Coordinated attacks that took place downtown Saturday have stoked alarm and prompted Chicago's acting police superintendent to issue a statement on the incidents.

But the idea of an organized group preying on strangers through seemingly random attacks is not a new phenomenon, according to Arthur Lurigio, psychology and criminal justice professor at Loyola University Chicago.

Such incidents have been reported in cities across the country for years, he said. What separates some of these crimes from previous incarnations is the reported use of social media and mobile technology to orchestrate them.

Police have been implementing strategies since May to address the so-called mob actions, some of which are coordinated via text messages or social networking websites, according to the Tribune. The attacks Saturday did not appear to be coordinated by any social media, police told the Tribune.

Other cities also have been affected by coordinated attacks.

Time magazine recently reported on flash mobs turning into "flash robs," in which groups of people swarm a store, grab merchandise and flee. Such incidents have been reported in Washington, D.C., and Chicago.

Other recent occurrences include one in New York City, where a group of teens showed up last month at Dunkin' Donuts and tossed chairs, grabbed donuts from behind the counter and stole drinks. Also last month, dozens of teens stormed a Las Vegas convenience store in a coordinated event, making off with about $600 worth of merchandise, according to The Associated Press.

Philadelphia saw a few incidents last year in which flash mobs assaulted and robbed people. In Kansas City, hundreds of teens last year showed up at a plaza causing fights and destroying property.

In Chicago, Lurigio said police action eventually will put an end to the incidents. He also said any kind of criminal activity can become less satisfying for a criminal the more it is carried out.

"It'll fade," he said. "I hope soon before more people get hurt."