

Securing educational institutions against an active killer on the example of the United States of America. Best practices and recommendations¹

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Abstract

Educational institutions can become targets for active killers and this threat seems greater today than it did a few years ago. The aim of the article is to describe the main elements and proposals for securing these facilities against attacks of this type of perpetrators, which are recommended in the United States, and then to indicate solutions that could be introduced in Polish facilities. They concern both physical security and broadly understood prevention and monitoring of threats.

Keywords

active killer, active shooter, attacks, school security, university security, physical security

¹ The article is based on a final thesis defended in 2023 at Collegium Civitas. The thesis was written as part of postgraduate studies on terrorism and hybrid threats.

Introduction

In Gdańsk in 2002², a student attacked a lecturer on duty with an axe. Another academic staff member stood up for him and did not survive the assault. The perpetrator easily carried the murder weapon in a backpack to the Gdańsk University of Technology. Previously, there had been no indication that the incident might occur. In Brześć Kujawski in 2019, a former student of the local school entered the facility without any control. He detonated explosives and then fired shots from a black powder weapon, wounding two people. The attacker was stopped by a school worker. Before the incident, the school had received training in the “Asylum” security procedure³, so that the balance of victims was not higher⁴. In 2020 in Chełm, a teenager killed his stepmother and attempted to deprive her children of their lives⁵. Previously, he expressed fascination with the perpetrators of Columbine⁶, among others, and posted an entry online informing the public of the plans for the crime. He also contacted young people planning a bombing of one of the schools in Warsaw⁷. Only

² B. Czechowska-Derkacz, *Z siekierą na egzaminatora* (Eng. With an axe at the examiner), *Tygodnik Przegląd*, 24 VI 2002, <https://www.tygodnikprzeglad.pl/siekiera-na-egzaminatora/> [accessed: 8 VII 2023].

³ “Asylum” - the Polish equivalent of the security procedure, which in the United States is referred to as Lockdown Drill – editor’s note.

⁴ *Postrzelił 11-letnią uczennicę i woźną, zdetonował w szkole ładunki wybuchowe. Były uczeń prawomocnie skazany* (Eng. He shot an 11-year-old student and a janitor. He detonated explosives at the school. Former student legally convicted), *TVN24*, 13 VI 2023, <https://tvn24.pl/pomorze/brzesc-kujawski-strzelal-do-dzieci-w-szkole-zdetonowal-kilka-ladunkow-wybuchowych-byly-uczen-prawomocnie-skazany-7172537> [accessed: 10 VII 2023].

⁵ K. Zasada, *Brutalnie zamordował macochę. Młodociany zabójca z Chełma na wolności* (Eng. He brutally murdered his stepmother. Juvenile killer from Chełm at large), *RMF24*, 10 VII 2023, https://www.rmfm24.pl/regiony/warszawa/news-brutalnie-zamordowal-macochemlodociany-zabojca-z-chelma-na-nId,6893565#crp_state=1 [accessed: 8 VII 2023].

⁶ The 1999 Columbine High School shooting was one of the largest mass shootings at educational institutions in U.S. history. The perpetrators were two teenage students at the school – Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold. From: Wikipedia, https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Masakra_w_Columbine_High_School [accessed: 6 V 2024] – editor’s note.

⁷ K. Zasada, *To miało być polskie Columbine. Znamy szczegóły planu niedoszonego zamachu w warszawskim technikum* (Eng. It was supposed to be a Polish Columbine. We know the details of the plan for a would-be assassination attempt at a Warsaw technical school), *RMF24*, 5 II 2020, https://www.rmfm24.pl/fakty/polska/news-to-mialo-byc-polskie-columbine-znamy-szczegoly-planu-niedosz-nId,4307829#crp_state=1 [accessed: 8 VII 2023].

by chance did a tragedy not occur at the capital's technical school. These are just a few of the stories reported in the media.

In the context of the topic raised, it is also worth recalling events of a completely different nature that occurred in 2019 in Pabianice⁸ and Barczewo⁹. Simulated terrorist attacks were carried out in schools there without warning¹⁰. They were so realistic that some students and staff experienced physical and psychological problems. Panic and chaos prevailed during simulated actions. Police units in these localities were also not informed of planned drills, so that a possible assault by the services could have made the situation even worse.

Attacks by active killers in educational institutions in the United States have been far more dramatic than in Poland. For example, at Columbine High School, 13 people were killed and 21 injured¹¹, at Virginia Polytechnic Institute the death toll was 30 people, 17 were injured, at Sandy Hook School there were 26 deaths and 2 people were injured. The scale of such crimes is also incomparable. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the U.S. Department of Justice published a summary from the years 2000-2019 in 2021¹². According to the data collected, active shooters attacked 18 times on college campuses and 44 times in schools during this period (it was the third highest figure, after facilities open to pedestrian traffic – 96 times and open spaces – 50 times). In 2021 there were two attacks on educational

⁸ *Antyterrorysty wtargnęli do szkoły w Pabianicach i zaczęli strzelać w sufit. "Trzęsłam się ze strachu"* (Eng. Anti-terrorists burst into a school in Pabianice and started shooting at the ceiling. "I was shaking with fear"), *Gazeta.pl*, 19 VI 2019, <https://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/7,114883,24916353,antyterrorysty-wtargneli-do-szkoly-w-pabianicach-i-zaczeli-strzelac.html?fbclid=IwAR3k3RDSROizgvWomU92oqmwArIfozsalRNnSlB3e3eYupLaOELAWTDMTqM> [accessed: 8 VII 2023].

⁹ *Atak na szkołę. Burmistrz odwołał dyrektor szkoły po upozorowanym ataku na placówkę* (Eng. School attack. The mayor dismissed the school's principal after a simulated attack on the facility), *Serwis Samorządowy PAP*, 5 XII 2019, <https://samorzad.pap.pl/kategoria/edukacja/atak-na-szkole-burmistrz-odwolal-dyrektor-szkoly-po-upozorowanym-ataku-na> [accessed: 8 VII 2023].

