

# ANALYSIS OF LONE ATTACKS AS A CHALLENGE FOR PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM FROM A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Types of Lone Attackers and their  
Radicalization Processes in Japan, and  
Recommendations for Prevention Measures



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# Table of Contents

<b>1. Background</b>	<b>9</b>
1. Analytical rationale	9
2. Analytical strategy	10
<b>2. Method</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>3. Results</b>	<b>19</b>
1. Overview of the incidents	19
2. Typological classification	22
3. Analysis of the radicalization/offending process	36
4. Consideration of personal factors that promote radicalization	42
<b>4. Discussion: Proposal of a hypothetical model of the radicalization process of Lone Attackers and countermeasures</b>	<b>43</b>
1. Hypothetical model of the radicalization process of Non-Ideological Lone Attackers	43
2. Measures to prevent crime and harm caused by lone attackers	44
3. Measures to prevent lone attackers from reoffending	47
<b>5. Future Prospects</b>	<b>49</b>

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## FOREWORD

The twin scourges of terrorism and violent extremism are a growing threat to global security. From violent attacks by members of groups who subscribe to particular ideologies to incidents by lone attackers who plan, prepare, and strike without direction from specific organizations, the methods vary but the impacts are devastating. Beyond the loss of lives, injuries, and the destruction of infrastructure, terrorism and violent extremism threaten democracy, adversely affect the stability of governments, and retard economic development. Such incidents are difficult to forecast and avert due to their pervasive and unpredictable nature.



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One of UNICRI's strategic priorities is to assist Member States to better understand emerging and evolving threats and to support them to prevent and counter violent extremism and radicalization. This aligns with the Institute's focus on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16, which promotes peaceful and inclusive societies, access to justice for all, and effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions.

In recent years, due to increasing incidents, concerns about lone attacks have grown among terrorism experts as well as global intelligence and security leaders. The reason for concern is that the increasing prevalence and use of the Internet has facilitated self-radicalization through extremist websites while making content such as bomb-making tutorials and geographic information easily available and accessible. This increases the ability of individuals to carry out sophisticated terrorist attacks.

A prominent example is the death of Japan's former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who was shot during a campaign speech on 8 July 2022, sending shockwaves throughout Japan and across the globe. Conducted by a lone attacker using a homemade gun, the assassination was carried out by an individual who was not affiliated with a specific political group or gang and was not motivated by any ideology. Despite having one of the lowest crime rates in the world, the prevalence of incidents by lone attackers has become a growing problem in Japan.

In 2023, with the support of the United Nations Asia and Far East Institute for the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders (UNAFEI), UNICRI collected data in Japan to analyze what happened, how, and why, so that we can formulate preventive measures.

This research also recognizes society's crucial role in preventing violent extremism (PVE). Understanding the radicalization process of lone attackers provides a basis for future PVE interventions that can be replicated in other Member States with similar social structures and challenges. We hope the recommendations in this research will help decision-makers to better understand the key drivers of lone attackers as they formulate preventive measures to make the world a safer place.



# 01

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## Background

### 1. Analytical rationale

Lone attackers, who plan, prepare, and carry out violent attacks without direction from a specific organization, have long been a problem in many countries, and the threat has grown in recent years. Because lone attackers are relatively isolated compared to group attackers and their attacks are perceived as being spontaneous, it is more difficult for law enforcement to detect and thwart their plans. To tackle this issue, there is ongoing research, mainly in Europe and the United States on lone attackers in terms of profiling, psychological traits, and the challenges of identifying them. According to van Buuren,<sup>1</sup> “Academic research has explored topics like the demarcation between lone attackers and terrorist cells or networks, typologies of lone attackers, the motivation of lone attackers, and – lately – the attack patterns of lone actors”.<sup>2</sup> While most definitions of terrorism refer to political, ideological or religious motivations or goals as a constituting part (van Buuren, 2018), there are many terms and definitions for lone attackers (lone wolf, loner, lone attacker, solo terrorist, etc.), and no single, universally accepted definition has been agreed on by academics (Spaaij and Hamm, 2015).<sup>3</sup> Here, lone attackers might be defined as individuals who plan, prepare, and carry out violent acts alone, without direction from a specific political or religious organization – often without any political, ideological or

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<sup>1</sup> Van Buuren, G.M. (2018), Patterns of Lone Attackers [Patterns of Lone Attackers] (translation: Buuren G.M. van). In: Echle C., Gunaratna R., Rueppel P., Sarmah M. (Ed.) *Combating Violent Extremism and Terrorism in Asia and Europe. From cooperation to Collaboration*. Singapore: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung. 55-66.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid 1.

<sup>3</sup> Spaaij, R. & Hamm, M.S. (2015). Key Issues and Research Agendas in Lone Wolf Terrorism, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 38 (3), 167-178.

religious motivations or goals – and who kill or injure many people at the same time in the same place, or who commit murder targeting high-ranking government officials etc.

Despite having one of the lowest crime rates in the world, Japan has experienced a growing problem of incidents committed by lone attackers, which have shocked society as a whole. Indiscriminate killings, where one perpetrator kills many unknown people in a single incident at the same place, occur annually in Japan. For example, 15 cases, including attempts, occurred in 2021 (NHK, 2022).<sup>4</sup> In addition, murder and attempted murder targeting high-ranking government officials, like the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2022 and the attempted assassination of current Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in 2023, occurred in short succession.

Although the number of cases appears low, urgent action is required to deter future incidents, considering the magnitude of the impact such killings have on society, and the possible risk of motivating copycat behaviour from other alienated youths. To enhance understanding of these “black swan”<sup>5</sup> events, sharing experiences, data and ideas regarding this particular threat between practitioners, policymakers and researchers from various regions and countries is essential to develop viable interventions to prevent lone attacks. This study will try to apply the knowledge of research on lone attackers conducted in various countries to incidents in Japan and to examine the commonalities and uniqueness of lone attacks in Japan.

## **2. Analytical strategy**

### **a) Typological classification**

First, this study applied the typology obtained from the analysis of past lone attackers, mainly in Europe and the United States, to the analysis of lone attackers in Japan and attempts to examine what types of lone attackers are most common. In 2015, an American government task force categorized lone attackers into four subgroups based on two dimensions: “ideological autonomy (IA)” (To what extent does the individual share ideology with others?) and “social competence (SC)” (Does the individual have social and psychological difficulties that cause isolation?).<sup>6</sup> Based on this, 98 cases in the US (National Security Critical Issue Task Force, 2015), 33 cases in the US, UK, and Europe

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<sup>4</sup> NHK (2022). Naze issen wo koerunoka: Musabetsu makikomi jiken no shinso [なぜ一線を越えるのか:無差別巻き込み事件の深層, Crossing the Line: The Depths of Indiscriminate Murder Cases] NHK Special. 21 Jun 2022. <https://www.nhk.jp/p/special/ts/2NY2QQLPM3/episode/te/LPV5WXRZY9/>

<sup>5</sup> The Black Swan theory, or the theory of Black Swan events, is a metaphor used to illustrate an event that takes everyone by surprise, has a substantial impact, and is often inadequately explained in hindsight. (Taleb, Nassim Nicholas (2010) [2007]. The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable (2nd ed.). London: Penguin. ISBN 978-0-14103459-1. Retrieved 25 April 2020).

<sup>6</sup> Radicalisation Awareness Network. (2021). Lone Actors as a Challenge for P/CVE, p7-8. Retrieved from [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/radicalisation-awareness-network-ran/publications/lone-actors-challenge-pcve-july-2021\\_en](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/radicalisation-awareness-network-ran/publications/lone-actors-challenge-pcve-july-2021_en)

(Lindekilde et al., 2019)<sup>7</sup>, and 125 cases in the US, UK, Europe, and Israel (Clemmow, et al., 2020)<sup>8</sup> have been classified. The four types of classifications are: Type I “Loner” (high IA, low SC), Type II “Lone follower” (low IA, low SC), Type III “Lone vanguard” (high IA, high SC), and Type IV “Lone soldier” (low IA, high SC)(Table 1). Although this analysis does not include lone attacker cases since 2015, it includes data from the past several decades, and is arguably the most powerful framework providing a comprehensive view of the characteristics and attack patterns of lone attackers. Yamamoto (2023)<sup>9</sup> suggested that many cases of lone attackers that have occurred in Japan in recent years could be classified as Type I “Loner”. This study evaluated this claim by comprehensively examining cases of lone attackers that have occurred in several decades.

**Table 1: The four types of classifications**

Type I Loner	Type II Lone follower	Type III Lone vanguard	Type IV Lone soldier
<b>High Ideological autonomy;</b> Low social competence	Low Ideological autonomy; Low social competence	<b>High Ideological autonomy;</b> <b>High social competence</b>	Low Ideological autonomy; <b>High social competence</b>

## b) Analysis of the radicalization/offending process

This study also analysed the psychological process of how lone attackers emerge, become radicalized, and commit crimes. Previous research has shown that lone attackers go through several stages of becoming radicalized and committing crimes. One of the most representative models is the one propounded by Hamm and Spaaij (2017),<sup>10</sup> who analysed a database<sup>11</sup> of 123 terrorist attacks committed by lone wolf terrorists<sup>12</sup> in the United States from 1940 to mid-2016. According to them, the following five characteristics of radicalization

<sup>7</sup> Lindekilde, L., O’Connor, F., & Schuurman, B. (2019). Radicalization patterns and modes of attack planning and preparation among lone-actor terrorists: an exploratory analysis. *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, 11(2), 113-133.

<sup>8</sup> Clemmow, C., Bouhana, N., & Gill, P. (2020). Analyzing person-exposure patterns in lone-actor terrorism: Implications for threat assessment and intelligence gathering. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 19(2), 451-482.

<sup>9</sup> Yamamoto, M. (2023). Preventing “lone wolf attacks” in Japan: lessons from western research on radicalization. *Freedom From Fear Magazine* (F3):UNICRI.

[https://unicri.it/sites/default/files/2023-05/09\\_Lone%20Wolf%20Attacks.pdf](https://unicri.it/sites/default/files/2023-05/09_Lone%20Wolf%20Attacks.pdf)

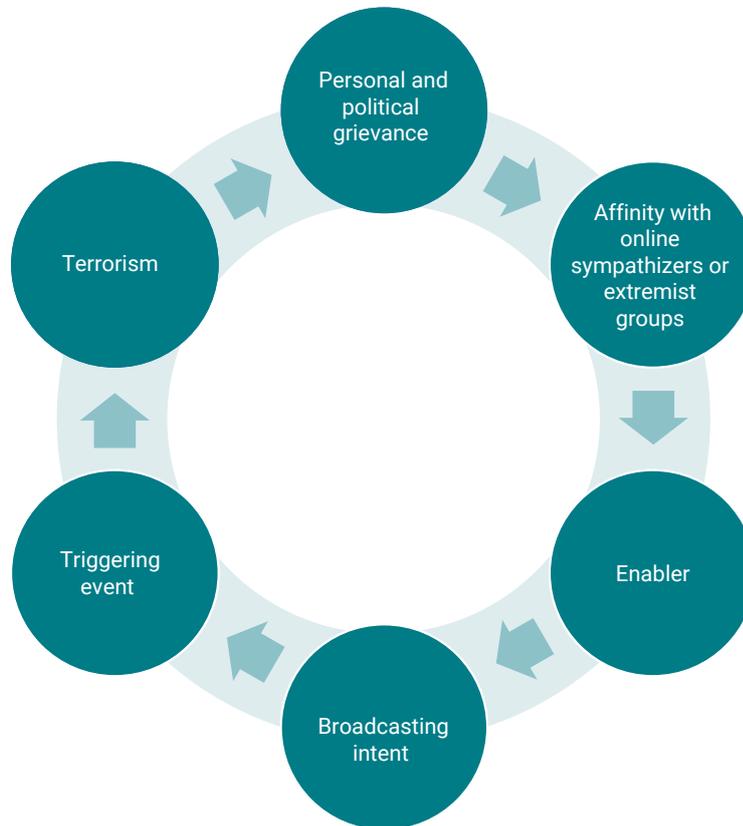
<sup>10</sup> Hamm, M., & Spaaij, R. (2017). *The Age of Lone Wolf Terrorism*. Columbia Univ Press.

