

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO

ACTIVE ATTACKER AWARENESS

FOR EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTES AT ALL LEVELS

Stanley Bezuidenhout



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Dedication

First, I'd like to dedicate this book to all the future heroes. Those people who will take my public warning to heart, those who will act now, seriously consider the threat that faces us all, and who – through decisive action – will become known for the lives they saved, when – not if - this threat is realized.

This book is dedicated, secondly, to all the victims of Active Attacker events – the martyrs of our ignorance and lack of preparation, our denials, and our “it will never happen to me” mentality. These might be harsh words, but surely the burden falls first on those who should protect the lives of the many we rely on. Those who, in their very unfortunate passing, educate, inform, and prepare us to not share their sad fates.

I would also like to dedicate this book to the families, friends, parents, and children of all those whose lives were lost too soon, too violently, and too unnecessarily.

Thank you, also, to all those who have contributed to the knowledge I am able to share, today.

About the Author

As a former Military Intelligence Specialist and Former Specialist Reservist in the South African Police Service, Stanley (Stan) Bezuidenhout is a highly experienced, credentialed, and respected authority in his field. Having trained thousands of private citizens, corporate clients, Law Enforcement Officers, Emergency Service Personnel and even children, Stan has dedicated his entire career towards groundbreaking and industry-leading endeavors.

Ever the willing educated, the first respondent to a variety of crime incidents, first through the door in high-risk law enforcement operations, and with a strong background in advanced VIP Protection during war times, Stan is not only educated, informed, and well-versed, but also revered by many for his courage and commitment in the face of adversity and physical confrontation.

Relying heavily on his multi-decade exposure to various forms of martial arts, his military duties as a VIP Protection Specialist, Military Intelligence Operator and Special Security, Policing operations and Tactical Risk Mitigation Instructor, he also worked closely with Retired US Secret Service Specialists to conduct high-level Tactical Risk Assessments, Asset Protection, and Risk Mitigation Analyses at exclusive facilities like the Gaylord Palm Hotel in Florida, in the USA.

While the advent of “Active Attackers” has not taken a hold in South Africa yet, this book is a warning that echoes Stan’s strong feelings about the need to be prepared for this kind of event. He is passionately committed to empowering educational institutions, guiding them, and training them in this highly specialized discipline.

Foreword

In recent years, the world has witnessed an alarming increase in Active Attacker events. From schools and universities to workplaces and public spaces, these events have the potential to cause widespread devastation and loss of life. As educators and administrators, it is our responsibility to be aware of this threat, to understand what motivates Active Attackers, who they might be, and why we need to prepare for them. This booklet aims to introduce the issue of Active Attacker awareness. This can be regarded as “step one” in your Active Attacker risk mitigation strategies.

First, we will define what an Active Attacker is. In short, an Active Attacker is an individual or group of individuals who engage in a mass attack with the intent to cause harm and chaos. These attacks can take various forms, including but not limited to mass shootings, bombings, and vehicular attacks. We will cover the possible motivations for these kinds of attacks and how crucial this understanding is towards developing effective prevention and response strategies.

One common misconception is that Active Attackers are always outsiders or foreign terrorists. While there have been high-profile attacks carried out by foreign terrorists, the reality is that many Active Attackers are individuals who have a connection to the target location or community. From real-world examples you will see that Active Attackers could be a former employee, student, or even a parent.

It is therefore essential to be vigilant and aware of potential threats from within the community, as well as external threats. The consequences of an Active Attacker event can be devastating, not only in terms of loss of life and physical injuries but also psychological trauma and long-term effects on the community. The impact can be felt not just by those directly affected but also by the wider community, including parents, friends, and neighbors.

It is therefore imperative that schools take proactive measures to prepare for an Active Attacker event, including developing an awareness campaign, empowering staff with training, and creating an Active Attacker awareness, response, and action plan.

A crucial step in preparing for an Active Attacker event is to engage a specialist to help with an awareness campaign. A specialist can provide expert advice and guidance on how to raise awareness of the issue, both among staff and students.

This could include providing training on how to recognize the warning signs of potential attackers, how to respond in an emergency, and how to report suspicious behavior. A specialist can also help to identify vulnerabilities in the school's physical layout and recommend improvements to enhance security and reduce the risk of an attack.

Creating an Active Attacker awareness, response, and action plan is the final goal in preparing for an Active Attacker event. This plan should outline the steps that will be taken in the event of an Active Attacker, including how to notify staff and students, how to evacuate the building, and how to communicate with law enforcement. The plan should also identify key personnel responsible for implementing the plan, such as a crisis management team or designated staff members.

The issue of Active Attacker awareness is one that cannot be ignored. Schools have a responsibility to be aware of this threat and take proactive measures to protect their students and staff. This includes engaging a specialist to help with an awareness campaign, empowering staff with training, and creating an Active Attacker awareness, response, and action plan. It is important to remember that being prepared for an Active Attacker event is not about causing panic or fear but rather about taking steps to prevent an attack from occurring and being ready to respond in the unlikely event that one does occur.

It is also important to recognize that preparing for an Active Attacker event is not a one-time event but rather an ongoing process. As the threat landscape evolves and new types of attacks emerge, schools must adapt and update their plans accordingly.

Regular training and drills should be conducted to ensure that staff and students are familiar with their roles and responsibilities and are prepared to respond in an emergency.

Finally, it is important to remember that an Active Attacker event can have long-lasting effects on the community, including psychological trauma and emotional scars. Schools should provide support and resources for those affected by an attack, including counseling and therapy services. By working together and supporting one another, communities can begin to heal and move forward from a tragic event.

What is an “Active Attacker?”

