage, that coverage generally came from local and regional print publications.
- Nine of these 39 reported incidents (23%) attracted national media attention and involved either youth or female victims.
- Only two headlines used the term "mass shooting," and both were for one incident.

"The media have a profound impact on society based on both what they choose to cover and how they choose to cover it," Dr. Beard added. "Neighborhood mass shootings are more common than the public—and policymakers—likely know. Going forward, we would suggest coverage focus more extensively on the complexity of the events, share victims' and survivors' stories, and explore root causes and solutions."

More information: Jessica H. Beard et al, Examining mass shootings from a neighborhood perspective: An analysis of multiple-casualty events and media reporting in Philadelphia, United States, *Preventive*

Medical Xpress

Medicine (2019). DOI: 10.1016/j.ypmed.2019.105856

Provided by Temple University

Citation: Philadelphia had 46 neighborhood mass shootings over 10 years, team finds (2019, November 18) retrieved 17 April 2024 from https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-11-philadelphia-neighborhood-mass-years-team.html

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