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Non-Terrorist active shooting attacks in small businesses: a management approach.

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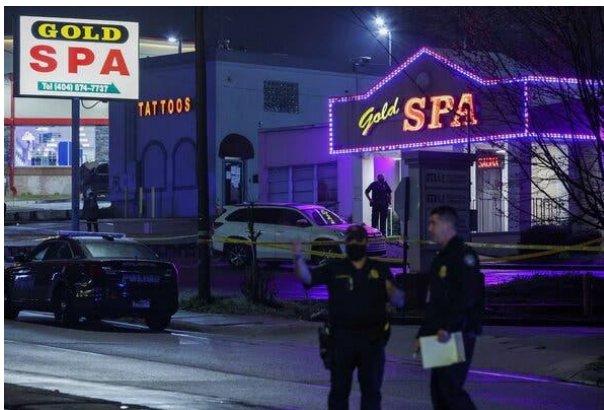
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1. Cases analysis.

1.1 Atlanta Spas attack.

On March 16, eight people were killed in three Asian Spas in Georgia, one in Cherokee County and two in Atlanta, including six Asian women. The crime, an active shooting incident on multiple locations, unfolded near Woodstock, the attacker's hometown, where he began the spree killing around 5:00 p.m., at the Young's Asian Massage, with two fatalities on the site and another two who died from their injuries at the hospital. The second and third locations were in Atlanta city, firstly at the Gold Massage Spa one hour later, with three dead and where the police responded as an armed robbery, and secondly, while police were on this second scenario 911 dispatchers received the call from a third location, at the Aroma Therapy Spa, where an additional fatality was founded. On the three locations the attacks took just some minutes, with the attacker coming in, shooting and leaving. Although at the beginning there were no evidence of facing just one shooter, around 8:00 p.m. footage and witnesses lead to the identification of him on the loose¹.



The attacker, Robert A. Long, presented sexual addiction issues, and he had visited the spas in the past himself as a client. Atlanta police believed that this could be a trigger for the attack, after he was kicked out from the family home due to spending hours on end watching online pornography. Additionally, Long was a deeply religious young man belonging to a strict Baptist community Church, so his addiction, in addition to the family problems it was causing because of their

religious involvement, was a cause of personal distress since his behavior clashed with his deepest beliefs. During the police interrogation as a suspect, Long declared that his attack wasn't racially motivated, but that those Spas he had previously frequented represented a temptation that he tried to eliminate. Investigation revealed that he had carried out the attack with a 9 mm. handgun, legally purchased².

1.2. King Soopers store attack (Boulder, Colorado).

The attack unfolded in a grocery in King Soppers commercial area, in Boulder, Colorado. On March 23, with ten fatalities, this is the last active shooting incident of a chain of active shooting incidents in a short period of time, triggering again the discussion of US laws about gun ownership and individual rights. However, prevention and armed appropriate incident

¹ McLaughlin, E., Tolan, C., and Watts, A. (2021). What we know about Robert Aaron Long, the suspect in Atlanta spa shootings, at <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/03/17/us/robert-aaron-long-suspected-shooter/index.html>

² Berman, M., Shammass, B., Armus, T., and Fisher, M. (2021). The Atlanta spa shooting suspect's life before the attacks, at https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/atlanta-shooting-suspect-robert-aaron-long/2021/03/19/9397cdca-87fe-11eb-8a8b-5cf82c3dffe4_story.html

management protocols are as important as the regulation in arms ownership, as it will be later on discussed.

The attacker was Ahmad al-Aliwi Alissa, a Syrian immigrant from a wealthy background. The family emigrated to the United States in 2000, fleeing from the Assad authoritarian regime. Al-Issa, 21, still lived with his family, since he presented some problems for adapting to his new life in the United States. He had suffered bullying at high school due to his Muslim origin and later on for being Syrian, and he spent time mostly alone, complaining through social networks about the supposed government screening at his phone and social accounts, which prevented him from having a girlfriend as any normal young man of his age. However, there is no record of any surveillance nor identified radical behavior in any of his communications nor social networks. What is known about the shooter, thus, is a long record of paranoid behavior, probably showing schizoid traits, stressed after 2014, during his high school years and the infamous action of Islamic State in Syria, which increased the harassment against the Alissa teenager³.



Shooting unfolded around 2:30 p.m. in the parking lot of the store at 3600 Table Mesa Drive. According to some witnesses, the shooter entered the shopping center with what seemed a rifle of some kind. Police force declared he used a Ruger AR-556 pistol with armed brace, legally bought on March 16, and opened fire in two bullet bursts, not spraying, and he was wearing tactical gear on him, or at least a bulletproof vest⁴.