An Active Attacker is an individual who is actively causing harm to others using a weapon, such as a firearm, knife, or explosive device. In the context of school shootings, an Active Attacker is someone who enters a school with the intent to cause harm, often targeting students and staff. Active Attackers can be individuals of any age, gender, or background, and their motives for carrying out an attack can vary widely. Some attackers may have a history of violence or aggression, while others may have no prior criminal record or history of violent behavior.

There are certain risk factors that may increase the likelihood of someone becoming an Active Attacker. These can include a history of mental illness or substance abuse, a history of violent behavior or aggression, social isolation, and a fascination with weapons or explosives. It is important to note, however, that these risk factors do not necessarily mean that an individual will become an Active Attacker, and that most individuals with these risk factors will never engage in such behavior. By being aware of the potential threat, schools can take proactive measures to help prevent attacks from occurring and to better prepare for a potential event.

Should you be worried?

Before you allow yourself to fall into the “it won’t happen to me” or the “it only happens in America” trap, consider the foundation for any such excuses for not addressing this real threat. Are you 100% sure this will not happen here, in South Africa? Can you provide any guarantee that the widely publicized mass shooting events proliferating all across social media almost daily cannot be regarded as a possible motivation for a South African that falls within the mindset classifications that are inherent to all domestic mass attacker events? In case you’re left wondering just how bad or serious a threat an Active Attacker can be, consider these examples:

1	2	3	4	5	6
20 Apr '99	Columbine	4	3	17/18	Firearms/Explosives
21 Mar '05	Red Lake	7	10	16	Firearms
16 Apr '07	Virginia Tech	32	33	23	Firearms
14 Dec '12	Sandy Hook	2	28	20	Firearms
14 Feb '18	Marjory Stoneman	17	17	19	Firearms

Columns: 1 – Date, 2- Facility, 3 – Total Victims, 4 – Fatalities, 5 – Age/s of attacker/s,

Method/s.

As just these five examples show, Active Attackers come in all shapes and sizes. They are not only “military-aged men of Middle Eastern Decent,” as many would like to believe. They are not also always men, adults, or lone actors, as the Columbine Incident reminds us!

To get back to the question: How much of a threat is this, in South Africa. You’d be wrong if you thought it isn’t.

On Saturday, 9 July 2022, four people were killed, and eight others injured in a mass shooting at a bar in South Africa. Two armed men stormed a pub in the Sweetwaters town in the southeast province of KwaZulu-Natal at 6.30 p.m. and began fire on revelers. During the incident, at least 12 people received bullet injuries.

On Sunday, 10 July 2022 – just a day later - 14 people were killed in a mass shooting at a bar in the Soweto township near Johannesburg. The incident happened shortly after midnight when gunmen opened fire on revelers who were enjoying themselves at a club in the Nomzamo informal settlement in Orlando.

On Wednesday, 28 September 2022 at around 13h00, a lone attacker stabbed a security guard and several other people at a Pietermaritzburg school. According to reports, an assailant gained entry to the school premises through the pedestrian gate and attacked a security guard. He also attacked two other adults. "The violent incident took place in full view of students who were visibly shocked and traumatized by the chaotic scenes that happened," the department's statement read.

In the most recent event, which happened shortly before publication of this booklet, five people were killed in a mass attack spree in Cape Town. On Wednesday, 12 April 2023 5 people were murdered and a sixth seriously injured in a shooting spree – a mass shooter incident - in Ocean View. Initial reports, via social media, warned people to stay away as more shots were fired even while emergency services were attending.

While initial reports indicate the last attack to be gang-related, it is not uncommon for gangs to infiltrate schools where drugs, firearms, or even stolen property could be distributed.

As young people are often attracted to the lifestyle promised by a life of crime, and as poverty is an ever-present excuse for criminal association, a gang-related mass shooting event could very easily happen on the premises of educational institutions.

In this event, the gunmen could potentially seek refuge in an educational facility, increasing the risk for all present if the need arises for them to engage with law enforcement, to infiltrate classrooms, or to take hostages.

While motivations will be discussed in this booklet, it would be courting trouble to assume that South Africa is in any way immune to, or free of, the risk of mass attacker events. As we explore the profiles and motivations of known mass attackers, you will quickly realize that some of the very staff members or students you know might very well fit the potential profile of what an Active Attacker might be perceived to be – before they strike.

If all I achieve, through your study of this booklet, is to change your mind towards acknowledging that Active Attackers are not always easily identified before an attack, that active attacks can happen anywhere, at any time, or to anyone at any facility, and that it is in your best interest and in the interest of all staff and students at your facility to regard it necessary to acknowledge this as a credible threat, I would be satisfied that I achieved all my goals, right now.