<sup>11</sup> “Information on the 123 cases was gathered from an extensive review of previous research, biographies and memories of lone wolf terrorists, media sources, government reports, and most importantly, court documents, including criminal complaints, trial transcripts, supporting affidavits and letters, and medical and psychiatric evaluations.”(p 24).

<sup>12</sup> It is defined as “political violence perpetrated by individuals who act alone; who do not belong to an organized terrorist group or network; who act without the direct influence of a leader or hierarchy, and whose tactics and methods are directed by the individual without any direct outside command or direction.”(pp 23-24).

can be seen in the process of committing a crime: i) Personal and political grievance, ii) Affinity with online sympathizers or extremist groups, iii) Enabler, iv) Broadcasting intent, and v) Triggering event (Figure 1). The contents are summarized below:

Figure 1: Model of Radicalization to Terrorism Among Lone Wolves in the USA (Hamm & Spaaij, 2017)



i) **Personal and political grievance:** While members of large terrorist groups share the group’s unique political and religious grievances, lone wolf terrorists are more likely to link highly personal grievances to a variety of ideologies. Both pre-and post-9/11, this characteristic was found in 80 per cent of the perpetrators.

ii) **Affinity with online sympathizers or extremist groups:** Since many lone wolf terrorists were unable to join a terrorist group, they tended to form a unilateral psychological bond with the terrorist group. In recent years, with the spread of social media, the role has shifted to online sympathizers who share the same values. These characteristics were observed in 63 per cent of lone wolf terrorists in the pre-9/11 era and 48 per cent in the post-9/11 era.

iii) **Enabler:** Lone wolf terrorists are enabled either directly by people who unwittingly assist in planning attacks or indirectly by people who provide inspiration for terrorism. Whereas affinity for extremist groups or with online sympathizers is a vicarious

experience best understood in terms of an ideological validation generated and transmitted by others, an enabler is best understood at a personal level as someone who either performs tasks that facilitate an attack or someone who indirectly encourages terrorism by example. Indirect enablers can include figures who are no longer living. These characteristics were observed in 57 per cent of lone wolf terrorists in the pre-9/11 era and 70 per cent in the post-9/11 era.

iv) **Broadcasting intent:** This is advance notice of the crime. Measures can include telling someone close to them, mentioning it in public, or posting a message on the Internet. Although it is rarely seen in crimes committed by large-scale terrorist groups, it was observed in 84 per cent of cases of lone wolf terrorists in the pre-9/11 era and 70 per cent in the post-9/11 era.

v) **Triggering event:** An event that makes one believe that it is essential to commit a crime and that is a direct cause of the attack, such as the experience of having a family member or friend killed by someone. This was seen in 84 per cent of lone wolf terrorists in the pre-9/11 era and 73 per cent in the post-9/11 era.

Hamm and Spaaij (2017) position the above model not as a linear stage model in the strict sense, but as a heuristic device for identifying individuals who are becoming radicalized and targeting them for intervention. The current study analyses and discusses the extent to which these characteristics seen in Hamm and Spaaij (2017) occur in the radicalization process of Japanese lone attackers and explores the commonalities and differences between the two studies.

As Yamamoto (2023)<sup>13</sup> points out, if many of the lone attackers in Japan are of the aforementioned “Loner” type, it is worth noting the extent to which perpetrators tend to link personal grievances with political and religious grievances in the process of radicalization. In order to be classified as a “Loner” type, it is essential to meet the requirements of ideological autonomy, but in the case of Japanese lone attackers, it is suspected that there was little or no strong sense of achieving any political or religious objectives, and perpetrators are thought to be motivated by strong personal grudges or a sense of misfortune. Obuchi (2018)<sup>14</sup> states that the psychological factors of criminals in indiscriminate killings are despair, desperation, and a heightened urge to self-destruct, which differ from terrorists belonging to extremist groups, who expect social rewards from the group, such as gaining the admiration of peers, status and honour within the group. This study will also focus on whether lone attackers exhibit self-destructive impulses immediately before committing crimes, such as feelings of hopelessness, suicidal thoughts, or suicide attempts.

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<sup>13</sup> op.cit.

<sup>14</sup> Obuchi, K. [大淵憲一](2018). Musabetsu tero no shinri bunseki [無差別テロの心理分析]. Keisei[刑政], 129(3), 80-93. Tokyo, Japan: Kyosei Kyokai[矯正協会].

### c) Personal factors that promote radicalization

Among the four types proposed by Connor and Flynn (2015),<sup>15</sup> there appear to be individual attributes that make people more likely to fall into a particular type. For example, some individuals who have low social competence and tend to be isolated from their surroundings due to their nervous temperament, impaired cognitive function, difficulty controlling emotions, or excessive aggressive behaviour may have suffered from abusive behaviour from their parents or peers that took place at an early age. Furthermore, in the case of people who do not share ideology with others and have a high degree of ideological autonomy, or, in cases where the crime is committed for reasons that are difficult for normal people to understand, it is possible that they are controlled by unique beliefs caused by delusions, hallucinations, and auditory hallucinations, etc. These personal characteristics are thought to play a facilitative role in the process by which individuals become radicalized and commit crimes. In addition, the history of mental illness and the presence/absence and severity of mental symptoms at the time of the crime have an extremely important influence on the results of a psychiatric evaluation and the determination of criminal responsibility. Therefore, in this study, from a developmental psychopathology perspective, the individual attributes of the lone attacker, such as mental illness and its symptoms, intellectual and developmental disabilities, antisocial behavioural tendencies, criminal history, and personality, were analysed, along with various growth factors thought to be involved in their formation.

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<sup>15</sup> Connor, J. and Flynn, C.R. (2015). Report: Lone wolf terrorism. Security Studies Program, National Security Critical Issue Task Force, Georgetown University.

# 02

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## Method

This study focuses on indiscriminate killings and murders by lone perpetrators targeting persons who were not directly acquainted with the perpetrator. The perpetrators targeted in this study were defined as those who met both of the following conditions: they were not members of a specific political/religious/antisocial/extremist group, and they were not instructed to commit those offences by any of these groups.

This study covers incidents that occurred in Japan from the beginning of the economic depression in 1991 to September 2023. After the collapse of the “bubble economy,” the Japanese economy’s growth rate continued to stagnate at an average low of 0.8 per cent, resulting in a high unemployment rate and a rapid increase in the number of suicides.

For cases in which convictions were finalized in criminal trials in Japan by September 2023, as determined by searching databases (“Case Search”, “Westlaw Japan”) for criminal judgments, the information, such as contents of the judgment, modus operandi, circumstances leading up to the crime, the offender’s personal characteristics, upbringing history, family relationships, and psychiatric evaluation, etc., was compiled into a table for each incident and analysed.

In addition, in view of the seriousness of the cases, although judgments have not yet been finalized, two major cases that occurred in recent years were included (the assassination of former Prime Minister Abe, and the animation company arson attack), and information was collected using the databases of major newspapers, and the above items were summarized in a table.

Cases in which there is no judgment document, i.e. cases in which the suspect died at the time of the crime, and the case was not prosecuted (2 cases), cases in which the crime was committed by a minor and did not go through a criminal trial (1 case), and cases in which the suspect was found not guilty due to insanity (1 case) were excluded from the analysis of this study. As a result, the 17 incidents shown in Table 2 were selected for analysis.

**Table 2: Cases that were the subject of this study**

Case Number	Name of Case	Date of Occurrence	Mode of Crime	Age at time of crime	Gender of perpetrator	Victims
1	Ikebukuro random attack	8-Sep-99	He stabbed 10 people consecutively with a kitchen knife on the street in the daytime.	23	Male	2 dead, 8 injured
2	Shimonoseki random attack	29-Sep-99	He drove his car out of control inside the station, hitting seven people, then got out of the car and stabbed eight people indiscriminately with a knife.	35	Male	5 dead, 10 injured
3	Osaka Elementary School stabbings	8-Jun-01	Invaded the premises of an elementary school and killed and injured first and second grade students and teachers with a knife.	38	Male	8 dead, 15 injured
4	Nagoya-shi random attack	30-Mar-03	Attacked women, stabbed one to death with a knife and injured another.	38	Female	1 dead, 1 injured
5	Sendai arcade street truck hit-and-run incident	2-Apr-05	He drove into the arcade with a truck, drove out of control, and killed and injured seven pedestrians.	40	Male	3 dead, 4 injured
6	Tsuchiura random attack	19-Mar-08	He killed and injured multiple passersby with a knife at a train station.	24	Male	2 dead, 7 injured
7	Akihabara random attack	8-Jun-08	He drove into a pedestrian zone with a large truck, hit five pedestrians, then got out of the truck and used a dagger to kill and injure multiple passersby.	26	Male	7 dead, 10 injured

8	Hachioji random attack	22-Jul-08	A man stabbed a store employee and a customer with a kitchen knife at a shopping centre in a station building, resulting in the death of the store employee.	33	Male	1 dead, 1 injured
9	Osaka private video booth store fire	1-Oct-08	Inside the theatre, where people could watch videos in private rooms, he used toilet paper and set himself on fire with a lighter.	46	Male	16 dead, 4 injured
10	Osaka Konohana-ku pachinko parlor arson murder	5-Jul-09	At a pachinko parlor in a multi-tenant building, he poured gasoline and set it on fire, killing 5 people and injuring 18 others.	41	Male	5 dead, 18 injured
11	Automobile manufacturer random attack	22-Jun-10	He entered the premises of an automobile manufacturer through the gate, drove his vehicle out of control, and hit employees he encountered.	42	Male	1 dead, 11 injured
12	Osaka Shinsaibashi random attack	10-Jun-12	He stabbed two passersby to death with a knife on the street.	36	Male	2 dead
13	Sagamihara stabbings	26-Jul-16	A former staff member at a welfare facility for people with intellectual disabilities fatally injured residents and staff with a knife.	26	Male	19 dead, 26 injured
14	Bullet train mass stabbing incident	9-Jun-18	A man stabbed 3 passengers with a machete on a bullet train, killing one and seriously injuring two others.	22	Male	1 dead, 2 injured
15	Miharu-machi hit-and-run incident	31-May-20	He killed two road cleaners with a stolen truck.	50	Male	2 dead
16	Animation company arson attack	18-Jul-19	He broke into the anime production company, doused it with gasoline and set it on fire.	42	Male	36 dead, 33 injured
17	Assassination of Shinzo Abe	8-Jul-22	A former prime minister was shot and killed from behind with a homemade gun while giving a speech to support the national election.	41	Male	1 dead



# 03

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## Results

### 1. Overview of the incidents

#### a) Timing

There were two cases in the 1990s, eight cases between 2000 and 2009, five cases between 2010 and 2019, and two cases after 2020. Many cases in recent years are still in the trial process, so the number of cases in recent years appears to be relatively small in this study, which is limited to cases where judgments have been finalized. A relatively large number of cases (10) occurred before 2010, and seven cases occurred after 2011.

#### b) Gender and age of the perpetrator

Among the 17 perpetrators, 16 were male and one was female. They were almost evenly distributed between their 20s and 40s, with five in their 20s, five in their 30s, six in their 40s, and one in his 50s, with an average age of 35.5 years.

#### c) Modus operandi

The most common method used was a knife (7 cases), followed by a car (3 cases), arson (3 cases), and a homemade firearm (1 case). Two cases (No. 2 and No. 7) involved the use of a car and a knife in combination.

#### d) Victim characteristics

There are two types of victims: unspecified people who are targeted indiscriminately, and cases where members of a specific group or specific person are targeted. The only case that targeted a person was No. 17, which targeted former Prime Minister Abe. Cases targeting specific groups include two cases (No. 11 and No. 16) which targeted employees

of specific companies, one case (No. 3) which targeted children at a specific school, and one case that targeted users of a specific facility (No. 13). The most common incidents were those indiscriminately targeting citizens passing by on the street, working staff, store employees and customers who happened to be inside the store, and passengers on public transport, with 12 incidents (Nos. 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15).