¹⁰ These trainings sessions were conducted not in an active shooter attack formula, but in a hostage situation, which is relatively rare to occur.

¹¹ *Columbine High School shootings*, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 16 II 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Columbine-High-School-shootings> [accessed: 8 VII 2023].

¹² Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Department of Justice, *Active Shooter Incidents 20-Year Review, 2000-2019*, <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/active-shooter-incidents-20-year-review-2000-2019-060121.pdf/view> [accessed: 8 VII 2023].

facilities (out of 61 total cases)¹³, in 2022 – four (out of 50 nationwide)¹⁴. Only in 2020, due to the pandemic, no act of assault was recorded in educational facilities.

The purpose of the research carried out within the framework of this article was to analyse the solutions for securing educational institutions against active killer used in the United States, and then to identify, among other things, on this basis, best practices and recommendations for institutions in Poland. The author primarily used materials available on official U.S. websites (statistics, reports, programs, information campaigns).

The United States has been facing the problem of the active killer for several decades. Attacks have been carried out not only on school grounds, but also in workplaces and public spaces such as shopping malls and religious sites. This has necessitated the introduction of appropriate solutions in the country to minimise the risk of an attack and, if it occurs, the number of victims. Countering the threat of an active killer requires the cooperation of ministries, agencies and private entities. In the United States the institutions that deal with this issue are primarily: FBI¹⁵, U.S. Department of Homeland Security¹⁶, United States Secret Service¹⁷, U.S. Department of Justice¹⁸, U.S. Department of Education¹⁹, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services²⁰ and Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA)²¹.

In Poland, there have not been as many and as serious in its consequences actions of an active killer, but this does not mean that

¹³ Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Department of Justice, *Active Shooter Incidents in The United States in 2021*, <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/active-shooter-incidents-in-the-us-2021-052422.pdf/view>, p. 13 [accessed: 8 VII 2023].

¹⁴ Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Department of Justice, *Active Shooter Incidents in the United States in 2022*, <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/active-shooter-incidents-in-the-us-2022-042623.pdf/view>, p. 12 [accessed: 8 VII 2023].

¹⁵ U.S. government agency that deals with crimes that go beyond the borders of a single state. It conducts intelligence and counterintelligence activities.

¹⁶ Department responsible for homeland security within the United States.

¹⁷ A law enforcement agency under the Department of Homeland Security, primarily concerned with protecting the country's most important people and their families.

¹⁸ Department dealing with the U.S. justice system and enforcement of federal laws.

¹⁹ Department in charge of U.S. education.

²⁰ Department in charge of U.S. health security.

²¹ Agency for cyber and physical security.

the threat can be downplayed. Without making certain scenarios plausible (conducting prior training, simulations, exercises), without developing and implementing appropriate procedures, the level of people's exposure to the consequences of such an event increases. The problem is that Poland lacks systemic solutions that would normalise preparation for this type of emergency. The topic is marginalised and only brought up when they occur. Such an approach makes it difficult to undertake a substantive discussion and introduce appropriate solutions. Poland does not learn from the experience of countries that have already implemented them. The services do not keep official records of such incidents. Knowledge of them is provided by the media, which focus on other aspects and usually do not follow up on the case and perpetrators. The gap is also evident in research on the issue - there are few Polish studies devoted to the subject.

According to the Ministry of Education and Science, there are about 400 public and non-public universities in Poland²². In turn, the Central Statistical Office reports that in the 2022/2023 school year there were 14,073 elementary schools, 6819 secondary schools, 1287 post-secondary schools and 816 schools for adults²³. Each such unit in its own right is responsible for the safety of students, pupils, employees and members of the public.

Appropriate security of educational institutions (and any other semi-public place) should provide certain functions. These include, first and foremost: detecting potential threats, responding to them, and preparing people to signal suspicious events or behaviour. Once an emergency occurs, safeguards should make it possible to limit its impact and minimise casualties, as well as facilitate rescue operations. In addition to the use of strictly technical safeguards, it is important to educate staff, pupils, students and parents to increase their knowledge of hazards and to consolidate the appropriate attitudes and reflexes. In order to increase the effectiveness of activities, it is necessary to develop mechanisms for cooperation and exchange of information on the line between members of the community-services-administrative bodies-media-society, and to activate people (e.g. through appropriate information campaigns,

²² *Szkolnictwo wyższe* (Eng. The higher education), Serwis Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, <https://www.gov.pl/web/edukacja-i-nauka/szkolnictwo-wyzsze> [accessed: 8 VII 2023].

²³ *Edukacja w roku szkolnym 2022/2023 (wyniki wstępne)* (Eng. Education in the 2022/2023 school year (preliminary results)), Serwis Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, https://stat.gov.pl/files/gfx/portalinformacyjny/pl/defaultaktualnosci/5488/21/1/1/edukacja_w_roku_szkolnym_2022-2023-wyniki_wstepne.pdf [accessed: 8 VII 2023].

participation in consultations, opportunities to submit their proposals for safety).

However, no safeguards are 100 % effective, and no service is capable of providing continuous protection. Each attack by an active killer is unique, making it impossible to prepare for all potential incident scenarios. There is also no single profile of the person posing the threat (a set of specific traits or behaviours of the perpetrator), nor a profile of the facility that could become a target of an attack. However, certain correlations and common features can be identified. In a broader sense, therefore, the issue is not only about securing educational facilities, but also about raising awareness in society about terrorist threats. According to experts, the time between the start of an incident involving an active killer and the arrival of the services averages 10 to 15 minutes. Witnesses to such an incident should therefore be physically and mentally prepared to take appropriate action²⁴. It is they who should be the first to react - to call for help if possible, to inform the relevant services of the situation, and upon their arrival to cooperate with them or - at least - not to impede their work.

