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Domestic Violence Allegations Were a Missed Red Flag before Florida Mass Shooting

Esteban Santiago, accused twice of strangulation, an offense that studies show often foreshadows future violence.

Melissa Jeltsen Senior Reporter, The Huffington Post, www.huffingtonpost.com

In the year before Esteban Santiago allegedly opened fire on unsuspecting travelers at Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport on Friday, killing five and injuring six others, he had at least five run-ins with police in Anchorage, Alaska.

Many involved allegations of domestic violence, including two reports of strangulation that don't appear to have been taken seriously. In January 2016, Santiago was arrested after his girlfriend told Anchorage police he attacked her while she was in the bathroom. He broke the door, forced his way in and began to strangle her, she said.

"She stated that he continued to yell at her while strangling her and smacking her in the side of the head," the responding police officer wrote. Strangling his girlfriend, (impeding her ability to breathe) shows a capacity to kill, experts say. Years of research has established that the act of strangulation is an important predictor of future lethal violence: If a woman has been choked by an intimate partner, she is seven times more likely to become a homicide victim in the future.

Strangulation, defined as cutting off air supply or blood circulation by applying pressure to the neck, can lead to neurological damage within seconds and death in under five minutes. Despite its danger, strangulation often leaves no visible injuries, making it particularly difficult to prosecute. Because of that, experts say, the offense has historically been treated as minor, akin to a slap or a punch.

But over the past 10 years, most states, including Alaska, have passed laws to treat strangulation as a serious, felony-level offense, even in cases where there are no observable injuries. That didn't happen to Santiago. He was charged with criminal mischief for damaging the bathroom door, and fourth-degree assault, both misdemeanors,

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A month later, he was rearrested for violating the conditions of a no-contact order when cops spotted him with his girlfriend. Prosecutors gave him a second chance. In March, they offered to drop the domestic violence charges if he attended anger-management classes and stayed out of trouble for a year, a process called deferred prosecution.

Experts contacted by The Huffington Post questioned the decision to defer prosecution in a case involving strangulation, and said Santiago's history of domestic violence allegations should have been a red flag that he was a potential danger to others.

"I don't believe any case involving strangulation should be deferred, ever," said Gael Strack, a former domestic violence prosecutor and one of the country's leading experts on strangulation. "We now know that strangulation involves a high level of violence and lethal violence. Much like when someone points a gun or holds a knife to a victim's neck, those cases also don't have visible injury, but they are life-threatening acts of violence."

Casey Gwinn, who headed the prosecutor's office in San Diego, California, and now runs trainings across the country on strangulation with Strack, noted that if Santiago had been convicted of a misdemeanor domestic violence offense, he would have been barred under federal law from owning or purchasing firearms.

"The handling of this case has all the earmarks of poorly investigating a strangulation case and minimizing its significance at every turn," Gwinn said. "Where was the follow-up investigation? Where was the forensic exam?"

Gwinn added that Alaska has a manual on how to investigate and prosecute strangulation cases. "There is no indication that the prosecutors followed any of the best practices guidance of their manual," he said.

It's unclear if Santiago attended anger-management classes, as he was required to do. Police responded to his residence on three occasions for "physical disturbances" from March to October, according to Anchorage Police Chief Chris Tolley, including for a second allegation of strangulation. Police wouldn't release details on those disturbance calls. In a press conference, Tolley said there was no probable cause for an arrest in any of the three calls.

Anchorage municipal prosecutor Seneca Theno told The Huffington Post her office takes allegations of strangulation very seriously, but a successful prosecution requires evidence.

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Theno said that in her experience, it was rare for a strangulation to occur without injuries. “Usually, you are going to see something,” she said. “Those things tend to be observable and would serve as corroboration of the report.”

The handling of Santiago’s domestic violence case raises questions, experts say. “Why was this even a deferred prosecution? Why did they charge it as the lesser crime?” said Dawn Dalton, executive director of the Domestic Violence Legal Empowerment and Appeals Project. “When you look at the escalation of violence in the research that has been done, strangulation is one of the final acts before homicide takes place in intimate-partner relationships.”

Dalton said she was especially concerned about the decision to offer deferred prosecution after Santiago broke the no-contact order barring him from seeing his girlfriend, and wondered why authorities didn’t regard the domestic disturbances in October as violations of the deferred-prosecution conditions. “To me, that is a system failure,” Dalton said.