It took about an hour to suppress the threat. The shooter was arrested and taken into custody. Among the victims there was police officer Eric Talley, first one in reaching the scene of the shooting, who was shot in the head and died because of that injury during an initial exchange of gunfire with the suspect.

Regarding citizens response, when the potential victims on the scene realized the “pops” were gunshots, most of them tried to flee from the mall. Witnesses accounts mention how there was almost a stampede of people running towards the perimeter of the shops to the exits, and younger ones helping to elder ones to evacuate⁵.

³ Padilla, A. (2021). Who is Ahmad al-Aliwi Alissa, accused Boulder shooting suspect?, at <https://denver.cbslocal.com/2021/03/25/grocery-store-shooting-who-is-ahmad-al-issa-ahmad-al-aliwi-alissa/>

⁴ Sánchez, R., Murphy, P., Ellis, B., Vera, A. (2021). Here’s what we know about the Boulder , Colorado, mass shooting suspect, at <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/03/23/us/boulder-colorado-shooting-suspect/index.html>

⁵ Rubino, J., Philipps, N., Hernández, E., Bradbury, S., Hunzinger, E. (2021). Boulder shooting: Gunman kills 10, including police officer, at King Sooper, at <https://www.denverpost.com/2021/03/22/police-active-shooter-shooting-king-soopers-boulder/>

Dissecting the attacks.

Attending to the profile of the targets, both premises and victims, and the attacks, we can point out a number of common elements, as well as some differences to bear in mind.

Common elements.

As common elements, we may address the nature of the businesses, the profile of the attacker and the number of victims.

Nature of the business: Commercial entities. Both attacks took place in commercial facilities, despite of different sizes and different activities. Commercial premises would fall in the category of *soft targets*, since normally they lack strong security measures in order not to disturb the activity of clients and users. Consequently, the perception of threat by customers is also limited, since they are mostly focused on the activity they are performing, and not paying attention to their surroundings.

Two elements to consider when analyzing soft targets are, on the one hand, the prospective number of potential victims it may gather, since it is going to condition the final casualty toll, and on the other, if it is a confined or opened space, and its size, since these two elements will determine the ability of victims to evacuate, go on lockdown or take hide. Although both targets are commercial facilities, the configuration differs, so the Spas offered less possibilities for a runaway than the grocery in the shopping center in Boulder.

Non-terrorist motivation. In both cases, terrorism was excluded as motivation for the attack. The Atlanta attacks were initially related to hate crime against the Asian community, although this line of investigation was later on abandoned after discovering A. Long's record of sex addiction, rehab and obsessive feeling of guilt, and his recurrent use of massage parlors looking for sexual relieve, up to the point of linking the target as a triggering factor for his problems and look for the suppression of it by violent means. In this case, an obsessive disorder can be tracked, leading to a violent snap. Some traits of a pseudocomando profile could be identified, as the grievances construction and the interest and access to weapons -Long was a deer hunter-, however the mental disorder traits and mental instability probably play a main role in the development of the attack.

Secondly, al-Issa case keeps some resemblance with previous active shooting attackers such as the Virginia Tech shooter, Seung Hui Cho. Both of them came from well set families with immigrant background and difficulties to adapt to their new life in the United States. Cho developed depression shown in isolation and antisocial behavior, whereas al-Issa, probably due to years of suffering harassment at high school for his condition of Syrian, developed a pattern of schizoid paranoia and persecution delusion. In the case of Cho, he bought one Glock 19 and one Walther P22 legally since there was no follow-up to his psychological evaluation, while in the case of al-Issa, he bought the Ruger legally too, as there was not even a psychological evaluation nor record to consider.

Similar number of victims. The number of victims is close, eight to ten, due mostly to concentration patterns. The concentration of potential victims was higher at Boulder, since the target was a shopping center with different shops, and consequently a much more open environment, so it allowed a quicker evacuation. However, Long carried out multiple assaults on

three different locations, so even though the number of potential victims -and eventually casualties- in each massage parlor was lower, the final toll reached eight, approaching to Al-Issa's one, relating this pattern in each target to the fact of smaller, confined spaces with less possibilities for the victims to flee, closer proximity to the shooter, and a tighter window of time to take cover.

Differences.