### **e) Number of victims**

The minimum number of deaths per incident was one, the maximum was 36, and the average number of deaths per incident was approximately seven (mean=6.59). The number of victims varied widely depending on the method of killing and the attributes of the victims. In the case of arson, No. 16 caused 36 deaths and No. 9 caused 19 deaths, and even the smallest cases, such as No. 10 caused five deaths. In cases where a car and a knife were used, No. 2 resulted in five deaths, and No. 7 resulted in seven deaths. Furthermore, there is a tendency for the number of victims to increase when the victims were severely disabled persons, as in No. 13 (19 deaths), or a young child in the first or second grade of elementary school, as in No. 3 (8 deaths).

### **f) Characteristics of the perpetrator**

i) **Educational background:** The educational background of the perpetrators was generally low, only two (11.8%) had graduated from university. The perpetrators included three middle school graduates, three high school dropouts, five high school graduates, two vocational school dropouts, one vocational school graduate, two university graduates, and one junior college graduate. This low level of education is believed to have reduced the chances of the perpetrators finding gainful employment that provided a stable income.

ii) **Occupation:** Regarding employment status at the time of the crime, 11 out of 17 (64.7%) were unemployed. With the exception of cases like No. 6, where the perpetrator lived at home with his parents and sometimes earned money through part-time work, more than two-thirds of the perpetrators lived alone, lacked a stable source of income, and experienced financial difficulties. Even in the case of employed perpetrators, many of them faced occupational challenges, such as difficulties in continuing their self-employment due to natural disasters (No. 2) and inability to secure work due to injuries (No. 8), and some of them were temporary employees (No. 7 and No. 11) who had unstable employment conditions.

iii) **Family members living together:** 12 people lived alone, and two people had no fixed address, with more than 80 per cent living alone and in isolation. Three people lived with their parents and other family members.

iv) **Marital/divorce history:** Among all 17 perpetrators, only four had been married, and all of them were divorced at the time of their attacks. Although some of them had children, none of them were living with their children at the time of the crimes, as they were separated due to divorce or later became independent.

v) **Mental illness/intellectual disability/personality disorder:** Except for No. 17, where the trial has not started and no psychiatric evaluation has been concluded, psychiatric evaluations were conducted during the investigation stage or trial in 16 cases. In this process, the mental illness and personality disorder that they suffered from were recognized, and the perpetrators' ability to take full responsibility was questioned. As a result, in all 16 cases, even if the perpetrators suffered from mental illness, they were found to be mentally competent to be held responsible for their crimes. Seven people (41.2%) were suffering from some kind of mental illness at the time of the crime, including two with schizophrenia, one with delusional disorder, one with mild depression, one with stimulant addiction sequelae and stimulant dependence, one with cannabis use disorder, and one with conduct disorder. In addition, two perpetrators (11.7%) had an intellectual disability, with mild or mild to moderate mental retardation, and one had a specific intellectual developmental disorder that could not be classified as either. As a result of psychiatric evaluation, some type of personality disorder was diagnosed in nine out of 16 cases (56.3%), or even if no clear diagnosis was given, personality traits that contributed to the crime were recognized. Various personality disorder diagnoses have been given, including Gemütlose, schizoid personality disorder, avoidant personality disorder, paranoid personality disorder, antisocial personality disorder, borderline personality disorder, and narcissistic personality disorder.

vi) **Suicidal ideation/suicide attempt:** Suicidal ideations or suicide attempts were observed in nine cases (52.9%), more than half of the 17 cases. In three cases (No. 2, No. 5, and No. 9), the perpetrator attempted suicide at the same time or immediately after the crime by taking large amounts of sleeping pills, setting his clothes or carry-on bag on fire, etc., but none of them were successful. Although not directly related to the crime, past suicide attempts had occurred in five cases (29.4%): No. 3, No. 7, No. 10, No. 16, and No. 17. Many of them were already suffering from hardships in their lives prior to the crime: No. 17 attempted suicide in order to provide death benefits for his brother and sister who were living in poverty; No. 16 lost hope after his work was ridiculed on an Internet bulletin board; No. 7 planned suicide every time he felt lonely. In addition, No. 6 committed the crime because he desired to be sentenced to death.

vii) **Criminal history:** Four people (23.5%), No. 3, No. 12, No. 15, and No. 16, had served sentences in prison before committing the lone attacks. No. 3 had been imprisoned for rape, No. 12 had been imprisoned three times for possessing and using stimulants, No. 15 had been imprisoned twice for assault and damage to property, and No. 16 had been convicted twice for stealing underwear and robbery. Although No. 3 had only one prior conviction, he had been arrested over a dozen times and had a long and wide-ranging history of antisocial behaviour, including rape, assault/injury, and property damage.

As outlined above, the 17 perpetrators in Japan were between the ages of 20 and 40 (average age 35), most of them were men, had an educational background up to high school, and were lonely. More than half had some type of personality disorder, had suicidal thoughts or had attempted suicide, and just over one-third suffered from a mental illness.

The high degree of pathology among these subjects is noteworthy. RAN (2021)<sup>16</sup> reports that lone attackers in Europe and the United States include many people with mental health problems, suicidal intentions, and personality disorders compared to the general population. It can be said that the Japanese lone attackers who were the subject of this study have a similar profile to those of Western lone attackers. In these Japanese cases, many had a combination of factors such as a personality disorder, including unemployment or unstable employment, mental illness/conditions, suicide attempts/suicidal ideation, and criminal records. The most extreme example is the perpetrator of case No. 3, who has many comorbidities, including a criminal record of rape and more than a dozen arrests, a personality bias of “Gemütlose”, specific developmental disorder, temporary delusions of attention/persecution, persistent delusions of jealousy, antisocial conduct disorder, and a history of suicide attempts. The perpetrator was unable to secure a stable job due to his own biased personality, anti-social behavioural tendencies, and delusional tendencies, and he became poor. Growing resentful towards his ex-wife, whom he divorced, his biological father, who refused to give him financial support, and society in general, he broke into an elementary school, killed eight children with a kitchen knife, and injured 15 other children and teachers. In this way, a certain pattern can be seen in which people who have many risk factors in adapting to social life repeatedly maladapt, and finally, economic hardship becomes a trigger for crime.

## **2. Typological classification**

### **a) Overview of typology**

In order to capture the characteristics of Japanese lone attackers, the 17 cases were examined and classified according to the four types mentioned earlier (Type I “Loner”, Type II “Lone follower”, Type III “Lone vanguard”, and Type IV “Lone soldier”). These four types are based on the idea that two factors are involved in why lone attackers commit crimes without belonging to an existing organization: the perpetrator’s social competence and ideological autonomy. This is because these two factors are the main conditions that determine whether they act independently rather than as a part of an organization. In order to act as a member of an organization, one is required to suppress one’s personal desires, protect secrets, and reliably carry out crimes while cooperating with one’s friends in order to carry out the orders given by the organization. To fulfil these roles within an organization, members are required to possess appropriate social competence. Some lone attackers demonstrate social competence and integrate into society. They also make contact with existing organizations and rebel independently while receiving support. On the other hand, some individuals are rejected or excluded from existing organizations due to a lack of social competence and are therefore forced to commit crimes alone. Additionally, some of the ideologies that the lone attackers risk their lives to achieve are the same or similar to those of existing organizations, while others have strong and

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<sup>16</sup> Radicalisation Awareness Network. (2021). Lone Actors as a Challenge for P/CVE, Retrieved from [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/radicalisation-awareness-network-ran/publications/lone-actors-challenge-pcve-july-2021\\_en](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/radicalisation-awareness-network-ran/publications/lone-actors-challenge-pcve-july-2021_en)

unique ideologies. In the latter case, because the ideology is difficult to share with others, it is difficult to gather allies who are willing to put their lives on the line to realize that unique ideology, and as a result, they are forced to commit crimes alone. As mentioned above, individual differences in social competence and degree of ideological autonomy have a large influence on whether lone attackers commit crimes alone, and it is thought that they can be categorized based on these factors.

An overview of the definitions of each of the four types by Connor, et al. (2015)<sup>17</sup> is as follows:

i) **Type I “Loner” (high IA, low SC):** This type exhibits low social competence and high ideological autonomy. Loners act alone to achieve their unique ideological goals. Their low social competence indicates an inability to build relationships with peers and mobilize others to their cause. Loners tend to be the most isolated of the lone attacker types because they have difficulty socializing with others and distrust others. Theodor “Ted” Kaczynski is a prime example among American solo attackers. Kaczynski was originally the youngest assistant professor at the University of California, Berkeley, but he resigned from that position and lived a solitary, self-sufficient life. Kaczynski wrote a manifesto called “Industrial Society and its Future,” and carried out a series of bombings across the United States targeting people involved in modern science and technology, killing three people and seriously injuring 23 others.

ii) **Type II “Lone follower” (low IA, low SC):** This type is characterized by low social competence and low ideological autonomy. This type of person advocates the ideology of an existing terrorist organization, but because they lack the social competence necessary to be accepted by the terrorist group, they are unable to join the group and commit acts of terrorism alone. It has been suggested that Lone followers are more strongly motivated by personal grievances. A typical example is Michael Zehaf-Bibeau, the perpetrator of the Canadian Capitol shooting. Zehaf-Bibeau had an Islamic extremist ideology and expressed his desire to seek revenge for the government’s atrocities against Muslims in the Middle East before committing the crime, although he did not belong to any terrorist organization. The crime is believed to be a reaction to a personal crisis rather than politically motivated.

iii) **Type III “Lone vanguard” (high IA, high SC):** This type is characterized by high social competence and high ideological autonomy. Lone vanguards carry out terrorist acts alone to advance their own ideology. They have the social skills necessary to form relationships with others, but their unique ideology makes it difficult for others to understand and follow them, and it is difficult for them to form ties with existing terrorist organizations. A typical example of this category is Anders Behring Breivik. Breivik perpetrated a series of terrorist attacks that killed eight people in a bomb attack on a group of government buildings in Oslo, Norway, and then posed as a police officer and killed 69 young Labor Party members on Utøya Island. Breivik summarized his radical ideas in a 1,500-page manifesto. The idea is based on documents from

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<sup>17</sup> op.cit.

existing right-wing extremist factions, but it is said to be unique and different from the established ideology of extremist organizations. Breivik believed that a lone attack was ideal to ensure the confidentiality of the attack plan. He was an ordinary Norwegian, unremarkable in social life, and was a moderately successful entrepreneur in his youth.

iv) **Type IV “Lone soldier” (low IA, high SC):** This type is characterized by high social competence and low ideological autonomy. Lone soldiers carry out terrorist acts alone for strategic purposes to further the political and religious objectives of existing terrorist organizations. Because they share the ideology of a particular terrorist organization, they are likely to come into contact with terrorist networks and receive some kind of assistance. In addition, because they have relatively high social competence, they function as members of general society. A typical example of this type is Nidal Hasan. Hasan was a military doctor in the U.S. Army when, in retaliation for the U.S. war in the Islamic world, he opened fire on a base medical facility, killing 13 people and injuring 31 others. Hasan had contact with two of the terrorists who committed the September 11 attacks at a mosque in Virginia and also attended a sermon by Al-Qaeda leader Anwar al-Awlaki.

## b) Japanese lone attackers seen from these four types

Of the 17 cases shown in Table 2, there are very few cases that fall into the four types shown in the classifications above.