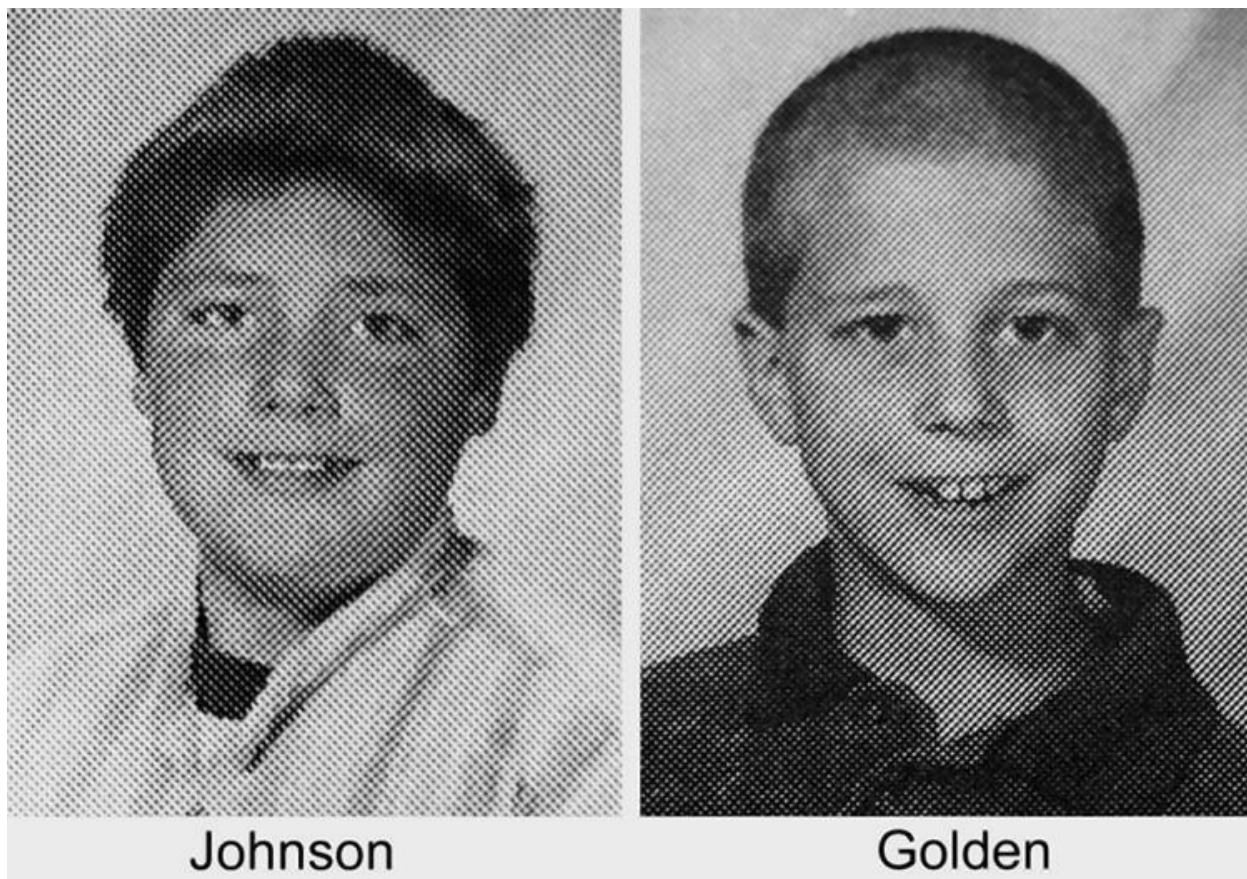
Consider this my promise: If educational institutions in South Africa ignore active attacks as a clear and present danger, they run the risk of paying for their denials by gambling with actual lives. The lives of teachers, parents, students, brothers, sisters, and friends. A price we cannot pay.

What do they look like?

The first step towards the early detection, and thereby the risk mitigation, of a potential Active Attacker comes in the form of a realization. Active Attackers, for obvious reasons, do not walk around with labels, signs, or hand symbols as gang members might.

You won't recognize them by their tattoos, clothing, tattoos, or even lifestyle as easily as you might anyone affiliated with a gang or criminal enterprise.

Active Attackers literally come in all shapes and sizes. As an example of just how hard it might be to identify a potential Active Attacker by casual observation, consider these examples:



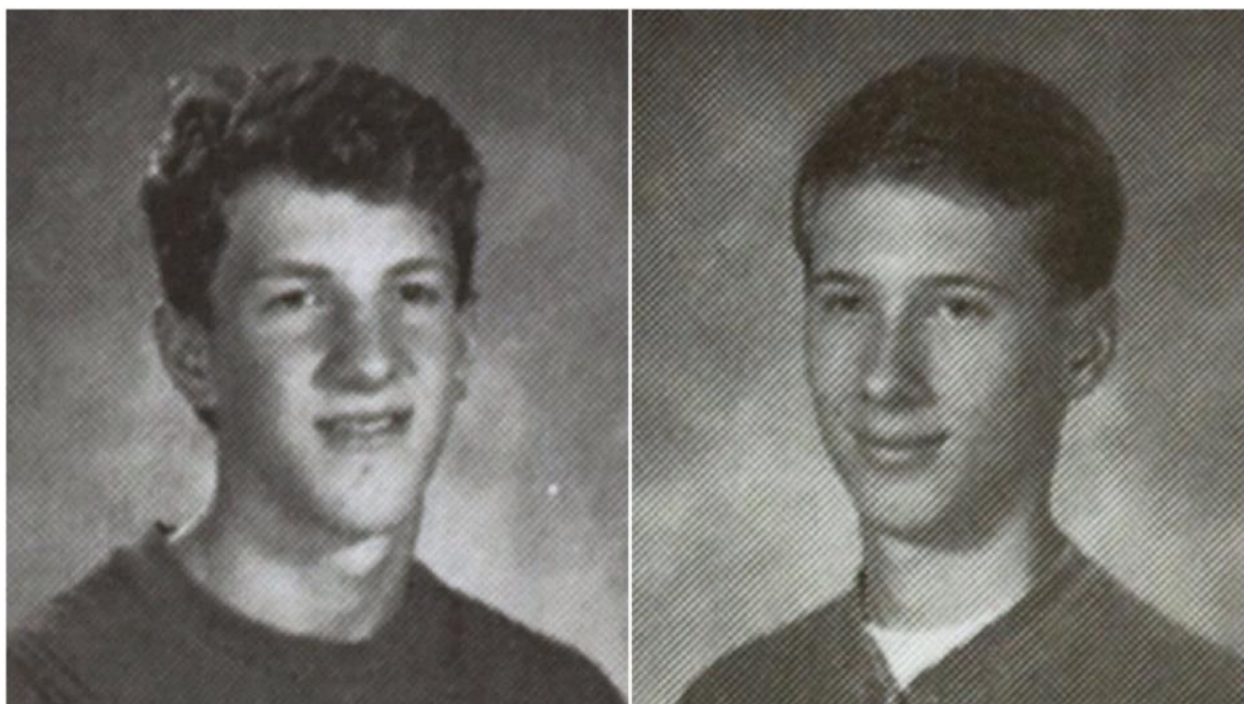
On March 24, 1998, a school shooting occurred at Westside Middle School in unincorporated Craighead County, Arkansas near the city of Jonesboro, perpetrators Mitchell Johnson, 13, and Andrew Golden, 11, fatally shot four students and a teacher with multiple weapons.