Active killer - brief characteristics

One of the terms cited in the article is active killer²⁵ (or active shooter²⁶). This is a person (or persons acting in a group) who aims to kill or injure as many people as possible in a designated area, in the shortest possible time²⁷. The places of attacks may have a specific meaning for the perpetrator (e.g. the place of his current or former work, educational institutions,

²⁴ U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *Active Shooter Educational Sheet*, https://www.heritagechristian.net/uploaded/Heritage_Documents/Safety_Security/DHS-Active_Shooter_Educational_Sheet_0.pdf [accessed: 8 VII 2023].

²⁵ In this article, the author uses the term active killer instead of active shooter. Easier access to firearms makes them the most common tool used by perpetrators of this type of crime in the U.S. In Poland, on the other hand, and in other countries where acquiring a gun requires putting in more effort and incurring a significant financial expenses, cold steel or explosives prepared at home are rather used.

²⁶ See: J. Stukan, *Szkolni strzelcy. Przewidywanie i zapobieganie morderstwom* (Eng. School shooters. Predicting and preventing murders), Warszawa 2020.

²⁷ The International Association of Chiefs of Police - Law Enforcement Policy Center, *Active Shooter*, April 2018, https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/2021-07/ActiveShooter2018-UpdatedFormat%2007.16.2021_0.pdf, p. 1 [accessed: 6 VII 2023].

religious centers, cultural facilities, shopping malls). The victims may be random, may also have a symbolic dimension (e.g. children, followers of a particular religion, members of the school community). An active killer can become a person with ties to a place (e.g. a student or pupil, an employee, a former member of the community), but also someone without ties (for whom the symbolism of a place or easy access to it will be important). There is no single profile of the perpetrator or list of characteristics and behaviours that would indicate that someone will start killing. One can only pick out risk factors. Their identification is important because most attacks are not carried out on impulse²⁸. Certain events and individual motivations (including real or imaginary wrongs) can lead to thoughts of forcible resolution of the situation, followed by planning and preparation for an attack²⁹. For observers (primarily family, friends), the state of crisis and its manifestations may be visible and serve as an alarm signal³⁰.

As a rule, active killers do not take hostages, do not torture victims, do not negotiate. In the course of an attack, they often move around (both on foot and by means of transport), which can pose an additional danger to bystanders. Some of them, at the end, commit suicide (also in the form of *suicide by cop*, i.e. provoking officers with their behaviour to use weapons) or are deprived of their lives by the services that arrive on the scene or witnesses to the incident. During an attack, perpetrators most often use firearms, in addition to knives, axes, explosives, drones, vehicles. Such incidents are characterised by a tendency to evolve - they often develop in unpredictable, non-schematic ways. In most cases, their course is so dynamic that the services are unable to appear quickly enough, which is why so much depends on the behaviour of participants and witnesses. The tactics adopted by the arriving services and previous prevention efforts also have a significant impact.

²⁸ C. Guthrie, *Can We Identify the Next Shooter? Preventing Mass Shootings and Active Shooters by Identifying Concerning Behaviors of the Shooter Prior to the Attack*, in: *Security and Society in the Information Age*, K. Maniszewska, P. Piasecka (eds.), Warszawa 2018, pp. 35–43.

²⁹ K.W. Schweit, *Addressing the Problem of the Active Shooter*, FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, 7 V 2013, <https://leb.fbi.gov/articles/featured-articles/addressing-the-problem-of-the-active-shooter> [accessed: 7 VII 2023].

³⁰ *Public Mass Shootings: Database Amasses Details of a Half Century of U.S. Mass Shootings with Firearms, Generating Psychosocial Histories*, National Institute of Justice, 3 II 2022, <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/public-mass-shootings-database-amasses-details-half-century-us-mass-shootings> [accessed: 7 VII 2023].

Factors that make it easy to launch an attack on an educational facility

Factors that make educational facilities (as well as other places with open and semi-open access) an easy target for an active killer are:

- open access, including to the public (lack of control of suppliers, service contractors, pupils, students, interested parties),
- surroundings of facilities (neighborhood of other schools, surrounding buildings),
- unprotected infrastructure elements,
- limited or no control of parking lots and vehicles,
- lack of constant monitoring,
- gathering the school community members in open spaces (during breaks, assemblies, various ceremonies, arrivals and departures by public transport or cars³¹),
- sharing facilities with the community and other bystanders (e.g. swimming pools, sports arenas, halls where cultural events are held, open lectures).

U.S. information policy on security in educational facilities

Due to the scale of the active killer problem in the United States, there are numerous projects to spread information about this threat. As stated in an article that appeared on the anniversary of the Columbine massacre: *The threat of an active shooter attack is rare but very real. We aim to eradicate the “It can’t happen to me” mentality and change the way people everywhere respond to armed intruders*³².

In the materials available on U.S. government websites, safeguarding against an attack by an active killer is seen not only as ensuring physical safety, but also as recognizing certain behaviours in a potential perpetrator that may indicate the risk of dangerous actions. They also describe recommended conduct during the attack, during the assault by services, and after the incident (contact with the media, psychological first aid, dealing with trauma).

³¹ This is dangerous because it takes place within a regular and predictable timeframe, which can make it easier to plan an attack.

³² *Columbine Anniversary: How a Notorious Mass Shooting Forever Changed the Way Americans Go to School*, The Independent, 20 IV 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/columbine-anniversary-high-school-shooting-active-shooter-drills-alice-dylan-klebold-eric-harris-a8878741.html> [accessed: 6 VII 2023].

There is an Active Shooter Safety Resources tab on the official FBI website³³. The agency's role is not limited to taking direct action in a crisis situation. It also includes conducting research to identify risk indicators for the use of violence and organising, in conjunction with other units, training to unify and improve response procedures throughout the country. The trainings are addressed to representatives of law enforcement agencies and other stakeholders. In addition, the agency offers assistance with media relations and a program to support victims of crime (Victim Services Division). The FBI also has the Community Relations Unit, a unit responsible for liaising with local communities to develop the best solutions for their safety. Guides are available on how to create emergency response plans for colleges³⁴ and minimise the consequences, including health, of such incidents³⁵. Another government initiative to combat threats is the 911 app³⁶.