No. 13 is thought to belong to either Type I Loner or Type III Lone vanguard. Late at night on 26 July 2016, the perpetrator broke into the facility where he used to work for people with severe disabilities, restrained the night shift staff with cable ties, and then assaulted the severely disabled facility users who were asleep. He attacked people with a knife, killing 19 people and injuring 24 others. His motive for the crime revealed at the trial is as follows: While working at a facility for severely disabled people, which was the target of the attack, he came to believe that severely disabled people were unhappy and that they were unnecessary and caused misfortune to their families and those around them. He believed that if severely disabled people could be euthanized, money would not be wasted, and the surplus funds could be used to revitalize the world economy and prevent World War III. He planned and executed a mass murder of severely disabled people who were unable to communicate, with the aim of creating a world where severely disabled people could be euthanized with the consent of their families. He committed the crime in the hope that what he did would resonate with the world and trigger similar actions in other countries across the world. Since the Illuminati cards (a card game that the perpetrator believed predicted events that would occur in the world) suggested that he was a legendary leader, he wanted to become a pioneer who would change the world (The Asahi Shimbun Newspaper Coverage Crew, 2020).<sup>18</sup> His ideology is thought to be a variant of eugenics, but it was a highly original ideology conceived from his own work experience, rather than one derived from the ideology of an existing terrorist organization

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<sup>18</sup> The Asahi Shimbun Newspaper Coverage Crew [朝日新聞取材班] (2020) Sagami-hara Massacre [相模原障害者殺傷事件]. Asahi Bunko [朝日文庫].

or a specific individual. He committed the crime while identifying himself as a revolutionary in order to realize this ideology, and he is considered to have a high level of ideological autonomy. Approximately five months before committing the crime, he had made a number of proposals under the title "New Japan Order," such as "murdering people with disabilities," "lifting the ban on medical marijuana," and "recruiting organized crime groups as Japan's military." He wrote a document describing his plan, visited the official residence of the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and delivered a letter addressed to the Speaker of the House of Representatives, foretelling that he would commit the crime himself. In this letter, he described a specific plan and method to kill 260 people with disabilities, and he requested that the government guarantee that he would be released within two years on the grounds of insanity and that he would receive 500 million yen (3.2 Million US\$) in financial support, after he turned himself in and was arrested. He was reported to the police, and he was treated as an emergency admission to the psychiatric department of a hospital based on the Mental Health and Welfare Act. He was forced to retire from the facility where he worked, remained unemployed, and finally committed a crime driven by the delusion that a gang was trying to kill him. Contrary to his hopes, no sympathisers who share his ideology have emerged or committed similar acts.

It is difficult to evaluate his social competence. The types of classification differ depending on how social competence is evaluated. In elementary school, he was a cheerful and friendly child who liked to stand out and had no particular problems. In junior high and high school, he was also a leader in his class and even dated female students, leaving a good impression on them, such as being kind. He went on to university with the aim of becoming an elementary school teacher, and his evaluation of his teaching practice was not bad. After graduating from university, he got a job at a transportation company but changed jobs as he became interested in working at a welfare facility for people with disabilities. On the other hand, he began interacting with delinquent groups during his junior high school days, and his temper led to problems such as assaults, injuries, and vandalism. While at university, he got a tattoo and began abusing substances such as marijuana. After graduating, he had interactions with organized crime groups and was even referred to the prosecutor's office for causing violence in the city. When he first started working at a facility for people with severe disabilities, he was positively evaluated by his superiors and colleagues as a bright and motivated staff member who spoke kindly to people with disabilities and treated them with respect. However, he began to receive multiple warnings for problematic behaviour, such as assaulting people with disabilities and for a poor attitude at work. While he behaved appropriately with like-minded friends, women and in public relationships and was never isolated, he consistently showed a tendency to display antisocial behaviour since adolescence, which grew worse with age. He had a strong anti-social side, and ultimately it cannot be said that he was fully adapted to the workplace. In his personal relationships, he was not isolated from his peers and had a certain degree of social competence, and several months before the incident, he told others about his plan to commit mass murder at a facility for the disabled. He also tried to invite them to cooperate with him in the crime. People around him tried to dissuade him from carrying out his criminal plans due to his radical ideas and actions, and nobody

around him was persuaded to assist him. He was unable to utilize his social competence to increase the number of associates.

As seen above, if his ability to form and maintain private peer relationships is evaluated, he can be classified as a Lone vanguard with a high level of ideological autonomy and social competence. However, in the months before the crime, he may be classified as a Loner, considering that he lost his job and failed to find an accomplice due to his extremist ideology and plans for the crime.

Besides No. 13, the only person whose criminal motive seems to have some political significance is No. 17, the perpetrator of the assassination of former Prime Minister Abe. On 8 July 2022, during the final stages of the House of Councillors election campaign, the perpetrator shot and killed former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe with a self-made gun while he was giving a speech in support of the Liberal Democratic Party's official candidate on the road in front of a private railway station. As of January 2024, the trial has not yet begun, and there are no public documents regarding the motive for the crime. In the course of the trial, the motive for the crime, the background of the crime, the perpetrator's upbringing, and the results of a psychiatric evaluation, etc., will likely be revealed officially. Therefore, how he would be classified according to the lone attacker typology should be carefully considered after obtaining such information. However, according to newspaper reports and books that include his statements during the interrogation by the police and the messages he posted on Twitter, it appears that his mother was a member of a religious organization called the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (formerly known as the Unification Church). He had a deep resentment for the church because his mother repeatedly donated large sums of money to the organization, resulting in bankruptcy and misery in his family. He intended to kill its president, Hak Ja Han, but found that it was difficult to do so. It has also been revealed that he assassinated former Prime Minister Abe because he perceived him as being sympathetic to the former Unification Church. Because he clearly stated on Twitter that the motive for the assassination was not political, it is currently understood in the Japanese media that Abe's assassination was not political terrorism. However, by assassinating Mr. Abe, who was rumoured to be a sympathizer of the former Unification Church, the church would attract public attention, be accused of exploiting its members, and be condemned legally and socially. Some have pointed out that if this was his purpose, it could be called "social terrorism" (Gonoi and Ikeda, 2023).<sup>19</sup>

It is an undeniable fact that a former prime minister of a country was murdered. In the wake of the incident, many people learned through news reports that the former Unification Church and a particular faction of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), led by Mr. Abe, had a deep relationship through which the Unification Church provided volunteer support for the party's election campaigns over many years. In the future, there is a possibility that this incident will have a certain degree of influence on politicians who were associated with the former Unification Church and the ruling LDP, and the incident may have great

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<sup>19</sup> Gonoi, I. & Ikeda, K. [五ノ井郁夫・池田香代子] (2023). Yamagami Tetsuya to nihon no ushinawareta 30 nen[山上徹也と日本の失われた30年]. Shueisha International [集英社インターナショナル].

political significance regardless of the perpetrator's intentions. Considering its grave consequences, there may be some validity in treating it as a case of political terrorism.

No. 17 is considered to belong to "Type III Lone vanguards" among the four types of lone attackers. His ideology is a denial of the former Unification Church, and his crimes are considered to be revenge or sanctions against the former Unification Church. In Japan, since the late 1960s, the former Unification Church's student organization, the Collegiate Association for the Research of Principles (CARP), has been recruiting ordinary students in questionable ways, and since the 1980s, they have been selling expensive vases, seals, and crystals, etc. In the 1990s, there were mass weddings in which believers were forced to marry spouses chosen for them by the founder, Sun Myung Moon. These methods have become a social problem, and their problematic nature has become widely known to the public. Consequently, there may be a number of people who view the former Unification Church negatively. However, radical anti-Unification Church ideology, such as No. 17's which goes so far as to aim to kill the president, cannot be said to be common in Japan, and therefore, it can be said that his ideological autonomy is high. Regarding his social competence, he does not seem to have had any particular problems as a child. In fact, his academic ability was so high that he entered one of the prefecture's most prestigious high schools. After his father committed suicide, his mother repeatedly made large donations to the former Unification Church, plunging the family into poverty, and he was deprived of the opportunity to attend university. Despite facing such adversity, he continued his efforts and achieved some results, such as working as a fixed-term member of the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force, and working part-time and as an employee at a temporary agency in order to obtain higher-paying occupations, such as obtaining qualifications as a surveyor and financial planner. Shortly before committing the crime, problems with his work attitude became noticeable, such as arguments with co-workers and absenteeism without permission, but up until then, he did not seem to have caused any problems at work. He was also deeply devoted to his siblings and said that he once attempted suicide in order to use his own life insurance money to help his siblings who were in dire straits (Suzuki, 2023).<sup>20</sup> He was an introverted and serious person and seems to have had a certain degree of adaptability to society. In addition, he showed a strong will and high self-control to achieve his goal – that is, the assassination of former Prime Minister Abe. Specifically, he spent about a year completing the homemade gun used as the murder weapon and made a detailed plan to carry out the crime, including a detailed investigation of Mr. Abe's campaign destinations. Considering these points, it cannot be said that his social competence is low. This is why he seems like a Type III Lone vanguard.

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<sup>20</sup> Suzuki, E. [鈴木エイト] (2023). Who was Tetsuya Yamagami? [「山上徹也」とは何者だったのか?] Kodanshya +α Shinsyo [講談社+α新書]

Of the 17 Japanese lone attackers analysed, only No. 13 and No. 17 can be called ideologically motivated crimes and terrorism.<sup>21</sup> Thus, a common feature of recent acts of killing and wounding large numbers of people carried out by lone Japanese attackers is the lack of a clear political or religious ideology.

### **c) Japanese lone attackers with no political or religious objectives**

#### **i) Why Japan's lone attackers have no ideology**

Lone attackers outside Japan tend to become radicalized through a process such as internalization of the ideology of a terrorist group and commit violent crimes with the aim of achieving some political or religious objective, combining their personal grievances with political or religious grievances, idolizing notorious terrorists, and following the ideology of terrorist organizations. In Japan in recent years, with the exception of No. 13 and No. 17 as described above, indiscriminate killings by lone attackers who are motivated solely by personal grievances and desires without a specific ideological foundation have been common, and it can be said that a lone attacker without ideology is a typical example. A major reason why such lone attacks continue to occur in Japan is that there are currently no political or religious groups in the country that seek to achieve their political or religious objectives through violence. Terrorism with clearly stated political objectives has been carried out in Japan in the past. From the 1960s to the early 1970s, there were frequent violent clashes between students from New Left political groups – armed with square timbers and Molotov cocktails – and police and riot police. Far-left terrorist organizations formed during this period were responsible for horrific terrorist incidents such as serial bombings of businesses in Japan and mass shootings at airports overseas. However, from the late 1970s onward, as young people became more averse to violence and increasingly economically affluent, left-wing extremist political groups lost support and disappeared. Meanwhile, from the late 1980s, Aum Shinrikyo, a cult led by Shoko Asahara, grew into a large religious organization through hefty donations and inspirational marketing, but eventually became armed with guns, bombs, and biological and chemical weapons, and began plans to overthrow the State. This led to indiscriminate killings, including the spraying of nerve agents such as sarin and VX gas in urban areas and subways. In 1995, founder Asahara was arrested, and the Tokyo District Court ordered the cult to disband. Since Aum Shinrikyo, no organization that seeks to achieve political or religious goals through violence has had any influence in Japan. Economically and socially disadvantaged people in Japan are not politically organized and live in isolation. In this way, those who are dissatisfied with Japanese society and wish to change it through violence are unable to associate with political or religious organizations that are willing to support such violence. The perpetrator, then, is forced to plan and carry out the crime alone. Japanese lone attackers commit violent crimes without advocating for any

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<sup>21</sup> Although there is no definition of “terrorism” under international law, as used here, terrorism refers to “...a form of violent struggle in which violence is deliberately used against civilians in order to achieve political goals (nationalistic, socioeconomic, ideological, religious).” (Ganor, B. (2005) *The Counter-Terrorism Puzzle: A Guide for Decision Makers*. New Brunswick, N.J.)

political or religious ideology because there are no violent political or religious groups in the country that promote the radicalization of individuals.

## ii) A typology of Non-Ideological Lone Attackers: Towards an understanding of Japanese cases

The remaining 15 cases, excluding No. 13 and No. 17, which involve some kind of ideology, can be divided into three groups from the perspective of the criminal motive: *Instrumental Lone Attackers*, *Retaliatory Lone Attackers*, and *Extended Suicide Lone Attackers* (Table 3).

**Table 3: A typology of Non-Ideological Lone Attackers in Japan**

Japanese Non-Ideological Lone Attackers		
Instrumental Lone Attackers	Retaliatory Lone Attackers; Specific group targeting type, Unspecified majority targeting type	Extended Suicide Lone Attackers

### ***Instrumental Lone Attackers***

This group includes No. 14, No. 15, and No. 6. What they all have in common is that they committed indiscriminate killings to achieve their own selfish goals. The use of aggressive behaviour to achieve a goal is called “instrumental aggression.”