After the shooting, both boys were arrested and charged with murder and other crimes. Golden, who was just 11 at the time, was sentenced to confinement until he turned 21, while Johnson, who was 13, was sentenced to confinement until he turned 18, followed by 10 years of probation.

By all accounts, the two suspects were not close friends. In fact, with Johnson attending the seventh grade and Golden attending the sixth grade, the students only shared bus rides to and from school. But both verbalized hostility toward others and threatened that something big was about to happen.

Johnson lived with his mother and stepfather and had a difficult relationship with his father. Fellow students reported that Johnson was bullish and bragged about being in a gang. Within the same school year as the shooting, Johnson was assigned in-school suspension three times and was criminally charged for molesting a two-year-old girl.

In contrast to Johnson's overt behavioral problems, Golden led a kind of "Jekyll and Hyde" lifestyle. Golden was not a disciplinary problem at school and was regarded by many adults as a well-mannered and cheerful student. He was very close to his family and shared the family's interest in firearms by competing and winning marksmanship awards. However, apparently unbeknownst to his family, Golden reportedly demonstrated violence by firing his BB gun at animals and other children.



On April 20, 1999, a school shooting and attempted bombing occurred at Columbine High School in Columbine, Colorado, United States. The perpetrators, 12th grade students Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, murdered 12 students and one teacher. Ten students were killed in the school library, where Harris and Klebold subsequently committed suicide. Twenty-one additional people were injured by gunshots, and gunfire was also exchanged with the police. Another three people were injured trying to escape.

Harris and Klebold had intended for the attack to primarily be a bombing and secondarily a shooting, but the failed detonation of the several homemade bombs they planted in the school caused the pair to launch a shooting attack.

Two bombs were set up as diversions at another location away from the school, one of which partially detonated. The motive remains inconclusive; however, they had planned the attack for at least a year and hoped to have a large number of victims.

In 1996, 15-year-old Eric Harris created a private website on America Online (AOL). It was initially to host levels (also known as WADs) Harris created for use in the first-person shooter video games Doom and Doom II, as well as Quake occasionally.

On the site, Harris began a blog. It included details about Harris sneaking out of the house to cause mischief and vandalism, such as lighting fireworks, with his friend Dylan Klebold and others. These were known as "Rebel Missions", and Harris' blog primarily consisted of "mission logs".

Beginning in early 1997, the blog postings began to show the first signs of Harris' anger against society. By the end of the year, the site contained instructions on how to make explosives. Harris' site attracted few visitors and caused no concern until August 1997.

Harris ended a blog post detailing murderous fantasies with "All I want to do is kill and injure as many of you as I can, especially a few people. Like Brooks Brown." Brown was a classmate of his. After Brown's parents viewed the site, they contacted the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office on August 7, 1997. An investigator wrote a draft affidavit to request a search warrant for the Harris household, but it was never submitted to a judge.

Klebold had already been keeping a personal journal since March 1997; as early as November of that year, Klebold had mentioned going on a killing spree. Klebold used his journal to vent about his personal problems as well as what he'd wear and use during the attack.

Harris and Klebold's schoolwork also foreshadowed the massacre. They both displayed themes of violence in their creative writing projects. In December 1997, Harris wrote a paper on school shootings titled "Guns in School", and a poem from the perspective of a bullet. Klebold wrote a short story about a man killing students which worried his teacher so much that she alerted his parents. Both had also actively researched war and murder. For one project, Harris wrote a paper on Nazis and Klebold wrote a paper on Charles Manson. In a psychology class, Harris wrote he dreamed of going on a shooting spree with Klebold. Harris' journals described several experimental bomb detonations.

Nearly a year before the massacre, Klebold wrote a message in Harris' 1998 yearbook: "killing enemies, blowing up stuff, killing cops!! My wrath for January's incident will be godlike. Not to mention our revenge in the commons,"; "the commons" was slang for the school cafeteria.

When an economics class had Harris make an ad for a business, he and Klebold made a video called Hitmen for Hire on December 8, 1998, which was released in February 2004.

It depicts them as part of the Trench Coat Mafia, a clique in the school who wore black trench coats and opposed jocks, extorting money for protecting preps from bullies. Klebold and Harris themselves were apparently not a part of the real Trench Coat Mafia but were friends with some of its members.

They wore black trench coats on the day of the massacre, and the video seemed a kind of dress rehearsal, showing them walking the halls of the school, and shooting bullies outside with fake guns.



Another example that cannot be excluded is the Sandy hook School Shooting on account of the media attention is received as well as the conspiracy theories that emanated after. On December 14, 2012, a mass shooting took place at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, which shocked the nation and led to widespread calls for increased gun control measures.