Santiago’s alleged history of domestic violence adds him to the long list of suspected mass shooters who physically assaulted those close to them before going on to attack the public. As The Huffington Post has previously reported:

This story is tragically familiar. In the past few years, many of the men who have committed heinous, unthinkable acts of violence against the public have had a history of abusing the women in their lives. Prior to unleashing their deranged violence onto the world, they practiced it against the most vulnerable and accessible targets, those living inside their homes.

Domestic violence and mass shootings are intricately linked in the United States. Many mass shootings actually target intimate partners or family members, though those incidents rarely make the news.

According to data collected by Everytown for Gun Safety, of the 16 mass shooting incidents in 2016, seven, and 43 percent involved a male shooter targeting a family member or intimate partner. In those shootings, women and children made up 81 percent of the victims.

“As a practical policy matter, society needs to recognize that by intervening in family violence, we are protecting the larger society as well,” said Joan Meier, a law professor at George Washington University. “The same people who attack members of their family are people who attack total strangers.”

Russia parliament votes 380-3 to decriminalize Domestic Violence

Doug Stanglin, USA TODAY www.usatoday.com

Russia's parliament voted 380-3 on Friday to decriminalize domestic violence in cases where it does not cause "substantial bodily harm" and does not occur more than once a year.

The move, which eliminates criminal liability in such cases, makes a violation punishable by a fine of roughly \$500, or a 15-day arrest, provided there is no repeat within 12 months.

The bill now goes to the rubber-stamp upper chamber, where no opposition is expected. It then must be signed by President Vladimir Putin, who has signaled his support.

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov told journalists that family conflicts do "not necessarily constitute domestic violence."

The passage by the parliament, or Duma, reverses a ruling by the Supreme Court last year, subsequently backed by parliament, that decriminalized battery that does not inflict bodily harm, but retained criminal charges involving battery against family members. That reform is effectively reversed by Friday's vote.

Andrei Isayev of the main Kremlin faction, the United Russia, said lawmakers are "heeding the public call" by correcting a mistake they made last year.

Russia is one of three countries in Europe and Central Asia that do not have laws specifically targeting domestic violence, according to *The Economist*.

Critics of the new measure warned it would encourage domestic violence and fuel crime.

"This bill would establish violence as a norm of conduct," Communist lawmaker Yuri Sinelshchikov said during the debate.

Russia parliament votes cont.

Women's rights lawyer Mari Davtyan told *The Moscow Times* that the legislative moves are dangerous and "send a message that the state doesn't consider familial battery fundamentally wrong anymore."

A survey this month by state-run pollster VTsIOM found 19% of Russians said "it can be acceptable" to hit one's wife, husband or child "in certain circumstances," the Associated Press reported. The nationwide poll by phone of 1,800 people was held Jan. 13-15. The survey had a margin of error of 2.5 percentage points.

In many ways, this reflects the thrust of an old Russian proverb: "If he beats you it means he loves you."

According to Russian government statistics from the Interior Ministry, 40% of all violent crimes are committed within the family. The figures correlate to 36,000 women being beaten by their partners every day and 26,000 children being assaulted by their parents every year.

Last year's revised law, when it took in effect in July, quickly drew opponents, notably ultra-conservative Russian lawmaker Yelena Mizulina, who called it "anti-family" and said it undermined parents' "right" to beat their children.

That view was echoed at the time by The All-Russian Parents' Resistance movement that warned on its website that "(p)arents no longer have the right to choose methods of upbringing."

Alyona Popova, activist and women's rights advocate, lamented that this attitude is widespread in Russia, *The Moscow Times* reported. "Traditional, or rather archaic values have become popular again," she said.

Even Russian police are often reluctant to get involved in domestic violence cases, which many regard as meddling in family affairs.

In November, prosecutors began investigating a police officer who took a call from a woman complaining about her boyfriend's aggressive behavior. Instead of offering help, the officer reportedly told the woman that the police would only come if she got killed. Shortly afterward, the man beat the woman to death, the AP reported.

Bethenny Frankel's Ex-Husband Arrested for Stalking

Maeve McDermott , USA TODAY, www.usatoday.com

Six months after their bitter divorce, Bethenny Frankel's ex-husband Jason Hoppy has been arrested for allegedly stalking and harassing the *Real Housewives of New York* star.

Hoppy was arrested on Jan. 27 after an altercation at their 6-year-old daughter Bryn's school and charged with aggravated harassment in the second degree, stalking in the fourth degree and harassment in the second degree, *People* and *E!* report.