The FBI, in conjunction with other units, regularly publishes reports on incidents involving an active killer³⁷. The data presented there are very detailed. They concern the perpetrators (among other things: age, gender, motives for action, criminal history, connections to other persons, actions prior to the high point, tools and weapons used³⁸), time and place of attacks (month, day of the week, time, state and specific place), victims (injured/

³³ *Active Shooter Safety Resources*, FBI, <https://www.fbi.gov/how-we-can-help-you/safety-resources/active-shooter-safety-resources> [accessed: 6 VII 2023].

³⁴ U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Federal Emergency Management Agency, *Guide for Developing High-Quality Emergency Operations Plans for Institutions of Higher Education*, 2013, https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/rem-s-ihe-guide_508.pdf/view, pp. 75–88 [accessed: 6 VII 2023].

³⁵ U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *Active Shooter Recovery Guide. August 2017*, <https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/active-shooter-recovery-guide-08-08-2017-508.pdf> [accessed: 6 VII 2023].

³⁶ *911*, <https://www.911.gov/> [accessed: 6 VII 2023].

³⁷ Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Department of Justice, *Active Shooter incidents. 20-Year Review...*; Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Department of Justice, *Active Shooter Incidents in the United States in 2020*, <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/active-shooter-incidents-in-the-us-2020-070121.pdf/view> [accessed: 6 VII 2023]; Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Department of Justice, *Active Shooter Incidents in the United States in 2021...*; Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Department of Justice, *Active Shooter Incidents in the United States in 2022...*

³⁸ The data relates not only to weapons, but also to the use of bulletproof vests, additional devices such as improvised explosive devices, incendiary devices, smoke grenades, tear gas canisters.

killed officers, number of injured persons), involvement of law enforcement and security personnel, participation of citizens, how the incident ended³⁹.

According to a 2019 Secret Service report, among the motivations perpetrators have are grief and desire for retaliation (against peers, facility staff, other emotional and personal motives), desire to kill, desire to commit suicide, need for fame/publicity, psychotic disorders⁴⁰. Determining dominant motives can be helpful in recognizing risks and identifying risk factors that require intervention.

Properly prepared and executed public campaigns play an important role in ensuring the safety and prevention of active killer threats. They should reach as large an audience as possible and educate, but without striking excessive fear. U.S. government institutions encourage downloading informational materials, making them available and sharing knowledge. The article briefly describes three such projects, chosen for their visibility and potential for implementation in other countries.

“Run, Hide, Fight” - is one of the better-recognized campaigns in the circles interested in security issues, conducted - with some modifications - all over the world⁴¹. It refers to the FBI's recommended tactics for dealing with an active killer attack. It should not be regarded as a proposal for a sequence of specific actions, but as options to be used depending on the circumstances surrounding the attack. In this tactic, *Run* recommends: leaving personal belongings at the scene, identifying escape routes, avoiding elevators and escalators, informing people you encounter about the threat, contacting an emergency number if possible, informing those responsible for providing security. The *Hide* option recommends: closing the door and barricading it with heavy objects, closing and covering the windows, turning off the lights, muting the phone and staying put until the services arrive. The *Fight* option applies to situations where it is

³⁹ In the form of suicide of the perpetrator committed before or after the arrival of the services, suicide committed elsewhere, the killing or detaining of the perpetrator by the services or citizens.

⁴⁰ U.S. Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *Protecting America's Schools: A U.S. Secret Service Analysis of Targeted School Violence*, 2019, https://www.secretservice.gov/sites/default/files/2020-04/Protecting_Americas_Schools.pdf, p. 15 [accessed: 9 VII 2023].

⁴¹ *Run, Hide, Fight*, FBI, <https://www.fbi.gov/video-repository/run-hide-fight-092120.mp4/view> [accessed: 6 VII 2023]. This is one of the initiatives on which the creators of the 4U campaign, developed by the Internal Security Agency's Terrorism Prevention Centre of Excellence, based.

impossible to avoid a direct confrontation with the attacker. You should try to overpower him, using maximum force and available objects (fire extinguishers, chairs, etc.).

“If You See Something, Say Something” - this campaign focuses on two areas, i.e. recognizing signals indicating a threat (not only of a terrorist nature, but also related to an active killer) and reporting them appropriately to the competent authorities⁴². It emphasises the role of bystanders, who are the first to notice alarming signals and alert the services. The goal of this campaign is to increase people’s vigilance and interest in their immediate surroundings.

“Don’t Name Them” - is an initiative of the FBI and ALERRT Center, which aims to focus the attention of the media, law enforcement not on the perpetrators of criminal acts, but on their victims, survivors, communities affected by the tragedy⁴³. This supportive attitude can have a positive impact on the process of dealing with trauma and recovery⁴⁴. Indeed, the problem is that some of the media, instead of pursuing a proper information policy, rely on sensational, unverified information and perpetuate harmful myths and stereotypes.

Physical security of educational institutions

The security system in educational institutions consists of the following elements⁴⁵:

- prevention - its main goal is to reduce the number of threats and increase the likelihood of their detection. Prevention activities include, but are not limited to: preventing violence and cyberbullying among students, taking care of their mental health and the right atmosphere at school, assessing threats and reporting them appropriately;

⁴² *If You See Something, Say Something*, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, <https://www.dhs.gov/see-something-say-something> [accessed: 6 VII 2023].

⁴³ *Don’t Name Them*, ALERRT Center, <https://www.dontnamethem.org/> [accessed: 6 VII 2023].

⁴⁴ *FBI Designates 61 Active Shooter Incidents in 2021*, FBI, 23 V 2022, <https://www.fbi.gov/news/press-releases/fbi-designates-61-active-shooter-incidents-in-2021> [accessed: 6 VII 2023].