Concentration of victims. As mentioned above, the size and spatial distribution determines to a great extent the victims' probabilities for evacuation and hiding. This variable must be considered in relation to the type of weapon used in the attack, its accuracy and its range. In active shooting incidents, short range weapons are more effective in confined environments with few options of escape or concealment, whereas longer range and accurate weapons are more functional in bigger or more open areas where victims may easily run away. According to this, the use of longer range and accurate weapons -i.e., a submachine gun or assault rifle- in a confined space, will increase the number of casualties.

Weapons. Following the previous point, the number of casualties can be explained due to the double fact that in the case of Long's attack, he used a 9 mm. handgun in three sequential closed spaces -the massages parlors-, with the consequence of a lower lethality, increased by the multiple locations, whereas al-Issa used a so-called pistol Ruger AR-556, which implies both pistol and ammunition use an AR-15 platform for shooting, what increases both range and accuracy. In this sense, al-Issa attack casualty toll was foiled because of the more open space where it took place, and the limited training the attacker had with the weapon, joined to the escape routes that victims could find to abandon the premises. Having the attacker a broader experience in shooting, probably the casualty toll would have been much higher.

Knowledge about victims. Knowledge of victims is symptomatic of planning, and consequently of more sophistication and efficiency than attacks where there is no previous knowledge. Long went several times to the three massage parlors looking for sexual satisfaction, considering them as a source for his addiction problems and his feeling of guilt; in this sense, the massage parlor lye in the root of grievances building, so common according to author as Peter Langman or Reed Meloy in organized individuals with narcissistic, psychopathic or obsessive traits, who build those grievances based on environmental situations which, according to them, harms them undeservedly. This rationalization of the target as a problem allows a planification of the attack, in Long's case, with a sequence of armed actions in different parlors where he had been a customer and where he felt guilt in a more direct way. On the other hand, al-Issa didn't have a previous grievance against King Soopers grocery and commercial area; the attack was motivated by a state of mental paranoia and anti-social behavior of the subject; it is still unknown why he chose that specific shop, but since he felt despised by American society, he might have taken his grief against a representation of capitalist, American "way of life", in which he doesn't seem to fit or feels as fitting. The sophistication of this attack remains connected only to the location, the weapon of choice -probably because it is easier to acquire legally, since it is considered just a pistol-, and the tactical vest; he didn't seem to rely on any escape route -as the gunfire exchange with the police and eventual detention shows-, disposition of weapons nor

taking hostages. In this sense, schizoid and paranoid mental disorders are frequently connected to non-organized attacks, without a conscientious planning cycle behind them.

2. Problematic of these kind of attacks in small-size targets.

Every organization has a duty of care to protect its employees and guests, users and customers while they are on the premises or even when they are acting on behalf of the organization, although outside the facilities.

Since triggering factors are multiple and attacker can be motivated both by internal and external aspects, the most effective way to deal with the risk of an armed attack is to plan proactively and established a preparedness plan according to the characteristics of the organization.

The classical process should involve the following steps⁶:

- *Prevention*. If possible, the organization should develop its own program. Prevention involves customized preventive actions which should evolve with the organization, such as a workplace violence policy, awareness program, community watch strategies, early detection training, or any other measure providing protection before the attack unfolds. It can include from basic CPTED strategies such as areas open to surveillance or deterrence urban structures such as bollards -depending on what kind of attack the organization seeks to prevent-, to advanced physical and electronic security measures or private security agents.
- *Protection*. Active shooting incidents, due to their dynamism, are difficult to prevent and to protect. However, some protective measures can be used: access control and detection measures, surveillance systems, protective barriers, armed security officers or policies and procedures as organizational measures. Organizational measures involve empowering employees and frequent users, clients or guests, so they can take make a decision about whether to run, hide or fight, and how to do it as a fundamental methodology when facing the extreme stress of a mass shooting.
- *Mitigation*. It begins when prevention and protection have been compromised. Mitigation measures are designed to minimize loss and lessen the effects of an attack. It relies in procedures as sheltering, lockdowns, evacuation, as any other measure able to reduce the effects of the attack.
- *Response*. It involves the capability of responding quickly to an incident and contain or neutralize the attack, as a crucial point in every active shooting program. This stage means preparing for supporting and helping in law enforcement and emergency first responders in suppressing the threat and providing first care to victims. A useful organizational measure is to have prearranged bags including keys or access badges, maps, door stops, and other special equipment to help police overcome the different security measures. The dotation of tourniquets, mass bleeding control devices, airway tubing and other emergency medical material, placed on strategic situations may help emergency services in the provision of the first aid to victims. Yet, in this aspect, training personnel is a key action in order the program and the tools to work.
- *Recovery*. Last stage is related to the notion of business continuity. Developing a program for recovering quickly from an armed incident may reduce the psychological

⁶Doss, K.T., and Shepherd, D. (2015). Active Shooter. Preparing for and responding to a growing threat, BH Elsevier, Oxford, pp. 143-144.

effects of the rampage on employees. In this sense, knowledge about specific risks and the personnel's profile, but also critical operations that must be resumed.