"On Friday, Jan. 27, (Hoppy) approached (Frankel) and a friend at her child's school at around 8:15 a.m. and tried to provoke a fight," an NYPD police spokeswoman told *People*. "He said, 'I will destroy you, you can get all the lawyers you want, you've been warned.' "

According to the complaint, as reported by *E!*, Hoppy approached Frankel and boyfriend Dennis Shields at the school and said, "Okay I see. This is how you want to do this. Okay. You can play your game. It doesn't matter. You can get 10 lawyers. There's nothing you can do to stop me. You'll be sorry. You've been warned. I can't help it. She's pure evil. You've been warned. Don't say I didn't warn you."

As the NYPD spokeswoman told *People*, the Skinnygirl mogul said Hoppy had sent numerous emails and FaceTime calls numbering in the hundreds, following her legal team sending him a cease and desist letter in November 2016.

"There are no words to express how saddened Mr. Hoppy is over his ex-wife's unjustified actions," Hoppy attorney Robert C. Gottlieb told *People*. "His only concern is his daughter and intends to vigorously fight these false charges."

Frankel and Hoppy announced their split in December 2012 after three years of marriage, and endured a brutal four-year divorce battle before finally splitting last year, spanning seasons of *RHONY* and the Frankel-focused spinoffs *Bethenny Getting Married?* and *Bethenny Ever After*.

In a post-divorce interview with *Us Weekly*, Frankel claims Hoppy hacked into her computer, read her emails, secretly recorded their conversations and called her a "witch" in front of their daughter, telling Frankel, "You're finished. You're done. I'm going to ruin you."

HAPPENINGS

ANGER MANAGEMENT GROUP

Wednesdays, 6-7:30pm. Co-ed six week group, start date contingent upon sign-ups.
\$40 fee for non-native clients.
Contact Tom @ 532-6811, ex 270

POSITIVE PARENTING & POSITIVE PARENTING OF TEENS

is done on an individual basis as space and time allow.
\$30 fee for non-native clients. For info or sign up,
Contact Mark @ 532-6811 ex 249.

FOCIS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE WOMEN'S SUPPORT GROUP

Women's Support Group Tuesdays 3 p.m. to 5p.m.
For info, contact Brittany@ FOCIS PROGRAM, 532-6811 ex 270.

BRAVE AT HEART CANCER SUPPORT GROUP

For anyone who has been touched by Cancer
Meetings every 2nd Thursday
5:00 to 6:00 pm
Call Ashley, 532-6811 ex.272

GIRLS TAKE CHARGE GROUP

Every other Wednesday, 4:30 to 5:30
Teen Girls are invited
Call Ashley @ 532-6811 ex 272

BOYS TAKE CHARGE GROUP

Thursday afternoons, 3:30 to 4:30
Teen young men are invited
For info or sign-up call
Ashley, 532-6811 ex 272

THURSDAY SUPPORT GROUP

Explore both Modern & Traditional forms of beadwork and other Traditional crafts. Thursday afternoons from 3:00pm to 5:00pm in the South Conference room, Call Mark @ 532-6811 ex. 249. For info or sign up.

MOTHERS STRONG GROUP

New Moms Supporting New Moms
Through Baby's Challenging First Year!
Contact Brittany to sign up
(530) 532-6181

HISTORY KEEPERS

Elders group, 55 and older
Tuesdays 12:30pm to 1:15pm
For more information or to attend,
Call Ashley @ 532-6811 ex. 270

RED ROAD TO WELLBRIETY MEETING

For those that have suffered alcoholism and drug addiction and other forms of self-defeating behaviors, you can walk the 12 steps of the Red Road to recovery.
WEEKLY MEETINGS ON WEDNESDAY @ 6.00 PM @ FEATHER RIVER TRIBAL HEALTH
530-534-5394
EVERYONE IS WELCOME!

LOCAL DV SERVICES

FOCIS PROGRAM SERVICES

Advocacy Services, Restraining Order assistance, court accompaniment, Community education and in-service training, Crisis intervention services, Women's Talking Circles, Resource information & referral service.
Feather River Tribal Health 530-534-5394 ext. 270

Catalyst DV Services

24-hour hotline for DV intervention & referrals, Emergency Shelter, Children's Program at HAVEN, Transitional Housing & Household establishment Drop-in centers, Individual counseling, Support groups, Restraining Order assistance & Court Accompaniment, Community Outreach.
24-Hour Hotline 800-895-8476 Oroville Drop-in Center 530-532-6427

SHARP (Self Help and Referral Program)

Self Help center that provides general assistance to people who do not have attorneys. Assistance is provided in the areas of family law, guardianships, evictions, small claims, name changes, and restraining orders.
1675 Montgomery Street Oroville, 530-532-7015



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