⁴⁵ Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, *K-12 School Security Guide*, 3rd Edition, 2022, <https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/2022-11/k12-school-security-guide-3rd-edition-022022-508.pdf>, p. 2 [accessed: 17 VII 2023].

- protection and risk mitigation - through, among other things, the use of physical security equipment and technology, the appropriate design of the building and surrounding area, the presence of security personnel, the introduction of security policies and procedures, training and exercising students and staff in these procedures;
- direct response at the time of an incident and the return to a state of relative “normality” and removal of the effects.

Physical security of facilities should serve the purpose of efficient detection (recording signals that something disturbing is happening or may happen soon), delaying the possibility of an attack, appropriate response from bystanders, witnesses and services, in addition to limiting unwanted effects. Solutions recommended for educational institutions are also analysed in terms of cost and the impact they may have on the atmosphere of the place⁴⁶. This means that when selecting solutions to ensure safety, the criterion of effectiveness should not be the only determinant. It is also necessary to take into account their impact on the comfort of the place and ensure that they do not lead to the “besieged fortress” syndrome.

Among the most important security proposals identified and evaluated by CISA are⁴⁷:

- perimeter lighting: low purchase and maintenance cost, probably to have a positive impact on the facility’s atmosphere and users’ sense of security;
- perimeter barrier (e.g. hedge, decorative fencing, chain links, concrete walls, cinder blocks): varying cost and impact on atmosphere depending on the solution chosen;
- single entrance or a small number of entry points in a perimeter barrier: cost dependent on other architectural elements, likely negative impact on atmosphere;
- facility staff or others assigned to control entrances (full-time or only at certain times): average cost, atmospheric impact may be variable depending on the training of those performing these tasks and their approach;

⁴⁶ In the guide prepared by CISA, costs are rated as: low, medium, high or varied, and the impact of solutions as: probably positive, neutral/variable or probably negative.

⁴⁷ Based on: Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, *K-12 School Security Assessment Tool. Technical Appendix*, <https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/2022-11/ssat-technical-appendix-022022-508.pdf> [accessed: 17 VII 2023].

- facility staff, volunteers or law enforcement officers patrolling the area: high cost, impact on atmosphere may vary;
- surveillance: expensive to both install and maintain, especially with real-time video tracking. Some establishments install dummy cameras, but there is no guarantee that they act as a deterrent to potential attackers. Surveillance is more often used for evidentiary purposes, that is, when an incident has already occurred. The impact on the atmosphere was considered neutral by the authors of the guide, attention should be paid to the right to privacy;
- road barriers (e.g. lowering gates, concrete posts or barricades filled with water/sand): relatively low cost, impact on atmosphere rather neutral;
- signs on site (e.g. designating school grounds, directing to entrance/exit, notifying of monitoring range, informing of security presence, indicating evacuation routes): relatively low cost;
- good visibility throughout the site to allow a view of what is going on: relatively low cost, the impact on the atmosphere depends on the solution chosen;
- installing locks on all doors and ensuring that they remain locked and bolted at all times (including emergencies): the cost of this solution depends on the option chosen - whether simple key locks or more complex and technologically integrated systems;
- automatic locks, locks activated by detection systems, manual locks, biometric locks, automatic systems operated by key fobs and integrated with intruder detection systems: high cost;
- master key that enables local law enforcement to access a building through locked doors: low cost;
- devices or systems that scan people and/or bags (e.g. handheld/portable metal detectors, magnetometers): varying costs depending on the solution chosen;
- traffic slowing facilities (e.g. speed bumps, curved driveways): low cost;
- alarm boxes or booths to inform law enforcement: depending on the technology used, cost can be high, impact on the atmosphere rather neutral. Be sure to make them accessible to all members of the community (including people with disabilities);
- emergency notification system (e.g. public address system, alerts sent to phones and mailboxes, apps): most schools already have

the capability for such notification, which could reduce set-up and maintenance costs. Such a system should be different from a notification system for example a fire, so that it does not add to the chaos and lead to inappropriate emergency actions;

- physical means of entry control (e.g. turnstile, vestibule): cost and impact on the atmosphere can vary;
- structural features of the building to prevent entry to certain areas (e.g. non-opening windows, bars on windows and doors, protective film to prevent glass from breaking): low cost;
- building design features to prevent the effects of gunshots or other attempts to break items (e.g. bulletproof film on glass, unbreakable glass): cost may be high;
- intrusion detection system (e.g. open door or window alarms): high cost; linking these systems to motion sensors, alarm systems or other technologies makes them even more expensive. Additional costs are associated with the required periodic testing and maintenance. There is a risk of these systems being hacked;
- identification system for employees, students, visitors (e.g. badges, ID cards, including those with a chip, visitor database): this is a simple and cost-free solution, but with some risks if it does not involve any identity control (possibility of badges theft, ID cards, providing false data). The use of identity scanners and verification of people entering the facility would be more complicated and costly;
- gunshot detection system: high cost, neutral impact on the atmosphere (due to minimal visibility);
- interior barriers (e.g. lockable hallway walls) to make it difficult for an intruder to move freely throughout the building: varying costs depending on the solutions chosen;
- thick walls, sturdy doors with locks, panic alarms, i.e. sirens that allow discreet calls for help: varying costs depending on the solutions chosen.

It is important to remember that securing educational institutions is not limited to the main building (classrooms, lecture halls, corridors, toilets, canteen, sports hall, library, secretariat, dean's office) and should involve adjacent areas (playing fields, playgrounds, parking lots). The surroundings of the facility also play an important role. In addition, consideration should be given to ensuring security on school buses (into which unwanted items can easily be brought).