The shooting resulted in the deaths of 20 children and six adult staff members, as well as the shooter himself, who had taken his own life. The incident remains one of the deadliest school shootings in American history and sparked debates on topics such as mental health, gun control, and school safety.

The perpetrator of the shooting was identified as Adam Lanza, a 20-year-old with a history of mental health issues. Lanza had attended Sandy Hook Elementary School as a child, but at the time of the shooting, he did not have any current or prior affiliation with the school. Lanza had reportedly struggled with mental illness for many years, and his actions that day were described as "a crime that has no explanation."

The shooting began around 9:30 AM when Lanza forced his way into the school by shooting through a glass window next to the locked front door. Once inside, he quickly made his way to the first-grade classrooms and began shooting, using a Bushmaster XM15-E2S semi-automatic rifle and handguns. The shooting continued for about 11 minutes, during which time Lanza fired dozens of rounds and killed 26 people, including 20 children between the ages of six and seven.

The first 911 calls were made at 9:35 AM, and police arrived on the scene within minutes. However, Lanza had already taken his own life by the time they arrived, and the officers discovered a horrific scene inside the school. The victims were found in various locations throughout the school, with some still hiding in closets and under desks.

In the aftermath of the shooting, there was widespread mourning and calls for action. President Barack Obama spoke at a memorial service for the victims, stating, "We're not doing enough. And we will have to change." The shooting also sparked a national conversation about gun control, with many calling for stricter laws and regulations to prevent such tragedies from occurring in the future.

Investigations into the shooting revealed that Lanza had a history of mental health issues and had been diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome, a form of autism. He had also reportedly spent countless hours playing violent video games and was known to be obsessed with mass shootings. In addition, Lanza had access to a large cache of weapons and ammunition, which he had acquired legally through his mother, who was a gun enthusiast.

The shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School highlighted the need for improved school safety measures and increased resources for mental health treatment. The tragedy also led to the development of several new laws and policies aimed at preventing future mass shootings, including the Fix NICS Act of 2017, which aimed to improve the National Instant Criminal Background Check System, and the STOP School Violence Act of 2018, which provided funding for school safety measures and training.

Overall, the Sandy Hook school shooting remains a tragic reminder of the devastating impact that gun violence can have on communities and individuals. It serves as a call to action for improved mental health resources, increased school safety measures, and stronger gun control laws to prevent similar tragedies from occurring in the future.

You'd be forgiven for thinking that Active Attackers, in the school environment, would be limited to "disturbed kids" that respond to ingrained criminality, bullying, or their general inability to "fit in."

But you'd be wrong. There are more recent examples that completely break the mold of what could previously be described as "the typical profile of a school shooter."

Never forget that you are not only housing kids or young adults at your facility. There are also staff members, former students, parents, and completely unrelated by socially disturbed people to consider.

Despite our best efforts to predict the typical profile of an Active Attacker, recent incidents clearly violated our most well-intentioned expectations as we have seen new events unfold in 2023.



On January 21, 2023, a mass shooting occurred in Monterey Park, California, United States. The gunman killed eleven people and injured nine others. The shooting happened at about 10:22 p.m. at Star Ballroom Dance Studio, after an all-day Lunar New Year Festival was held on a nearby street. Shortly afterwards, the gunman drove north to Lai Lai Ballroom in nearby Alhambra to continue his shooting spree but was confronted by staff and disarmed before fleeing by car.

The perpetrator was identified as 72-year-old Huu Can Tran. He died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound during a standoff with police in Torrance the next day. Huu Can Tran, 72, was a truck driver, a divorcee and an immigrant who moved to Texas then California. Despite a swirl of rumors surrounding Tran's motives Saturday night, Luna said detectives do not know why Tran targeted the dance halls. The FBI is collaborating on that part of the investigation, Luna said.

"There's information out there that the suspect may have committed these crimes ... due to jealousy or some relationship issues," Luna said. "We're hearing those things too but have not confirmed any of that information. It's part of what our investigators are diligently looking into."

Luna said detectives were looking into reports of possible relationships between the suspect and individuals at the dance hall but could not confirm any relations yet. But so far, Luna said there is no evidence any victim is related to the suspect.

Tran had a "limited criminal history," Luna said, with an arrest in 1990 for unlawful possession of a firearm. Earlier this year, he repeatedly visited a police station in Hemet. Hemet Police Department spokesman Alan Reyes said Tran claimed he had been poisoned by his family members in Los Angeles County over the last several decades.

This example illustrates that there might sometimes be no evidence of any specific motivation, complicating the risk mitigation planning any institution could implement. While these are extreme examples, the face of an Active Attacker might even be more familiar than you would ever imagine.

This was highlighted in yet another mass shooting incident in Louisville Kentucky, in the USA.



On Tuesday, 11 April 2023, it took just one minute for a gunman to complete his deadly rampage before he stopped and waited for police to arrive. The shooter legally bought an AR-15-style rifle at a local gun dealership six days before he used it to kill five of his colleagues.

It's still not clear what provoked Sturgeon, a 25-year-old employee, to go on a deadly rampage at Old National Bank and livestream the gruesome attack on Instagram. Sturgeon had interned at the bank for three summers and been employed there full-time for about two years, his LinkedIn profile showed. The assailant had been notified that he was going to be fired from the bank, a law enforcement source said Monday. But Louisville Mayor Craig Greenberg said he doesn't believe the shooter was given notice of termination. "From what I have been told by an official at the bank, that is not accurate," Greenberg told reporters Tuesday.

There is one more example that would help you appreciate the extent to which Active Attackers vary.