No. 14 attacked passengers with a machete on a bullet train on 9 June 2018, killing one person and seriously injuring two others. Immediately before the crime, he was unemployed and homeless and committed the crime with the intention of getting a life sentence so he could spend the rest of his life in prison. He was sentenced to life in prison and shouted with joy as the sentence was handed down.

On 30 March 2020, using a stolen truck, No. 15 killed two volunteers who were cleaning the road. The crime occurred just two days after he was released from prison. Even though he had received support for his immediate living expenses and had a new job and a new place to live, he still had to face new relationships and adjust to an unfamiliar environment. This was caused by his anxiety over the job he had no experience in, so he committed the crime as he preferred to stay in prison for a long time.

No. 6 spent his days holed up at home playing games after graduating from high school. Hoping that he would be sentenced to death, he stabbed a person to death with a knife at a private house he visited on 19 March 2008. On 23 March he killed one person and injured seven others when he attacked passersby with a knife on the passageway at a railway station.

These three people found it extremely difficult and painful to live independently in society, and hoped to be sentenced to death or life in prison. To make that wish come true, they committed indiscriminate killings. Japan’s economy is currently in a long-term slump and

it is anticipated that the economic difficulties and growing poverty may result in more of this type of lone attacker, who kills indiscriminately hoping to escape poverty through either a death sentence or life imprisonment.

***Retaliatory Lone Attackers (Specific group targeting type/ Unspecified majority targeting type)***

This group attributes their undesirable circumstances to some kind of violation, such as discrimination or malicious treatment by others or society. Their deep anger and resentment trigger the criminal incidents. The purpose of the crime is to retaliate or punish the person or group that the perpetrators perceive to have caused the violation, discrimination, or ill-treatment. Unlike Instrumental Lone Attackers, they do not desire to be punished. This type has two subtypes, depending on the target of the attack: one that targets a specific group with whom they have no direct relationship and one that kills indiscriminately.

**i) Specific group targeting type – Retaliatory Lone Attackers**

Perpetrators who target persons indiscriminately for belonging to specific groups recognize that they have been subjected to some form of violation, unfair discrimination, or other aversive treatment from specific groups. Out of resentment or anger, they indiscriminately attack people belonging to that group. No. 16 and No. 11 fall under this category.

No. 16 broke into the first studio of an animation production company, on 18 July 2019, poured gasoline in a bucket, and ignited it with a lighter, causing a fire. The building burned down, killing 36 employees and seriously injuring 33 others. This incident had the highest death toll in over 100 years in Japan. During the trial, he stated that the motive for the crime was as follows: Influenced by that company's original novel, he began writing novels in the hope of becoming a novelist. In 2016, he submitted two of his novels to that company's awards, but they were rejected. However, a movie produced by that company that was released afterward, depicted a scene that was similar to what he wrote in his submission. He believed that the company had plagiarized his idea, so he was deeply angered, and committed the crime in revenge. He also stated that he did not target a specific employee, but rather targeted the company as a whole. From his statement at trial, it is clear that the crime was an attack based on a grudge that indiscriminately targeted the entire company, or in other words, all of its employees.

Like No. 16, No. 11 committed indiscriminate killings targeting employees of a specific company. On 22 June 2010, No.11 entered the factory premises of a major automobile manufacturer where he worked as a temporary employee, and, using a car manufactured by the company as a weapon, ploughed through a large number of people during the transition between the night and day shifts. He drove the vehicle for about 10 minutes at a speed of 40 km/h on the road within the factory grounds, hitting 12 employees, killing one and seriously injuring 11 others. The motive behind the crime revealed at the trial was as follows: The perpetrator, who was suffering from delusional disorder, developed a paranoia that he was being stalked by multiple co-workers, and complained to his boss at

work and a police officer. However, because no one took action, he became angry at the company as a whole, claiming that the company knew his co-workers were stalking him and condoned it, and, consequently, he committed indiscriminate killing. It was alleged that he was trying to damage the company's reputation.

No. 16 and No. 11 both targeted entire companies that they perceived as having caused them harm, and indiscriminately killed or injured employees associated with the entities with the intention of retaliating.

## ii) Unspecified majority targeting type – Retaliatory Lone Attackers

Similar to the specific group targeting type, this is driven by strong negative emotions such as anger or a grudge and leads to indiscriminate killings with retaliatory intent. The attack is unique in that it targets an unspecified number of people, such as passersby or patrons of a store. This type is the most common among the 17 cases analysed. For example, No. 1, No. 2, No. 7, and No. 10 are typical examples of this type.

On 8 September 1999, No. 1 shouted, "Ah! I'm disgusted. I'll kill you!" on the sidewalk in Ikebukuro, Toshima Ward, Tokyo. Using a knife, he first attacked an elderly couple, then fled to Ikebukuro Station, where he attacked pedestrians he encountered on the way. He killed two people, seriously injured six others, and assaulted two others. His early years, from elementary to junior high school were comfortable. Although he enrolled in a high school that was considered a preparatory school in his hometown, he dropped out after two years. His unemployed parents abandoned him after they incurred a large debt from consumer loans and fled to avoid repaying the money. He could not attend university and moved from job to job to fend for himself. He struggled with physical labour that he was not accustomed to, and interpersonal relationships at work. He also felt that although he was forced to take a job he did not want to do, his efforts were not being rewarded fairly, and he believed that he was not appreciated because young people lived hedonistic lives without much effort. His dissatisfaction with Japanese society intensified. One day, he received a silent call on his newly purchased mobile phone, which he thought was harassment from a co-worker who "didn't make an effort" and became furious. He committed the crime with the intention of "carrying out indiscriminate murders against people who don't make an effort to shock the public and make them recognize me." For him, his father, who borrowed money without working, abandoned him and ran away without paying it back, was the epitome of a "person who doesn't make an effort." He transferred the anger and attack that should have been directed towards his father onto the general public and committed the crime. An attack like this, which was carried out against people who had caused the perpetrator no harm, is called "displaced aggression" (Marcus-Newhall, et al., 2000).<sup>22</sup> Displaced aggression is likely to occur when the person who caused the anger is absent or when further retaliation from the person who caused the anger is expected. In the perpetrator's case, his father, who was the cause of his misfortune, was absent, so there was no one to direct his anger toward, hence he targeted

<sup>22</sup> Marcus-Newhall, A., Pedersen, W. C., Carlson, M. & Miller, N. (2000). Displaced aggression is alive and well: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 78(4), 670-689.

innocent people instead. This “displaced aggression” is not unique to No. 1 but is a common cause of crimes committed by lone attackers in this category, resulting in the loss of many innocent lives.

No. 2 was also driven by anger and, like No. 1, indiscriminately killed innocent people due to “displaced aggression”. On the evening of 29 September 1999, just 21 days after No. 1’s incident, the perpetrator drove his car onto the sidewalk in front of Shimonoseki Station, hitting people, and then drove into the station, hitting passersby. He then got out of the car and attacked train users with a knife on the stairs leading from the ticket gate to the platform and on the platform, killing five people and seriously injuring 10 others. The motive for this crime was his sense that he had been unfairly treated by society for many years and his resentment that his father did not honour his wishes. Although he graduated from the Department of Engineering and Architecture at a prestigious national university in the region, he was unable to find a job due to social phobia. However, his symptoms temporarily improved, and he went through a period of success, opening his own architecture firm, getting married, and starting a family. However, due to his pettiness, his relationship with his business partner deteriorated, and he was forced to shut down his business and ended up running a transportation business. Unfortunately, the light truck was submerged in water due to flooding caused by a typhoon, making it difficult for the company to continue its operations. He asked his father to cover the repair cost but he refused to help him. He had a bad relationship with his father to begin with, and had developed a strong antipathy toward him, but he was especially angry when he refused to pay for the repairs. His anger increased and he became desperate. He felt that he was ignored by those around him, could not get a satisfactory job after graduating from university, could not succeed in the transport industry, and felt isolated in his misery and that he was treated unfairly by society. Because he had suicidal thoughts from the beginning, he thought that he would kill others along with himself, committing mass murder, demonstrating his strong anger to his parents and the world all at once. He also used the mechanism of “displaced aggression” to redirect the attack intended for his father against people at Shimonoseki Station.

Approximately nine years after the incident involving No. 1 and No. 2, No. 7 committed an indiscriminate killing using a car and a knife on 8 June 2008. At an intersection in front of Akihabara Station in Tokyo, the perpetrator hit people who were crossing the street at traffic lights with a 2-ton truck. He then drove his truck into the pedestrian zone, hitting pedestrians. He got out of the truck and, using a knife, randomly attacked passersby and the people he had hit, killing and injuring them. He killed seven people and injured 10 others in this incident. He committed the crime because he was displeased that someone had vandalized the Internet bulletin board that he was presiding over, and impersonated him to respond to messages from visitors, so he wanted to stop this behaviour. On the day of the crime, a new thread was created on the bulletin board saying, “I’m going to kill someone in Akihabara,” and a message that directly foretold the crime was “I’m going to hit you with my car, and if I can’t use my car, I’m going to use a knife. Goodbye everyone”, so that people could see the relationship between the incident and the message. The

mechanism of “displaced aggression” is at work here too, replacing revenge against some unknown person on a bulletin board by indiscriminately killing innocent civilians.

No. 10 doused the inside of a pachinko parlour in Osaka city with gasoline and set it on fire on 5 July 2009, burning down the store and killing the customers and staff inside. Five people were burnt to death and 18 others were seriously injured. His crime was also driven by a grudge, and through “displacement aggression,” innocent people who happened to be in the store at that time on that day were indiscriminately killed. However, No. 10’s case is special in that the object of his grudge was a delusional being. According to court records, 11 years before the crime, he suddenly had hallucinations of a female psychic named “Mihi” who belonged to a group called “Mark.” He had a past conviction for using stimulants, and a psychiatric evaluation at the time of trial revealed that the auditory hallucinations were caused by excessive fatigue combined with continued thoughts of harm triggered by stimulant use, resulting in an acute psychotic state. From the time the hallucinations started, he believed that any misfortune that happened to him was caused by Mihi and her group. He also believed that people in the world knew this but turned a blind eye and were helping Mihi and others. A psychiatric evaluation at the time of the trial determined that this was not an incomprehensible primary delusion seen in symptoms of schizophrenia, but was an understandable secondary delusion created by combining hallucinatory experiences with his own feelings of victimization. Despite having these secondary delusions, he was able to live a normal life without any problems. Due to issues at the company such as bankruptcy, he had to move from job to job, but didn’t have a negative attitude wherever he worked. He quit work due to low wages and looked for a job while receiving unemployment insurance, but he was unable to find a job as he had hoped. Desperate because he was running low on funds and highly indebted due to excessive consumer loans, he blamed Mihi and Mark for both the poverty and job instability he faced. He planned and commissioned the crime targeting pachinko parlour employees and customers, resulting in innocent people being sacrificed because of a grudge against a delusional being. He was found to be fully responsible for the crime and on issuing the sentence, the judge said, “He committed the crime of his own free will while under increasing psychological burden due to his failure to work and the resulting financial hardship.”

In addition to the above, this category also includes the cases of No. 8 and No. 3. Case No. 8 was working at a sheet metal processing company while living with his parents at home, but was injured at work and his parents made him do all the housework and chores. Although he was happy that he had recovered from the injury and had the prospect of returning to work, his frustration with his parents grew as he did not receive the appreciation that he expected from them. Motivated to commit murder to express his frustration and embarrass his parents, he attacked a bookstore employee and customer with a knife, killing one person and injuring another. He committed the crime by transposing his anger and attack on his parents to the bookstore’s staff and customers, who had nothing to do with him.