Other security solutions of educational facilities

Solutions that can also affect the safety of educational institutions are:

- training, drills, procedures (e.g. “Asylum”) - learned from an early age (in the form of play), and then consolidated and expanded at later stages of education;
- having police in squad cars with balancing equipment (bar cutters, sledgehammers) - this can significantly speed up taking action⁴⁸;
- a safe room⁴⁹ - a place where you can hide, providing cover from an attacker (it does not guarantee full protection). It’s a good idea to equip them with the most necessary items, such as a first aid kit, a landline phone, a list of employees and their contact numbers, water, toiletries, wet wipes, a plan of the building (with evacuation options marked), the ability to charge phones, straps or ropes to help secure swinging doors to the outside, door stops.

There are also controversial proposals. The effectiveness of these is difficult to assess, and their impact on the atmosphere in the facilities may be negative. These include:

- no backpacks are allowed to be brought - students may only carry small bags with personal belongings, plastic bags with clothes for sports activities, boxes of food. All bags brought should be searched before entering⁵⁰;
- guns for teachers - a solution suggested by supporters of the right to own guns⁵¹. Restricting access to firearms (both official access and illegal access is an issue) for potential attackers is a contentious matter not only in the United States.

⁴⁸ Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, Interagency Security Committee, *Planning and Response to an Active Shooter. An Interagency Security Committee Policy and Best Practices Guide*, 2021 Edition, https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/2022-11/Planning%20and%20Response%20to%20an%20Active%20Shooter_2021.pdf, p. 15 [accessed: 9 VII 2023].

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

⁵⁰ USA: *Dzieci nie mogą przyjąć do szkoły z plecakiem* (Eng. USA: Children can’t come to school with a backpack), “Kwestie bezpieczeństwa”, Rzeczpospolita, 5 V 2023, <https://www.rp.pl/spoleczenstwo/art38432501-usa-dzieci-nie-moga-przyjsc-do-szkoly-z-plecakiem-kwestie-bezpieczenstwa> [accessed: 17 VII 2023].

⁵¹ *Co piąty pedagog w USA popiera pomysł uzbrojenia nauczycieli* (Eng. One in five educators in the U.S. supports the idea of arming teachers), Rzeczpospolita, 1 VI 2023, <https://edukacja.rp.pl/za-granica/art38557971-co-piaty-pedagog-w-usa-popiera-pomysl-uzbrojenia-nauczycieli> [accessed: 17 VII 2023].

The choice of solutions to ensure the safety of the school community and bystanders should take into account the individual circumstances of the institution - depend on its needs, budget, previous experience. Introducing some of them without prior needs analysis misses the point, while others seem necessary now. None of the solutions mentioned will be effective if they are not properly applied and integrated, and people are not properly trained. The security of educational (and non-educational) facilities is a product of the physical security measures in place, as well as awareness of threats, knowledge of procedures, and the ability to respond appropriately. A gap in this system can have tragic consequences.

Best security practices and recommendations for the security of Polish educational institutions

The recommendations were made on the basis of solutions used in the United States and other sources (including analyses of specific cases of active killer attacks and an online course prepared by the Internal Security Agency's Terrorism Prevention Centre of Excellence⁵²).

- Conducting training, drills, implement procedures - taking appropriate action quickly in the event of an attack by an active killer depends on the correct response of witnesses to the incident. Chances increase when they are aware, sensitive to suspicious behaviour, able to report their observations to the appropriate authorities⁵³. Poland lacks an integrated educational program to sensitise people to these issues, and the problem itself is often ignored (according to the belief that since such an attack has not happened so far, there is no need to prepare for it). If such training is organised, it is generally on the basis an individual decision of the management of a given institution. It is worth noting that training should concern not only pupils or students, but also school staff (if only in terms of receiving a report of a threat of assault and reacting to suspicious packages and parcels), parents (behavioural

⁵² *Chcialbyś być antyterrorystą?* (Eng. Would you like to be an anti-terrorist?), <https://learning.tpcoe.gov.pl/> [accessed: 9 VII 2023]. Students and employees of the Faculty of Political and Security Sciences at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń gained access to this course in 2023. More than 100 people have been trained.

⁵³ C. Guthrie, *Can We Identify the Next Shooter?...*, p. 42.

symptoms to watch out for, where to seek help for the child). Referring here to the cases from Pabianice and Barczewo mentioned in the introduction, it should be said that training in this form can be conducted, but it should be preceded by talks held at the facility, including presentation of procedures, discussion of psychological aspects of attacks. As Krzysztof Danielewicz rightly points out:

The necessity of training itself is not disputed by anyone, but the problem is the way it is conducted. In some cases, training companies try to faithfully recreate the atmosphere of such a threat, shooting plastic bullets at teachers and students, for example. In others, artificial blood, recorded sounds imitating shooting or the screams of children and teenagers are used. Parents of children argue against this type of training, saying that instead of lowering the risk of being harmed in an attack, it causes students to shy away from school for fear of being killed⁵⁴.

- Having updated building plans (electronic and hard copy), contact information for selected people, make them available to the relevant services (it is worth considering the following beforehand: how to evacuate people with disabilities? How to proceed in case the main evacuation routes are blocked? Which places can be good shelters? How can the environment be informed of the danger and that it is already safe?).
- Introducing university guards who can play a supportive role to the services and staff of the university⁵⁵. Their task would be to regularly patrol the university grounds, report suspicious activity to the services, but also receive reports from the student community regarding emergency situations. Members of these guards should be equipped with radio communications equipment and receive professional medical training in qualified first aid.

⁵⁴ K. Danielewicz, *Mankamenty w systemie bezpieczeństwa placówek oświatowych oraz procedury bezpieczeństwa – teoria i praktyka* (Eng. Shortcomings in the security system of educational institutions and security procedures – theory and practice), Security in practice, <https://securityinpractice.eu/mankamenty-w-systemie-bezpieczenstwa-placowek-oswiatowych-oraz-procedury-bezpieczenstwa-teoria-i-praktyka/> [accessed: 7 VII 2023].