On March 27, 2023, a mass shooting occurred at The Covenant School, a private Presbyterian Church in America parochial school in the Green Hills neighborhood of Nashville, Tennessee. Local resident and former student of the school Aiden Hale killed three children and three adults. Hale, 28, was killed by two Metropolitan Nashville Police Department officers responding to the incident. Later it was confirmed that Hale was a trans man.

Hale drove a Honda Fit to the school, arriving at 9:54 a.m. and parking it in the lot. At 9:57, Hale sent an Instagram message to an old friend saying an earlier post he made was "basically a suicide note" and that he planned to die that day. His friend called a crisis hotline before contacting the Davidson County Sheriff's Office at 10:13.

At 10:11, Hale shot through a set of glass side doors and entered the building. He was armed with two rifles and a pistol. At 10:13, police received a call about an active shooter. He walked across the second floor of the school before opening fire.

He fired into several classrooms; no one in the classrooms was injured because the teachers had fortified doors and sheltered the students. The police first arrived at the

school at 10:24. A teacher told an officer that the students were in lockdown and two were missing.

Officers entered the building at 10:25 and they searched each room for Hale. They heard gunshots coming from the second floor. Five Metro Nashville police officers went upstairs and saw him in a lobby area, firing through a window at arriving police vehicles. Two of the officers fired four times each killing him at 10:27, 14 minutes after the initial 911 call was made.

Aiden Hale was identified as the shooter. Police initially identified him as a woman using his birth name, Audrey Elizabeth Hale, but authorities later reported he was a transgender man. He was a 28-year-old Nashville resident with no criminal record who had been a student at the school at an early age.

A neighbor said Hale lived with his parents. An ex-classmate said that Hale had a difficult time dealing with the August 2022 death of a woman who was possibly a romantic partner or close friend.

His former art teacher and a former classmate recalled him coming out as transgender on Facebook in 2022. Police chief John Drake said Hale was under care for an emotional disorder at the time of the shooting. Drake also said Hale had legally purchased seven firearms, including three recovered from the shooting scene, between October 2020 and June 2022.

There are many more examples, but this should lead you to the only obvious realization: Active Attackers come in all shapes and sizes.

What motivates them?

School shootings and other forms of attacks on educational institutions are a tragic reality in many countries around the world. While the motivations behind these attacks are complex and varied, there are certain factors that may contribute to the motivation of an Active Attacker who targets schools and kills victims.

While we can provide a comprehensive tactical analysis of your facility, provide short- or long-form training to educators and staff, and help you develop an Active Attacker preparedness plan, it is vital for you and your institution to understand the possible motivations that drive Active Attackers to action. By being aware of the wide variety of possible motivation modalities that drive this kind of attack, you would be well motivated to regard the seriousness of this kind of threat, the danger of putting off action towards mitigating this form of risk, and the possible consequences of procrastination.

I would urge you to regard your environment, your facility, your peers, and your students closely to see if there are any similarities between some of the examples in this book and your experiences. These are just some of the possible motivations that lead to active attacks:

One potential motivation for a school shooter is a desire for attention or recognition. Many perpetrators of these attacks have been found to have a history of social isolation or difficulty forming relationships with others. In some cases, the perpetrator may feel as though they have been ignored or overlooked by their peers and see a violent attack as a way to gain attention and notoriety.

The media coverage that often follows these attacks can also contribute to this desire for attention, as the perpetrator may see their name and image being broadcast widely across the news and social media.

Another possible motivation for a school shooter is a desire for revenge or retribution. This may stem from a variety of sources, including bullying, perceived injustices, or personal grievances against specific individuals or groups.

The attacker may feel as though they have been wronged in some way and see a violent attack to even the score or get back at those they perceive as their enemies.

In some cases, mental illness or other psychological factors may play a role in motivating a school shooter. Many perpetrators of these attacks have been found to have a history of mental health issues, such as depression, anxiety, or psychosis. These conditions can cause an individual to experience feelings of anger, frustration, or hopelessness, which may contribute to a desire to lash out violently.

Another potential motivation for a school shooter is a desire to make a political statement or draw attention to a particular cause or ideology. In some cases, the attacker may have been influenced by extremist or radical beliefs, such as white supremacy or anti-government sentiment. They may see a violent attack to express their views and bring attention to their cause.

Finally, some perpetrators of school shootings may be motivated by a desire to inflict harm on others. This may stem from a variety of factors, including a lack of empathy or a desire for power and control. The attacker may see a violent attack as a way to exert their dominance over others or to satisfy a desire for violence.

Regardless of the specific motivation, it is important to understand that school shootings and other attacks on educational institutions are complex and multifaceted issues. While there may be no single cause or solution to these problems, there are steps that can be taken to help prevent and respond to these attacks.

One key strategy is to focus on identifying and addressing potential warning signs. This may involve increasing awareness of the signs of mental illness and other risk factors, as well as promoting a culture of reporting and intervention.

Schools and communities can also work together to create safer environments, through measures such as increasing security and improving emergency response plans.

Another important strategy is to promote positive social connections and mental health. This may involve programs that help students build social and emotional skills, as well as efforts to reduce stigma around mental health and encourage help-seeking behaviors. By promoting positive relationships and mental wellness, schools can help prevent the social isolation and psychological distress that may contribute to violent behavior.

Ultimately, the motivations behind school shootings and other attacks on educational institutions are complex and varied and may stem from a range of factors. By understanding these factors and taking proactive steps to prevent and respond to these attacks, we can help ensure that our schools and communities remain safe and secure for all.