No. 3 was unable to hold a job for long due to his tendency to act violently, and in the end, he lost his job and had to take a consumer loan, making it difficult to make ends meet. It became clear that he was unlikely to receive alimony from his third wife, which strained him both financially and emotionally. He considered killing his ex-wife and committing suicide, but he was unable to do so. He contacted his estranged father to rebuild his life, but he did not get the support he expected and became desperate. He fantasized about and planned to carry out the mass murder so many people could experience the same suffering that he had. In order to kill a large number of people without resistance, he chose a school he once wanted to apply to but gave up. He carried out a knife attack on children and staff at the elementary school. He killed eight children and injured 13 children and two teachers. The targets were limited to lower grade children at the affiliated elementary school, but the children at the elementary school were not the direct targets of the grudge. They were also the targets of his “displaced aggression.”

### ***Extended Suicide Lone Attackers***

This type of lone attacker is a person who attempts suicide due to poverty and despair, but in the process of committing suicide, becomes desperate and kills others indiscriminately. Among the 17 cases targeted for analysis, No. 5, No. 9, and No. 12 fall into this category.

No. 5 worked as a machinist and truck driver after graduating from high school, got married, started a family, and had a child. However, he suffered from negative life events such as being forced to change jobs due to interpersonal problems at work, and he began to suffer from auditory hallucinations. The auditory hallucinations interfered with his actions, criticized him, and gave him instructions. When he told his co-workers about the hallucinations, they did not take him seriously. This made him distrust his colleagues and he moved to another company. After getting divorced and being separated from his wife and child, he experienced hallucinations and a related mistrust for people at work, and following repeated job changes, he developed suicidal thoughts and set himself on fire in his truck. While driving a truck to put his plan into action, he inadvertently hit two pedestrians who were crossing the street at a green light. To escape, he drove a 4-ton truck at 50 km/h into a pedestrian-only arcade, without stepping on the brakes or honking his horn, even though he knew there were people there. He intentionally hit and ran over four pedestrians from behind, resulting in a total of three deaths and four others being seriously injured. In the end, he was forced to stop because his path was blocked by a parked large vehicle, and he sprinkled the light oil he had brought on his clothes and ignited them, but he failed to die, so he got out of the truck and turned himself in at a nearby police box.

No. 9 worked as a truck driver after graduating from high school, then got employed at a major electronics manufacturer, married, and had two children. However, he divorced a few years later and moved in with his mother, who had custody of his eldest son. Due to the divorce, he felt responsible for separating his children, and considered suicide but did not carry it out. He returned to work but retired early at the age of 40. When he was 42 years old, his mother passed away and he inherited her estate, but spent all his money on

gambling and entertainment and ended up living in a rented house. After his eldest son became independent and moved out of his house, No. 9 lived alone and worked as a taxi driver, but quit his job and started receiving assistance from social welfare due to heart disease. He befriended a fortune teller he met at a street corner, and became his assistant. Late one night, at a private video shop that was open all night, where he stayed with the fortune teller, he realized the misery of his own life and wanted to die, so he tried to commit suicide by setting the fortune teller's bag on fire, knowing that the store would burn down and there would be collateral deaths. However, when he could not breathe due to inhaling the smoke, he left the private room and ran outside, without making efforts to rescue staff or other customers. Sixteen people died from carbon monoxide poisoning, and four were seriously injured.

No. 5 suffered from delusional symptoms and a corresponding sense of distrust in his workplace, while No. 9 suffered from the collapse of his family due to divorce and dissipating the inheritance from his mother. They both had their lives turned upside down, and were driven to the point of suicide, and in desperation, killed innocent passersby and shop patrons.

On the other hand, No. 12 had a history of anti-social behaviour, becoming a delinquent in his third year of junior high school, the head of a motorcycle gang at age 18, and a member of an organized crime group at age 19. He was addicted to paint thinner and marijuana since his teens, and started using stimulants at the age of 19. In his late 20s, he began experiencing auditory hallucinations because of his addiction to stimulants. He was convicted twice for possessing and using stimulants, and served time in prison. He was released from prison after completing his second sentence, but could not find a job in his hometown, so he joined a private organization that helped drug addicts reintegrate into society, which the probation office introduced him to. However, he started getting into trouble within a short period and left the facility, but did not receive the support he expected from his relatives and older brother, so he went to another place to help out with a job that someone he met in prison had asked him to do, but he was disappointed when he learned that the job involved smuggling stimulants. He had been suffering from insomnia since the day before he left the facility, and he had intermittent auditory hallucinations such as "Stab me" and "Buy a knife". Things did not go well for him in his hometown of Tochigi. His older brother abandoned him, his job in the new place was disappointing, he even started hearing hallucinations, and he began to have suicidal thoughts. No. 12, who had left his friend's house, bought a kitchen knife and tried to stab himself in the abdomen with the intention of committing suicide, but was too scared to do so. In desperation, he followed a hallucination telling him to "stab that man" and stabbed two passersby with a kitchen knife, killing them.

These cases differ in terms of criminal history and the presence or absence of symptoms of mental illness. Some of the perpetrators had suicidal thoughts due to poverty and attempted suicide but were unable to carry it through, while others were in a desperate psychological state. What they had in common was that they caused others to die as collateral damage. Originally, this type would include those who succeeded in committing

suicide at the time of the crime. In this study, those cases were excluded from the analysis because the suspects were dead and the cases were not prosecuted (court documents could not be obtained), but such cases are also seen occasionally in Japan. The essential characteristics of this type, including cases like these, will need to be analysed in the future to deepen understanding.

### **3. Analysis of the radicalization/offending process**

Here, the radicalization process of recent cases of Japanese lone attackers, which was the subject of analysis, was examined based on the model of Hamm and Spaaij (2017). Of the 17 cases covered in this research, two cases — No. 17 whose trial has not yet begun, and No. 16, whose trial has not yet been concluded — were excluded from the analysis, because less information was obtained to verify their psychological states.

#### **a) Personal grievance**

The content of the perpetrators' personal grievances in each of the 15 cases is wide-ranging, but the main issues were economic, relationship, and workplace problems. There were many cases where multiple issues overlapped.

##### **i) Economic problems**

Economic hardship can be seen in eight cases (Nos. 3, 5, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, and 14), such as loss of a stable source of income, unemployment, living on welfare or unemployment insurance, or having incurred large amounts of debt from consumer loans. There were also two cases in which the perpetrators were not actually living in poverty but were seriously concerned about their futures (Nos. 4 and 15). Although not included as a motive for the crime, there were three cases, Nos. 1, 7, and 11, in which low income and unstable employment contracts were cited. No. 2 had an urgent issue of securing funds to repair a light truck that was damaged during a natural disaster.

Economic problems can be said to be the most common problem, either as personal dissatisfaction that is directly linked to the motivation for committing crimes or as a background factor that drives individuals to commit crimes.

##### **ii) Problems in close human relationships**

The second most prominent cause is relationships with people close to the perpetrators, such as spouses, parents, and siblings. If possible background factors for the crime are included, in Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, and 12, there was some kind of problem with the spouse, parents, or siblings. Among them, in No. 8, the motive for the crime was frustration with the way his parents treated him at home. In No. 2, the pent-up feelings from years of being unable to assert himself and being submissive to his father are involved in the crime. In No. 3, the motivation for the crime was deeply rooted in his divorce from his third wife and his resentment towards her for having an abortion without his consent. In No. 4, the motivation for the crime was due to deepening isolation due to disagreements with his father, who was his financial supporter, and estrangement from his family. In

No. 12, the perpetrator was displeased by the lack of support from family members, for example not being hired as an employee at his relative's store when he was released from prison. In the cases mentioned above, relationship problems between the perpetrators and their parents, family members, and relatives were either the motive for the crime, or a contributory factor. Problems with familiar human relationships are common in many cases as a background factor behind the crime. In No. 1, the problem started when the parents disappeared, leaving their children behind. In No. 6, the perpetrator's sister was listed as the primary target for murder. In No. 7, there were problems such as his mother's abusive upbringing from his childhood until his graduation from junior college, and his father's failure to transfer his scholarship funds. In No. 5 and No. 10, the attackers were married and had children, but they had divorced, were separated from their children, and lived alone.

As mentioned above, in the present or in the past, having some kind of trouble with family members, becoming estranged, and deepening isolation were common personal frustrations in many cases.

### iii) Problems in the workplace

Although relatively rare, workplace issues can also be cited as personal grievances of lone attackers. There were four cases related to this motive: No. 5, No. 7, No. 11, and No. 13. In No. 5, when the perpetrator consulted his workmates about the auditory hallucinations he was experiencing, they did not take him seriously and he got frustrated. He was cited saying, "The employees and the company were colluding to harass me." This affected him and he moved from job to job, while his thoughts of death intensified. Similarly, No. 11 believed that the employees at his workplace were "group stalking" him and that the company was condoning it, which led to him wanting to retaliate against the company. In No. 7, a notice of dismissal for all temporary employees, including the perpetrator, was issued and later cancelled due to company circumstances, but when he reported to work one morning, he couldn't find his work uniform, so he assumed he was being pushed to resign. This triggered his anger and led him to commit the crime. No. 13 worked at a facility for people with severe disabilities, and his superiors often warned against his attitude and behaviour towards people with disabilities.

As mentioned above, problems at the workplace exist as a personal grievance, and there is a noticeable pattern of delusions in which non-existent threats are perceived as real.

### iv) Other Problems

Personal grievances other than these include: grudges against a specific company or organization (No.11), anger over vandalism and impersonation online (No. 7), anger towards a delusional being that tormented the attacker (No. 10), dissatisfaction with Japanese society for not rewarding hard work (No. 1), and failure to secure suitable employment despite a history of academic success (No. 2), boredom (No. 6), and the desire to return to prison (No. 15).

## b) Personal and political grievances

In Hamm and Spaaij's model of the radicalization process, radicalization is promoted by combining the personal grievances seen above with some kind of political or religious grievances. In the 15 recent cases of Japanese lone attackers that are the subject of this analysis, No. 13 was the only person who considered his personal grievance in a political context and presented it as a more general social problem that many people shared. As mentioned above, he compiled a document called the "New Japan Order," which included killing people with disabilities, lifting the ban on medical marijuana, and integrating organized crime groups into the Japanese military. There were no political groups who shared his ideology, and no sympathizers with this ideology emerged.

In addition, about two years before the crime, No. 1 sent many letters to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to tell them that there were people like him who were not appreciated even if they tried to make efforts. One of them was written in a language that was difficult to understand and did not seem to have any particular message. Although the content was not a clear political statement, it could be thought of as an attempt to link his grievance with Japanese society to politics.

## c) Affinity with online sympathizers or extremist groups

None of the individuals in the 15 cases sought spiritual ties or support from a specific extremist group before committing the crimes. Regarding the act of seeking understanding for one's own crime on Internet bulletin boards and social media, this was similar to the "crime notice" that No. 13 used for the Speaker of the House of Representatives. This includes sending out simultaneous messages to friends and family members seeking understanding, and recruiting accomplices. No. 7 created a thread on an internet bulletin board and made a post foretelling the crime right before committing the Akihabara serial murders. However, this was not done to seek understanding or sympathy from the thread's visitors, nor was it intended to create friendships with online sympathizers, but rather to punish malicious users who impersonated the attacker.

## d) Enablers

These are people who directly or indirectly facilitate one's radicalization. A direct enabler is one that provides the motive, means, and opportunity necessary for committing a crime, and actually facilitates the crime. All 15 cases were prepared and carried out by a single perpetrator; therefore, there were no direct enablers in this sense. Regarding indirect enablers, No. 6 had created a logic to justify his crimes, such as "murder is not evil" and "there is no good or bad." A few years before the crime, his father gave him a philosophy book for young people that formed the basis of such ideas. Although No. 6 seems to have simply distorted parts of this book to suit his agenda, it can be said that it served as an indirect enabler. No. 13 recognized the indirect enabler as a model. He said that he learned the courage to say what he thinks by watching and listening to the words and actions of a certain foreign politician who was attracting attention at the time. No. 13 frequently expressed extremist ideologies such as "we don't need people with severe disabilities," and threatened to commit crimes. If this boldness was something he learned

from this foreign politician, then his influence as an indirect enabler was by no means small.