⁵⁵ See: T. Białek, *Czy uczelnie są bezpieczne? ppłk rez. dr Tomasz Białek - Collegium Civitas #40* (Eng. Are universities safe? Lt. Col. Tomasz Białek, PhD – Collegium Civitas #40), YouTube, 20 IX 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QNN6oHpm6oY&ab_channel=ProjectSAFE-TY [accessed: 15 VIII 2023].

- Monitor the network and report suspicious activity⁵⁶- as proven in U.S. government reports, attacks by an active killer are generally preceded by signals directed at the environment (both online and face-to-face) directly or in a veiled manner. Failure to respond to them can encourage a potential perpetrator to carry out the action. An example of a situation during which witnesses reacted quickly to disturbing words and behaviour was the attack at Charles University in Prague in December 2023⁵⁷. Had it not been for their proper attitude, there could have been even more casualties (15 people died and 25 were injured)⁵⁸.
- Introducing training in first aid classes on the principles of dealing with bleeding (or increase the scope of such training on a similar basis to Tactical Combat Casualty Care, TCCC), since most victims of an active killer die from blood loss.
- Avoiding, in the event of an attack by an active killer, the use of fire alarms⁵⁹ and designated evacuation sites, which can be a trap for the fleeing⁶⁰.
- Introducing restricted access to facilities and monitor entry-exit (e.g. with a chip in the ID card or badge). This will not fully solve

⁵⁶ U.S. Secret Service, National Threat Assessment Center, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *Mass Attacks in Public Spaces 2016-2020*, <https://www.secretservice.gov/sites/default/files/reports/2023-01/uss-ntac-maps-2016-2020.pdf>, p. V [accessed: 9 VII 2023].

⁵⁷ K. Jaworska, *Czechy: Strzelanina na uniwersytecie w Pradze. Kilkanaście ofiar śmiertelnych* (Eng. The Czech Republic: Shooting at a university in Prague. Several fatalities), *Polsat News*, 21 XII 2023, <https://www.polsatnews.pl/wiadomosc/2023-12-21/czechy-strzelanina-na-uniwersytecie-kilka-ofiar-smiertelnych/> [accessed: 21 XII 2023].

⁵⁸ “At around 3 p.m., police were already in the area. They got a signal that David K., a former student at the Faculty of History and a current student at the Faculty of Arts at Charles University in Prague, was going to Prague for a lecture, that he wanted to take his own life at around 2 p.m., that he was armed, and that he might be dangerous. The police then directed their forces to the Faculty of Arts, but it turned out that he opened fire (...) at the Faculty of Philosophy”. See: *Strzały na uniwersytecie w Pradze. Sprawca miał wcześniej zabić ojca. Policja bada też zabójstwa młodego mężczyzny i dziecka* (Eng. Shots fired at a university in Prague. The perpetrator allegedly killed his father earlier. Police are also investigating the murders of a young man and a child), *TVN24*, 21 XII 2023, <https://tvn24.pl/swiat/czechy-praga-strzelanina-na-terenie-uniwersytetu-zabici-i-ranni-st7630568> [accessed: 21 XII 2023].

⁵⁹ Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, Interagency Security Committee, *Planning and Response to an Active Shooter...*, p. 13.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

the problem, as the card may be stolen and the perpetrator himself may have the entitlement to use it. To some extent, however, it can prevent the entry of unauthorised persons and allow for a quick response.

- Cooperation with the media, training of spokespersons - the media should not only report on the incident, but also educate on the proper rules of conduct. As an example of such information, we can point to the Crisis Communication Book prepared by the Government Centre for Security team⁶¹. Indeed, as Adam Lankford and James Silver have noted, attackers are often motivated to kill and injure large numbers of people by the publicity it will bring them. Some try to exceed the number of people killed by their predecessors⁶². In cases of school shootings, perpetrators often cite Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris.
- Taking into account the role of social media and responding efficiently to the content published in it, which is especially true for materials recommended to children and young people⁶³.
- Authorities and services should be sensitive to upcoming symbolic dates (e.g. Adolf Hitler's birthday, the Columbine bombing, the attack on the World Trade Center), but also to the timing of meetings, graduation ceremonies and school balls.
- Considering the role played by prevention, identifying earlier warning signs, such as: problems with discipline and with legal representatives, experiencing bullying and cyberbullying, mental health problems, including depression and suicidal thoughts, drug use, alcohol use, dysfunctional home environment⁶⁴. This is

⁶¹ Rządowe Centrum Bezpieczeństwa, *Księga Komunikacji Kryzysowej 2017. Podstawy zarządzania informacją w kryzysie* (Eng. The Crisis Communication Book 2017. The basics of information management in crisis), Serwis Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, <https://www.gov.pl/web/rcb/ksiega-komunikacji-kryzysowej> [accessed: 29 VII 2023].

⁶² A. Lankford, J. Silver, *Why Have Public Mass Shootings Become More Deadly? Assessing How Perpetrators' Motives and Methods Have Changed Over Time*, "Criminology & Public Policy" 2020, vol. 19, no. 1, pp. 40-41, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9133.12472>.

⁶³ I. Tomaszewska, *Rekomendacje YouTube'a dla dzieci – broń, strzelaniny i mordercy* (Eng. YouTube recommendations for children – guns, shooting and murderers), Demagog, 10 VII 2023, https://demagog.org.pl/analizy_i_raporty/rekomendacje-youtubea-dla-dzieci-bron-strzelaniny-i-mordercy/ [accessed: 29 VII 2023].