Early detection of potential attackers

While early detection might be more of a “soft art” than a simple check-list activity, a proper Active Attacker awareness and reaction program might include a variety of subjects that require specialized guidance and direction. Here are some topics that could be covered in a training series that will prepare a school for an Active Attacker event, based on law enforcement advice:

- Understanding the threat: Provide an overview of the types of Active Attacker events, including their motivations and methods of attack. Discuss common warning signs and indicators of potential threats.

- Emergency response planning: Develop a plan for responding to an Active Attacker event, including evacuation, sheltering in place, and lockdown procedures. Review the roles and responsibilities of school personnel and law enforcement agencies during an event.

- Communication strategies: Teach effective communication strategies for responding to an Active Attacker event, including how to communicate with students, staff, and law enforcement agencies during an emergency.

- Threat assessment and management: Discuss how to conduct a threat assessment and management process to identify and mitigate potential threats before they become Active Attacker events.

- Psychological first aid: Teach psychological first aid techniques for responding to trauma, including how to provide emotional support to students and staff after an event.

- Physical security measures: Review physical security measures such as access control, perimeter security, and surveillance systems that can help prevent or deter an Active Attacker event.

- Active shooter response training: Provide hands-on training in responding to an active shooter event, including how to evacuate or shelter in place, how to barricade doors, and how to respond if an attacker enters a room.

- After-action review: Conduct an after-action review to evaluate the response to an Active Attacker event and identify areas for improvement in the school's emergency response plan.

Early warning signs

Here are ten early warning signs you should look for to detect someone who fits the profile of an Active Attacker:

1. **Unusual Behavior:** The individual may exhibit unusual or erratic behavior, such as pacing, sweating, or talking to themselves.
2. **History of Violence:** The individual may have a history of violent or aggressive behavior, such as domestic violence or physical altercations.
3. **Extreme Beliefs:** The individual may hold extreme or radical beliefs, such as those associated with hate groups or terrorist organizations.
4. **Threatening Language:** The individual may use threatening or violent language, such as talking about hurting others or seeking revenge.
5. **Acquiring Weapons:** The individual may acquire weapons, especially firearms or explosive materials, without any legitimate purpose.
6. **Social Isolation:** The individual may become socially isolated, avoiding contact with friends, family, or colleagues.
7. **Substance Abuse:** The individual may abuse drugs or alcohol, which can lead to increased aggression or impulsivity.
8. **Mental Health Issues:** The individual may have a history of mental health issues, such as depression, anxiety, or personality disorders.
9. **Financial Troubles:** The individual may experience financial troubles or other stressors, which can increase the risk of violent behavior.
10. **Obsession with Violence:** The individual may exhibit an unhealthy obsession with violence, such as watching violent movies or playing violent video games excessively.

What should you do now?

I would strongly recommend that you take the following steps at your very earliest convenience, if not immediately upon completing your study of this booklet:

1. **Share your awareness:** The first step in preparing for an Active Attacker situation is to raise awareness among your colleagues. Share the importance of having an Active Attacker awareness and response plan in place, and the potential dangers of not having one. Encourage your colleagues to engage in dialogue and work towards developing a plan.
2. **Consider your vulnerabilities:** Take some time to identify the vulnerabilities of your school without an Active Attacker awareness program in place. This will help you to understand the risks you face and the importance of developing a plan to mitigate them.
3. **Consider approaching a professional for program development:** Engage a professional to develop an Active Attacker awareness and response program for your facility. The program should cover key areas such as evacuation plans, safe areas, communication protocols, and response procedures.
4. **Request a free consultation:** Reach out to a professional and request a free consultation to discuss the roadmap towards developing an effective Active Attacker awareness and response program. This will give you an opportunity to ask questions and get a better understanding of what you need to do.
5. **Conduct a Tactical Threat Analysis:** Have an expert conduct a Tactical Threat Analysis of your facility to identify areas requiring immediate, later, or eventual improvement. This will help you to prioritize your efforts and ensure that you are addressing the most critical areas first.

6. Engage and inform parents: Engage parents early in the process and keep them informed of the actions you are taking. This will help to build trust and ensure that everyone is working towards the same goal.
7. Conduct informal discussions with students: Conduct informal discussions with students, without alarming them, to see if there are any social tensions that could motivate retaliation by their peers. This will help you to identify potential threats and take appropriate action.
8. Develop open communication: Develop open communication with staff and students, to allow them to express concerns before they develop into motivations. This will help to create a safer and more secure environment for everyone.
9. Assign a budget: Allocate funds to engage professional guidance towards developing an Active Attacker awareness and reaction program at your facility. Make this a priority to ensure the safety of your staff and students.
10. Engage an expert: Finally, consider engaging an expert to guide you through the whole process. This will ensure that you have the necessary expertise and resources to develop an effective Active Attacker awareness and response program.

As you become a risk mitigation activist in your environment, you will surely experience a lot of resistance as you attempt to alert your colleagues to the reality of this very serious threat. Fortunately, as I conducted Tactical Risk Analyses all over the world, I have probably heard all the good “reasons” for why action is not warranted, or necessary. These “reasons” may seem sound, at first glance, but let me help you prepare for a meaningful engagement with those around you.

Excuses for not acting

It's too expensive: Active Attacker awareness strategies can involve significant costs, including hiring additional security personnel, installing new equipment, and conducting regular training sessions.

***Your reply:** While there may be some initial costs associated with implementing these strategies, the potential cost of not having them in place can be much higher. The safety and well-being of students and staff should always be a top priority, and the investment in security measures can help prevent tragic events from occurring.*

It creates a fearful environment: Some school administrators may worry that Active Attacker awareness strategies will make students and staff feel anxious and scared.