A lone attacker who commits indiscriminate murder may become an indirect enabler for subsequent lone attackers. For example, No. 11, after committing a crime in which he intentionally hit multiple people with his car inside the main factory of an automobile company, telephoned an acquaintance and boasted that he had surpassed the number of people killed and injured by No. 7, which suggests that he was somehow influenced by him. No. 7 developed the idea of using a truck and a knife in a pedestrian zone for indiscriminate killings after seeing and hearing about such cases in the media. The murder committed by No. 5, which occurred three months before the incident by No. 7, was with a knife, and about three years earlier, in 2005, a runaway truck incident occurred in an arcade in Sendai. It is highly likely that No. 7 was influenced by reports of these incidents.

Although they were not included in this analysis because no one died, since the incident by No. 14, there have been a series of crimes in Japan in which passengers were attacked with knives in moving train cars and train cars were set on fire. Many Japanese people are surprised and horrified by these incidents, which are covered in the mass media. In its coverage of events, the media tends to function as an indirect enabler in the sense that it conveys the specific methods used.

### e) Broadcasting intent

There are very few cases in which there was prior notice of the crime, and the only cases are No. 1, No. 7, No. 13, and No. 6.

When No. 1 left his room on the day of the crime, he left behind a note with the message, "I'll kill all the idiots". Just before committing the crime, No. 7 changed the name of a thread he created on an Internet bulletin board to "I will kill someone in Akihabara" and gave a preview in the article, including the method of the crime. To express his anger at someone who was trolling his thread and impersonating him in posts, he wrote "A lot of people have died because of me." This was a punitive action designed to make the victim feel guilty and discourage vandalism and impersonation. Five months before the crime, No. 13 sent a letter to the Speaker of the House of Representatives, informing him that he intended to commit the crime. His intention seems to have been to secure a promise that he would be exonerated and receive 500 million yen in financial support from the government after the crime. But because of this letter, police reported him to his employer and he was hospitalized and forced to resign. Around the same time, he sent a similar message to the one contained in the letter on social media to his friends and acquaintances, soliciting their participation in the crime. It is believed that his intention in informing his friends and acquaintances of his plans for the crime in advance was to promote himself and gain comrades. No. 6 committed murders over two days, four days apart. On the first day, he stabbed an elderly man to death with a knife at the entrance of a private house, and four days later carried out a random attack with a knife at the train station near his home. After committing the first crime, he returned to his home, took off his bloodstained

clothes, and wrote the word "death" on the wall, along with messages such as "I am justice! I am the law!" He fled, leaving behind his cell phone with emails on it, and hid in a business hotel in Tokyo. After that, before the second attack, he sent an email to his mother's cell phone saying, "I'm the culprit, please catch me quickly. What are the police doing? I'm going to have more victims." His goal was to kill as many people as possible before being arrested and sentenced to death at trial. Since he wished to be arrested by the police as the culprit, it is thought that he sent the message to provoke the police by confessing to being the culprit of the first crime.

## **f) Triggering event**

In Hamm and Spaaij's model, a triggering event refers to an event that directly triggers a terrorist act. Here, it is considered as an event that directly triggered the crime. Various events can be triggers, but those with multiple applicable triggers include the experience of being victimized, failure in job search, lack of money, and rejection from parents.

Experience of victimization is an experience in which the person felt that he or she had been harmed in some way by another person, and it also includes experiences that led the person to believe that, even though objectively it was not the case. For example, No. 7 experienced actual infringement, such as the vandalism of his thread on an Internet bulletin board or someone impersonating him, No.11 experienced being a victim of delusions that made him believe his co-workers broke into his room without permission while he was away. In any case, the recognition of being victimized generated anger, which accelerated the motivation to commit a crime.

Failure to secure suitable employment was seen in No. 10 and No. 12, who said they were unemployed and had difficulty finding a job, or that they were stuck in unfulfilling jobs. Thus, they were overcome with feelings of impatience, frustration, and disappointment, which drove them to commit crimes. A similar situation is "financial scarcity," which is a situation like No. 8, in which people become desperate and are easily motivated to commit crimes when they run out of money.

"Rejection from parents" was the trigger seen in No. 3 and No. 2. Both were in dire straits and applied for financial aid, but their fathers refused to assist them. Being in financial difficulty and being rejected by the fathers they relied on not only meant that they could not solve their financial problems, but also made them feel abandoned by their parents, and such a shock may strongly encourage crime.

In addition to the above, the following events and situations were also triggers. "Situations that arouse anxiety about one's future life" was the trigger for No 15. After being released from prison, the night before he was about to make a fresh start in an unfamiliar city, and a new job, he became anxious and wanted to go back to prison, so he committed the crime on the next day. "Recklessness" was the trigger for No. 5, who accidentally hit people with the truck he was driving while contemplating suicide, and then intentionally hit many people indiscriminately. "Situation that increased self-hatred" was the trigger for No. 9, and the crime was caused by feeling pathetic after being under the care of a street

fortune teller and spending the night in a small private room at a video shop. “Urgency” was the trigger for No. 13, who originally planned to attack the facility on a date about three months away, but hastily changed his plans after a conversation with his friend made him believe that he was being targeted by a gang, so he carried out the attack earlier.

It has been shown that events that arouse intense anger or stress reactions, serious financial situations, rejection from parents, anxiety or despair about the future, etc., act as triggers. However, some triggers are unique. To understand why such unusual events become triggers, it is important to consider how the perpetrators interpreted the event and the kind of thoughts the event triggered.

### **g) Characteristics of the radicalization process of Japanese lone attackers**

From the above analysis, the following can be pointed out regarding the characteristics of the radicalization process of 15 Japanese lone attackers.

#### **➔ Radicalization process of lone attackers with ideology**

Of the 15 cases analyzed for the radicalization process, only No. 13 falls into this category. He was radicalized based on all the processes in the model by Hamm and Spaaij (2017).

#### **➔ Radicalization process of non-ideology lone attackers**

Fourteen of the 15 cases, except No. 13, mentioned above, belong to this category. As already mentioned, all the lone attackers in this group had personal grievances. These included financial, close relationship, and workplace problems. However, because they did not have an ideology, they did not go through the process of combining personal grievances with political and religious grievances. The crimes were committed independently, with no affinity to extremist groups or online sympathizers. However, the perpetrators knew about the methods of previous crimes committed by lone attackers through mass media reports, which served as an indirect enabler and influenced them when formulating concrete plans for crimes. Broadcasting intent is usually not carried out unless there is a special purpose, such as intentionally making oneself more likely to be arrested. In most cases, the crime was triggered by an event or difficult situation, such as a history of being violated, stagnation or failure in job hunting, lack of money, or rejection by parents. This was especially found among the Retaliatory Lone Attackers. Furthermore, in the case of Instrumental Lone Attackers, crimes were not carried out due to triggering events, but were committed in the hope of obtaining a “reward”, such as the death penalty or life imprisonment. Despite having no political or religious cause, and no involvement or direct or indirect interaction with existing extremist groups or political organizations, how can Japanese lone attackers go from their personal grievance to the point where they indiscriminately kill and injure large numbers of people? Personal factors of the lone attackers play a major role in this.

## 4. Consideration of personal factors that promote radicalization

Among 17 cases, two cases — No. 17 whose trial has not yet begun, and No. 16, whose trial has not yet been concluded, were excluded from the analysis, because less information was obtained to verify their psychological states.

The most common factor is loneliness due to living alone, which occurred in eight out of 15 cases. When people live alone, it is difficult to obtain various types of social support, which probably places them in difficult situations and may cause problems.

Another frequent factor is a personality disorder or some type of personality abnormality. This was observed in nine out of 15 cases. Personality disorders are stable disorders that consistently produce characteristic distortions in an individual's speech and behaviour across settings. Antisocial personality disorder (No. 4), narcissistic personality disorder (No. 6), and borderline personality disorder (No. 4) are all personality disorders that are strongly associated with aggressive behaviour towards others. Paranoid personality disorder (No. 2 and No. 14), and borderline personality disorder (No. 4) are common personality disorders that motivate aggressive behaviour based on persecutory delusions and hostile attribution bias. Schizophrenic personality disorder (No.1) and avoidant personality disorder (No. 2) are personality disorders that make it difficult to interact with others and tend to deepen social isolation. No. 13 was found to have a personality disorder in a psychiatric evaluation at the trial, but the type of disorder was not detailed.

Mental illness is also a common factor and is seen in seven out of 15 cases. Psychiatric disorders, such as conduct disorder, with symptoms that exhibit behavioural patterns characterized by repeated and persistent antisocial and aggressive behaviour, are mental disorders that directly contribute to the occurrence of indiscriminate killing. On the other hand, auditory hallucinations and delusional symptoms caused by schizophrenia, paranoia, and the use of stimulants or cannabis can result in delusions of unjust persecution by people close by, which can lead to indiscriminate killing.

Cases of suicidal ideation or a history of suicide attempts can be identified as a common factor, as seen in seven cases of the 15 cases. When these people face severe stress, they tend to have suicidal thoughts and attempt to commit suicide. This is typically seen in the case of Extended Suicide Lone Attackers.

Although the number of cases is small, prior convictions for violent crimes and stimulant use/possession are also important factors. A prior conviction for a crime involving violence would directly increase the incidence of indiscriminate killing. In addition, a prior conviction for stimulant drug use means that there is a high probability that hallucinations and delusions, which are the after-effects of stimulant drug use, may prompt a person to commit an indiscriminate killing.

# 04

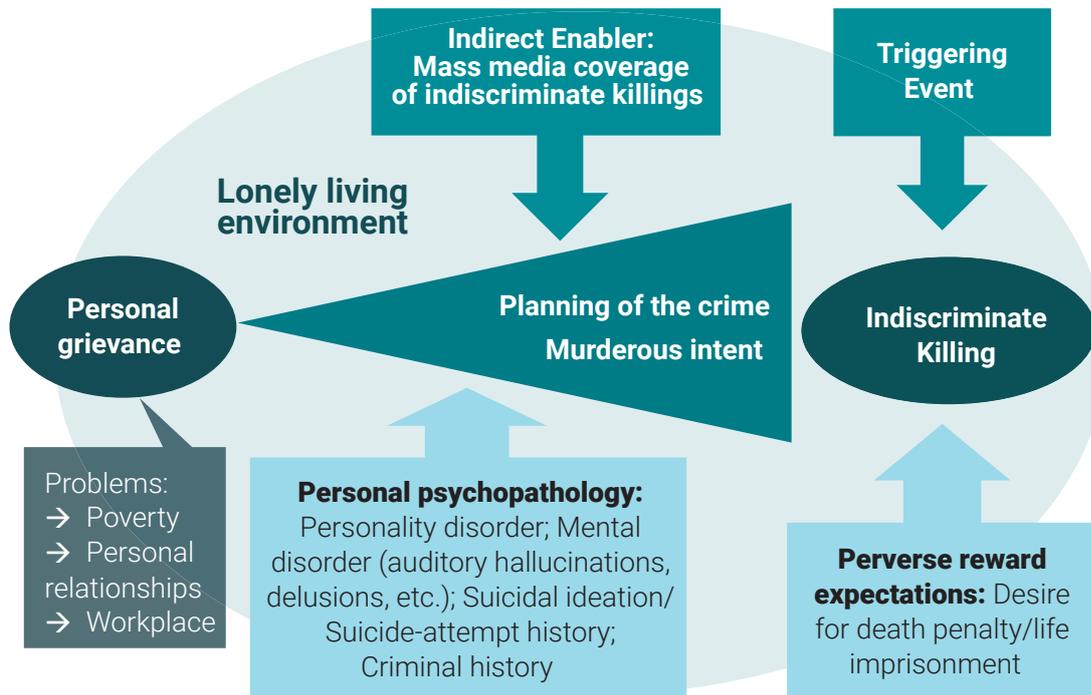
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## **Discussion: Proposal of a hypothetical model of the radicalization process of Lone Attackers and countermeasures**

### **1. Hypothetical model of the radicalization process of Non-Ideological Lone Attackers**

As seen above, Japan's Non-Ideological Lone Attackers are characterized by several psychopathological crisis factors. A process in which the lone attackers seen in Hamm and Spaaij combine their personal grievances with ideology, become radicalized by approaching or interacting with existing terrorist organizations, accessing information on the Internet, etc., and then, once triggered, carry out crimes while disseminating their intentions. From the results of the analysis, as shown in Figure 2, Japan's Non-Ideological Lone Attackers are people who live alone in a lonely household setting and are facing problems with money, close relationships, and the workplace, etc. These problems cause personal dissatisfaction. People who have amplified personal dissatisfaction become even more radicalized due to the combination of psychopathological crisis factors, such as personality bias, a mental illness that promotes delusions and antisocial behaviour, increased suicidal ideation and suicide attempts, and plan the crime using previous indiscriminate killings as an enabler, and are triggered by the experience of being violated/infringed or by occupational crisis. The processes of committing indiscriminate killings are thought of as either retaliation or a "reward" to obtain the death penalty or life imprisonment.