⁶⁴ U.S. Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *Averting Targeted School Violence: A U.S. Secret Service Analysis of Plots Against*

relevant not only in the context of an active killer, but also other destructive attitudes⁶⁵. Expulsion from school or university is not the solution to the problem. The glorification of extremist ideologies that promote violence, white supremacy, the use of hate speech, reference to the characters of killers or terrorists who have attacked in schools, fascination with weapons and violence is worrying. In the case of abnormal or suspicious behaviour, educational institutions should intervene as soon as possible before it escalates. The best chance of spotting such behaviour is in the close social environment - other students or pupils, teachers, parents. As part of the “Safety is the most important thing” project, the Centre for Security Studies and Education of the University of Wrocław, together with the Internal Security Agency’s Terrorism Prevention Centre of Excellence, organised an information and training expert conference⁶⁶. The main recipients of the project were the staff of the Wrocław Education Office. This is in line with both the ministerial objectives of improving the skills of personnel from the education sector and the mission of the Internal Security Agency’s Terrorism Prevention Centre of Excellence, which was to promote appropriate security attitudes.

- Creating procedures for reporting alarming signals - these should ensure the safety of the person reporting, while allowing efficient and reasonable action to be taken.

There are relevant questions in the context of securing educational institutions in Poland: are the services, especially front-line officers,

School, 2021, <https://www.secretsservice.gov/sites/default/files/reports/2021-03/USSS%20Averting%20Targeted%20School%20Violence.2021.03.pdf>, p. 50 [accessed: 9 VII 2023].

⁶⁵ Recently, there has been an increase in mental and psychological problems among Polish youth, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. See: J. Dymecka, *Psychospołeczne skutki pandemii COVID-19* (Eng. Psychosocial effects of the pandemic), “*Neuropsychiatria i Neuropsychologia*” 2021, vol. 16, no. 1–2, pp. 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.5114/nan.2021.108030>; L. Myszka-Strychalska, *Pokolenie koronawirusa jako spuścizna po pandemii COVID-19(?) – próba charakterystyki* (Eng. Coronavirus generation as a legacy from the COVID-19 disease pandemic?) – an attempt to characterise, “*Podstawy Edukacji. Na jakie ważne dziś pytania szukamy odpowiedzi?*” 2022, vol. 15, pp. 161–186. <https://doi.org/10.16926/pe.2022.15.12>.

⁶⁶ *Bezpieczeństwo jest najważniejsze – szkolnictwo i administracja pub.* (Eng. Security is the most important thing - education and public administration), <https://uwr.edu.pl/wydarzenia/konferencje-eksperckie-bezpieczenstwo-jest-najwazniejsze-szkolnictwo-i-administracja-publiczna/> [accessed: 9 VII 2023].

adequately prepared to respond to an active killer⁶⁷? Are drills conducted in educational institutions with the participation of service representatives? Does the topic of the active killer come up during prevention talks?

In the context of service training, it is worth mentioning that the issue of the active killer is addressed in specialised courses for police officers who intervene against aggressive and dangerous persons, as well as for police officers carrying out arrests of dangerous criminals⁶⁸.

No less important is the cooperation of the services (police, firefighters, municipal police, secret services) both with schools and universities, as well as with administrative bodies, employees of psychological and family counselling centres, etc. Such cooperation (involving, for example, the exchange of information) increases the chance of detecting the threat and responding even before the danger occurs. As Danielewicz emphasises: *The problem lies in the lack of awareness that dangerous situations have not occurred not because the school has security systems, but because it is lucky and no one has chosen the school as a potential target of attack*⁶⁹.

Contrary to appearances, the most expensive solutions are not considered by experts to be the most effective. Experts also point out that a facility may have state-of-the-art safeguards, but if, for example, a control at the entrance to the building fails or a threat is ignored by witnesses, these security features will fail. Therefore, ensuring the security of educational facilities requires a comprehensive approach, working with community members, services, professional companies.

Summary

The article does not exhaust the subject of securing educational facilities against active killer attacks. An individual assessment of these facilities

⁶⁷ A. Krasa, *Postępowanie policjantów w przypadku ataków tzw. aktywnego zabójcy (wybrane elementy)* (Eng. The conduct of police officers in the case of so-called active killer (selected elements)), "Kwartalnik Policyjny" 2018, no. 3 (46), pp. 117-119; D. Władysiak, *Aktywny strzelec. Taktyka działania zespołu interwencyjnego – policja*, (Eng. Active shooter. Intervention team tactics- police), "Kwartalnik Policyjny", 2018, no. 4 (47), pp. 9-11.

⁶⁸ *Plan szkoleń i kursów specjalistycznych* (Eng. Plan for training and specialised courses), Szkoła Policji w Katowicach, <http://katowice.szkolapolicji.gov.pl/spk/informacje-o-szkole/plany-szkolen-i-kursow> [accessed: 7 VII 2023].

⁶⁹ K. Danielewicz, *Przeżyć szkołę. Bezpieczeństwo w szkole. Teoria i praktyka* (Eng. Surviving school. School safety. Theory and practice), Warszawa 2021, p. 106.

would show that different conditions exist in each of them, both in technical and environmental contexts. The significantly lower number of incidents involving this type of perpetrator in Poland compared to the United States does not mean that the problem can be marginalised. Educational institutions (e.g. as part of health and safety training) may be the right place to teach best practices in recognizing and responding to potentially dangerous situations.

What changes are likely to take place in the sphere of security of educational institutions? It can be assumed that the security of most of them will remain at the same level they have been at for years. A reason for change could be, as mentioned earlier, a dangerous incident involving an active killer, or the introduction of binding guidelines and recommendations by the ministry responsible for education⁷⁰. This is because it seems that without top-down instructions, the problem will continue to be marginalised, in the belief that there are more important issues than an “imaginary” threat. Pressure from parents, teachers, lecturers, pupils, students and others for whom security in educational institutions is a priority can contribute to the creation of appropriate security procedures. In the current difficult situation internally (polarisation of society, radicalisation, increase in the scale of mental problems occurring in society) and externally (threats from Russia, Belarus or other actors), the need to create and implement these procedures is even more urgent and important.

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⁷⁰ R. Gorgoń, *Zabezpieczenie szkół przed zagrożeniami* (Eng. Securing schools against threats), “Kontrola Państwowa” 2021, no. 4, pp. 123–130. <https://doi.org/10.53122/ISSN.0452-5027/2021.1.35>.

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