***Your Reply:** While it's true that discussions about school safety can be difficult and uncomfortable, it's important to have open and honest conversations about the potential risks and how to mitigate them. By educating students and staff on how to respond in an emergency, they can feel more empowered and prepared to handle a crisis.*

It takes too much time away from academics: Educators and administrators may feel that spending time on Active Attacker awareness strategies takes away valuable instructional time.

***Your Reply:** While it's important to prioritize academic instruction, it's equally important to ensure that students and staff are prepared to handle emergency situations. Active Attacker awareness strategies can be integrated into existing curriculum and can actually enhance student learning by promoting critical thinking and problem-solving skills.*

It's not necessary: Some may believe that their school is immune to an Active Attacker situation, or that the chances of an incident occurring are too low to warrant investing in prevention and response strategies.

***Your reply:** Unfortunately, no school is immune to the potential threat of an Active Attacker. It's essential to be proactive and have measures in place to prevent and respond to emergencies. In the unlikely event that an incident does occur, the cost of not having preventative measures in place can be catastrophic.*

It's too complex: School administrators may feel that the logistics of implementing Active Attacker awareness strategies are too complicated.

***Your Reply:** While it's true that there are many factors to consider when implementing Active Attacker awareness strategies, there are resources available to help schools navigate the process. Additionally, it's important to remember that any effort to improve school safety is worthwhile, regardless of how complex it may seem.*

It's a low priority: With so many competing demands on school resources, some administrators may not see Active Attacker awareness strategies as a high priority.

***Your Reply:** While it's true that schools face many challenges and priorities, the safety and well-being of students and staff should always be a top concern. By investing in preventative measures, schools can help ensure that everyone on campus is protected and prepared.*

It's too disruptive: Some may worry that implementing Active Attacker awareness strategies will be too disruptive to daily routines and operations.

***Your Reply:** While there may be some disruption during the implementation phase, ultimately, Active Attacker awareness strategies can become part of the standard operating procedure for schools. By incorporating drills and training into the regular routine, schools can help ensure that everyone is prepared and confident in their ability to respond in an emergency.*

It's too time-consuming: Educators and administrators may feel that the process of implementing Active Attacker awareness strategies will take up too much time and energy.

***Your Reply:** While it's true that implementing these strategies takes effort and dedication, the potential benefits far outweigh the costs. By being proactive and investing in prevention and response measures, schools can help protect their students and staff from harm.*

It's too scary for younger students: Some may worry that discussing the possibility of an Active Attacker situation with younger students will cause them unnecessary anxiety and fear.

***Your Reply:** While it's important to be sensitive to the developmental needs of younger students, it's also essential to ensure that everyone on campus is prepared to respond in an emergency situation. By presenting the information in an age-appropriate and non-threatening manner, and by involving parents and caregivers in the discussion, schools can ensure that everyone is on the same page and working together to promote safety.*

It's not effective: Some may doubt the effectiveness of Active Attacker awareness strategies and feel that they won't make a significant difference in the event of an emergency.

***Your reply:** While no strategy can completely eliminate the risk of an Active Attacker situation, Active Attacker awareness strategies have been proven to be effective in preventing and responding to emergencies. By investing in prevention and response measures, schools can help reduce the likelihood of an incident occurring and ensure that everyone on campus is prepared to respond if necessary.*

The school already has a security service on call: Some schools may feel that their existing security service is sufficient to handle an Active Attacker situation.

***Your reply:** While it's true that having a security service is a good start, it's important to consider whether they have the specific expertise and training necessary to respond to an Active Attacker situation. Sending a single security officer who may not be specially trained in handling such a crisis can be risky and could result in slow reaction times. Additionally, having a comprehensive Active Attacker awareness strategy in place can help supplement the work of the security service and ensure that everyone on campus is prepared to respond if necessary.*

This bring us to the end of this booklet and outlines the main reasons why consideration of the threat of an active attack should not be dismissed simply on account of the lack of prevalence in South Africa. I consider it a serious threat, I think we are overdue, and that we have been lucky thus far. While many would be well-justified to consider political upheaval a more immediate issue, crime to be a more pressing matter, or internal tensions to be more worthy of immediate attention, I trust that this booklet would have guided you towards a higher awareness.

To engage with the author, to receive professional guidance, or to take active steps towards developing an Active Attacker awareness, response, and reaction plan, these are or contact details:



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Thank you for reading this booklet, all of the very best with your efforts towards target-hardening your facility, and we look forward to engaging with you, guiding you, and helping you develop an effective Active Attacker detection, mitigation, reaction, and response program in the very near future!



About the Author

With an extensive background in Military Intelligence, Operational Policing, and Crime Scene Investigation, Stanley has worked side-by-side with some of the world's most elite security forces, including the South African Police Special Task Force, Tactical Intervention Units, METRO Police Drug Interdiction Units, and retired US Secret Service Specialists.

Through his work in Tactical Asset Assessment, Operational Planning, and Target Hardening, Stanley has gained invaluable experience in Attacker Dissuasion, High-Risk Warrant Planning and Execution, and Training. His expertise in these highly specialized fields has remained low-key, providing guidance and training only to selected private clients. However, with the increasing prevalence of active attacker events and mass casualty incidents in South Africa, Stanley recognized the need to reach out to institutions of education, the most vulnerable human and physical assets in society.

In this booklet, Stanley approaches the issue of active attacker awareness from the perspective of example cases, profiling, and risk. His insights and guidance offer a vital resource for those seeking to protect themselves and their communities from potential threats. With his unique blend of real-world experience, tactical expertise, and commitment to education and training, Stanley Bezuidenhout is a true authority on the subject of active attacker awareness.