Due to the multiple challenges represented by workplace violence, it can post a problem not only for more complex organizations as medical, religious or educational ones, which face specific problems and risks, but too for smaller organizations lacking the structure or the capabilities to provide stronger security measures.

Problems of protecting small businesses.

Small organizations such as small shops or businesses, whatever is the activity they develop, may find difficult to implement security measures to the same level than bigger corporations. For instance, normally they are going to lack a security department to design and apply workplace violence policies. In the same way, it might be difficult to create internal structures such as threat assessment and management teams, since the number of employees is frequently limited to one to ten people. Some guidelines regarding armed incidents prevention and management are the following ones:

- Identification of customers profiles and possible risk behaviors. Are they recurrent? Or they just go on business -whatever the activity is- occasionally? In the first case risk behaviors might be spotted -erratic behavior, anger and rage outbursts, misogynist attitudes, nervousness or, on rare occasions, identification of radicalization patterns as changes in clothing or interpersonal relations, among others. In the second one, suspicious behaviors as clothing with no correspondence with the weather, presence of tactical equipment, and too nervousness, sweat, et cetera. In this last case the odds of early detection of a possible attacker are limited, so preparedness should focus on response mechanisms.
- Identification of vulnerable situations where a grievance might take place, such as confrontations with clients or providers, complaints, etc., former coworker sentimental relations ruptures, terminations of contracts, among others.
- Identification of the site vulnerabilities and strengths, regarding environment, entries and exits, surrounding, possible evacuation paths, but too possible vulnerable points of access for an external aggressor.
- Preparedness. Despite being a small business, train, train and train. Prevent situations of violence and how to act according to the Run-Hide-Fight algorithm: escape routes, confinement and safe-rooms for lockdown, places which offer a good cover for protection against the attack, et cetera. Secondly, check if there is some kind of community policing program in the area, so a closer relation can be established with local police forces: mutual knowledge facilitates the identification of risks and improves response times and effectiveness, since the facilities are known beforehand.
- Become familiar with the Hartford Consensus. They establish a framework for the integral response between citizens, private sector, and public responders -both law enforcement and emergency services-. The Hartford Consensus provide a cohesive model of response joining the suppression of the threat -the attacker or attackers- and first care to victims, especially associated to mass bleeding control through the use of tourniquets and hemostatics, airway protection and rapid extrication from the direct threat area. These techniques require basic training, which is currently available in multiple countries through the program Stop the Bleed and associated providers, with

free options for citizens and tailored training packages for private organizations who looks for an improvement of their response capabilities to armed incidents. Finally, the training needs the complement of the acquisition of bleeding control materials as IFAKs -Individual First Aid Kits- containing tourniquets and hemostatics, as part of the health security policy of the organization, along with defibrillators and other first aid equipments. These measures are complementary of any other elements of corporate security, independently of the organization size.

Conclusions.

When dealing with an active shooter event, there is no one-size-fits-all solution for every organization. Each case requires a specific assessment about its conditions, environment, organization and capabilities, and consequently, its specific threat, vulnerabilities and risks. Due to these conditions, also the protocols for responding armed incidents such as active shooting ones needs a careful revision to be effective.

Despite the extensive bibliography and protocol models of response available, one problem is that mostly all of them are design for complex organizations with resources enough as to implement organizational and corporate security measures which include dealing with armed aggressions. However, these procedures are difficult to be applied in small businesses where the whole of the workforce is barely of ten employees.

In these situations, where the organization lacks the manpower for creating structures such a threat assessment and management team to screen risky behaviors, preparedness for armed incident management goes through the assessment of the premises, a careful analysis both internal and external, and regular training for the staff, in coordination with the local security forces with jurisdiction in the area, so prevention and response are effective and may enable employees with the skills to provide the first aid to victims -including themselves-, opening a saving gap of time for the arrival of law enforcement first responders to suppress the threat and further on for evacuation to hospital premises.