Figure 2: A hypothetical model of the radicalization process of Non-Ideological Lone Attackers



## 2. Measures to prevent crime and harm caused by lone attackers

As prevention measures against incidents caused by lone attackers, the following are suggested.

### a) Implementing comprehensive isolation prevention measures: Creating a place of support for adults living alone

In many cases, lone attackers live alone and develop personal grievances due to financial problems, conflicts with close relatives, and problems at work. Some of these people have some kind of personality disorder or suffer from symptoms such as delusions and auditory hallucinations. This convergence of individual risk factors is likely to lead to motives for committing a crime. Therefore, each local government should open a place for psychosocial support for single-person households living in the area, providing information and consultation mainly on financial issues, employment, use of social welfare systems, and useful knowledge for daily life, etc. In addition to providing opportunities for interaction among users to prevent isolation, it is also necessary to establish institutions that provide free counselling for adults living alone on mental and interpersonal issues. During consultations, it is necessary to establish a system to connect people who may have a mental illness to local medical institutions.

### **b) Improving comprehensive support in psychiatric treatment and community mental health services for people with personality disorders**

Except for No. 17, where the trial has not started and no psychiatric evaluation has been concluded, of the 16 cases included in this study, there were nine cases in which personality disorders or personality biases were pointed out by psychiatric evaluation. Although the court records did not clearly state the details, it is likely that the perpetrators did not receive drug or psychological treatment for their disorders at a medical institution before committing the crimes. This analysis suggests that when a personality disorder coexists with symptoms of delusions and auditory hallucinations, people are more likely to commit indiscriminate killings with retaliatory intentions. In addition to accumulating evidence on the causal relationship between various personality disorders and violent crimes, especially murder and arson, in the field of psychiatric treatment, careful monitoring of patients with personality disorders who tend to harm themselves or others, and treatment that also takes into consideration comorbidities such as delusions, should be emphasized. Furthermore, to support patients with personality disorders who have coexisting social and economic problems such as isolation, economic hardship, and rejection from parents and family members, it is necessary to enhance community mental health systems and provide comprehensive support through close collaboration between various professions, including outreach activities.

### **c) Enforcement of treatment including measures against auditory hallucinations and delusions in drug addiction recovery programmes**

In this study, there were cases in which people who were convicted for using drugs such as stimulants and served time in prison suffered from auditory hallucinations and delusions and committed indiscriminate killings after being released. In treatment programmes to prevent drug addiction relapse in prison, and in drug addiction recovery support facilities used by these people after release, it is necessary to provide treatment that addresses auditory hallucinations and delusions caused by drug use. It is necessary to make sure that all relevant persons are aware of this and to enforce it.

### **d) Implementation of thorough support for people released from prison**

This study had two cases in which the offenders committed crimes shortly after being released from prison. One of them committed the crime out of desperation because he was unable to find a job that satisfied him and a place to return to after his release. The other did not have confidence in his ability to adapt to the new environment, even though he had a job and a place to return to, so he committed the crime so he could return to prison. In Japan, the Offender Rehabilitation Act, which came into effect in June 2008, provides for a system of emergency rehabilitation protection. Based on this, people released from prison can receive up to six months of support such as money, accommodation, and employment, etc., from the government in cases where they do not receive support from relatives or public health and welfare organizations. In order for such a system to function well, it is necessary to investigate the reasons why it did not

work in the cases of the lone attackers, examine the problems within the system, and then implement more detailed and careful operations.

### **e) Creating an environment that is resistant to indiscriminate killings**

In a society where people have access to information about how to obtain and make their own firearms, the environment itself becomes an enabler for indiscriminate killings. As one of the crime prevention measures against indiscriminate killings, it is important to create an environment that makes it difficult for indiscriminate killings to occur, and minimizes the damage if they occur. The murder weapons used in the cases covered by this study were gasoline, cars, knives, and homemade guns. Measures need to be taken to prevent such items from being used in incidents.

#### **i) Request to refrain from posting online information about how to make guns and explosives**

In Japan, the possession and use of guns by individuals is strictly regulated by law, but information on how to manufacture guns and bombs, including information from overseas, can be easily found on the Internet. Although it is difficult to develop laws that prohibit or restrict the posting of such information on the Internet due to the need for freedom of expression, considering the magnitude of the social impact, it is necessary to take measures such as calling on-site administrators to refrain from posting such information.

#### **ii) Conducting a survey on the compliance status and effectiveness of the amended regulation for the sale of gasoline in portable cans**

After No. 10 and No. 16, some of the rules regarding the regulation of dangerous goods in Japan were revised, making it mandatory to verify the identity of the purchaser, confirm the purpose of use, and create sales records. Even after this regulation was amended, there were cases of indiscriminate killings committed by people who bought gasoline with cans they carried (the suspect was not prosecuted as he died during the incident and was not the subject of this study). It is necessary to investigate the status of compliance with the revised regulations and sales performance, and to conduct follow-up surveys on the effectiveness of the amended regulation.

#### **iii) Countermeasures against indiscriminate killings using automobiles as weapons**

When it comes to indiscriminate killings using cars, there are many patterns in which cars enter arcades, train stations, and sidewalks and run over passersby. In areas with a lot of foot traffic, it is necessary to ensure that obstacles such as fences and barriers are erected to prevent vehicles from entering spaces that are only available to pedestrians. In future, it may become necessary to take measures such as requiring all vehicles to be equipped with a hit-and-run prevention function that will automatically stop the vehicle and prevent it from restarting in the event of an accident that causes injury or death.

**iv) Strengthening security against outsider intrusion**

No. 3, No. 11, No. 13, and No. 16 all invaded schools, institutions, corporate buildings and premises and committed indiscriminate killings. After the incident involving No. 3 in 2001, schools across the country created and implemented strict manuals for dealing with external visitors. No. 13 broke into a facility for people with severe disabilities at night, and No. 16 broke into the anime production company during the day through the entrance of the building. Facilities that house sick or disabled people will need to put monitoring and warning systems in place to prevent intruders at night. In addition, businesses need to check whether they have systems in place to prevent suspicious persons from entering, such as locking entrances and exits and deploying security guards, in preparation for intruders during daytime hours.

**v) Creation of guidelines for defence against indiscriminate killings and evacuation, implementation of evacuation drills, and awareness activities**

Indiscriminate killings tend to occur in places and at times when many people gather. These include streets in downtown areas and in front of stations, factory premises when commuting to and from work, transportation vehicles and station premises, schools, facilities for the severely disabled, pachinko parlours, and stores in commercial facilities, etc. Victims are often ordinary citizens, but they never know when or where they might be affected by such a crime. Therefore, citizens need to be aware of how to act to protect their lives if they are present at the scene of an indiscriminate killing. Measures will need to be taken, such as the creation of guidelines to suit each situation, including by local governments, public transport companies, private companies, schools, and institutions such as facilities for people with disabilities, etc., holding regular evacuation drills, and creating and posting evacuation simulation videos online for citizens to view at their convenience.

### **3. Measures to prevent lone attackers from reoffending**

To prevent lone attackers from committing similar crimes again, deterrent measures need to be taken inside prisons while they are serving their sentences. Many criminals, including those who were not the subject of this study and those whose crimes did not result in death, serve their sentences in prison and eventually return to society. In addition to the measures listed above, interventions that change their cognition, thinking, and behaviour would also be effective. Such interventions include training in critical thinking to gain a variety of perspectives, and clinical psychological approaches to behaviour change such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and the Good Lives Model (GLM). In particular, the CBT is expected to be particularly effective for Retaliatory Lone Attackers who commit indiscriminate killings based on unilateral beliefs founded on distorted cognition. GLM may be effective against all lone attackers, including those with ideology. GLM is based on the premise that all humans, including criminals, actively try to acquire the following 11 mental states, human characteristics, and experiences:

(1) Life (healthy living and functioning), (2) Knowledge, (3) Excellence in Play, (4) Excellence in Work, (5) Excellence in Agency (autonomy and self-directedness), (6) Inner Peace (freedom from emotional turmoil and stress), (7) Relatedness (intimate, romantic, and family relationships), (8) Community, (9) Spirituality (finding meaning and purpose in life), (10) Happiness, and (11) Creativity (e.g. Ward & Gannon, 2006).<sup>23</sup>



All human beings want all of these to some extent, but which one is emphasized and prioritized depends on the individual's unique sense of values and priorities in life. Crimes are directly or indirectly related to these pursuits and are said to arise from problems such as inadequate activities and means to achieve them. For example, a lone attacker may have sought (4), (5), (9), and (10) and tried to achieve them using the wrong means. The purpose of treatment based on GLM is to think together with the person being treated about what means should be used in the future to achieve these goals in a socially acceptable way.

<sup>23</sup> Ward, T., & Gannon, T. A. (2006). Rehabilitation, etiology, and self-regulation: The comprehensive good lives model of treatment for sexual offenders. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 11, 77-94.

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## Future Prospects

The incidence of lone attackers of the type that have recently occurred in Japan may increase in future, and may occur in countries where many young people are disgruntled and isolated from society. While there may be many reasons for this dissatisfaction and isolation, it may also be because some young people feel excluded from society or are not receiving adequate services and support from the government. For example, in the Republic of Korea, from July to August 2023, two indiscriminate killings committed by young people alone occurred;<sup>24</sup> in addition, many reports of similar cases inspired by these incidents, have been posted online. Although the current unemployment rate in the Republic of Korea is not high, many young people are unable to find the jobs they prefer and give up on job hunting. In addition, the number of people becoming recluses – a form of severe social withdrawal – is increasing rapidly, and young people are becoming increasingly isolated.<sup>25</sup> This kind of situation surrounding young people may be the cause of incidents in the Republic of Korea. Also, similar incidents occurred in some developing countries in Asia, such as Thailand and the Philippines<sup>26</sup> among others. As these countries

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<sup>24</sup> In July 2023, a 33-year-old man attacked passersby one after another with a knife on the street, killing one person and injuring three others (<https://apnews.com/article/south-korea-knife-attack-seoul-7e0856a269a2d2ab449544dc65c0baf9>), and in August 2023, a 22-year-old man drove his car into the sidewalk of a station rotary, hit a pedestrian, and then brandished a knife at a commercial facility, killing one person and injuring 13 others (<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/13-people-hurt-stabbing-incident-near-seoul-yonhap-2023-08-03/>).

<sup>25</sup> E.g., <https://diamond.jp/articles/-/327576>; <https://diamond.jp/articles/-/327515>

<sup>26</sup> In October 2022, a former policeman killed 36 people and injured 10 others by shooting, stabbing, and vehicle-ramming in Thailand. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2022\\_Nong\\_Bua\\_Lamphu\\_massacre](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2022_Nong_Bua_Lamphu_massacre)) In the Philippines, sudden outbursts and frenzied violent behaviors after a period of brooding and quiet have become a problem, and this kind of case is categorized as “amok” or “running amok”, which is said to be a syndrome observed among males in Malaysia and other parts of Southeast Asia (e.g., [https://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/man-runs-amok-in-philippines-hacks-five-to-death-118041500728\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/man-runs-amok-in-philippines-hacks-five-to-death-118041500728_1.html); <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1636153/man-kills-old-woman-wounds-wife-3-year-old-kid-in-manila>).

achieve economic development, the structure of society will change, and there is a possibility that people who feel alienated or disadvantaged will increase. The outcome of this study will contribute to providing important suggestions to such countries.





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