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AMOK – THE MOST COMPLEX THREAT TO HYBRID PUBLIC SPACES

Solomun, D.[1], Jozić, M.[1], Pišković, D.[2]

[1]University of Applied Sciences for Criminal Investigation and Public Safety
dsolomun@fkz.hr, mjozic@fkz.hr
[2]General Police Directorate, International Police Cooperation Department
dpiskovic@mup.hr

Abstract: This paper analyzes and questions the specificities of police tactics in so-called AMOK situations (a state of uncontrollable rage or violence, often associated with senseless destruction or attacks) characterized by extreme violence perpetrated by an individual or group who randomly and uncontrollably endanger the lives and safety of people in selected hybrid (quasi) public spaces. Given their extremely negative implications for citizen, public, and national security, AMOK incidents demand special attention and require police and other security services to engage in systematic monitoring and protocol-based crisis response. These crisis events are sudden and difficult to predict, involving the lethal use of firearms or cold weapons, but recently also various motor vehicles, leading to mass casualties and serious threats to public facilities and spaces In examining the adequacy of response and police tactics in resolving these situations, the crucial variable is the attackers – perpetrators, who typically exhibit psychological difficulties, a sense of social isolation, and motivations related to revenge or personal frustrations, regardless of their social status. At the same time, in certain overlapping aspects of AMOK situations, the attackers may possess a radical ideology that leads toward terrorism. Victims are mostly within hybrid public spaces: students, bystanders, employees, or visitors, where targets may be selected or entirely random. AMOK incidents typically follow several stages: preparatory, execution, intervention, attacker neutralization, and post-crisis. It is important to emphasize that a swift response by potential victims through the "RUN, FIGHT OR HIDE" protocol, along with effective evacuation, is crucial until police arrive. Accordingly, this analysis, in addition to its conceptual and theoretical foundation, includes a case study of ten selected typical AMOK events. The cases are examined using a specially designed methodological model/a matrix of 10–11 variables, through which the patterns and specificities of these events are discussed. In line with the research objective, patterns in the analyzed incidents and responses are identified, and the effectiveness of applied police tactics is assessed, with a view to validating and implementing best practices. The results of the statistical operations confirm a statistically significant correlation between the "speed of police intervention and duration of the attack" ($\chi^2(2) = 9$, $p = 0.011$). In addition to more effectively

resolving crisis situations, the research results may also plausibly be applied to the development of preventive tactical measures aimed at enhancing public safety and preventing such events or reducing their harmful consequences.

Keywords: AMOK, hybrid public space, threat, violence, police tactics

1. INTRODUCTION

Questioning and discussing the best ways to achieve any aspect of security in today's conditions of global threats and numerous, intense uncertainties seems both challenging and demanding. This is especially true for discussions that dare to theoretically, though less abstractly and more directly, question the efficiency of security institutions, particularly the police.

Violence and aggression are innate human traits that disrupt order, peaceful living, and the safety of most citizens and their communities. The harm caused by violence becomes even greater and more dangerous when it is ideologically motivated and directed toward political goals. However, such violence is usually visible, recognizable, or expected, and therefore predictable, possible, and likely for public security mechanisms and the police.

The most complex type of violence from a security perspective is the one that is not indicative, not yet manifested, unknown, or perhaps latent, and not overtly threatening. Fatalities are expected in modern traffic, the criminal underworld, gang conflicts, domestic disputes, and similar interpersonal clashes; they are probable and typically met with routine, standardized responses.

However, police responses and tactics are often unprepared or delayed when it comes to covert, accumulating violence committed by an anonymous, inconspicuous individual who is vaguely inspired or motivated, yet lethally aggressive, determined, and prepared. Nonetheless, such responses are necessary, essential, and expected.

A particularly dangerous form of this type of violence with broader security implications is found in the phenomenon of AMOK, which, under the conditions of hybrid or quasi-public spaces, forms the central focus of this research.

Moreover, the phenomenological aspects of this occurrence further complicate its analysis. In terms of methods of attack, brutality, victims, and other features, AMOK incidents often resemble terrorist acts. The primary factor that distinguishes AMOK from terrorism is the perpetrator’s motivation. This distinction is a fundamental challenge for law enforcement and criminal investigations.

Accordingly, this research seeks, from the outset, starting with the sample definition and structure, to develop a mechanism for selecting and distinguishing AMOK incidents from the broader group of terrorist events, which are typically motivated by ideological or political objectives, unlike most AMOK cases.

The challenges in identifying and defining AMOK in this study are further emphasized by limiting the sample to hybrid public spaces, enabling a truly in-depth, multidimensional exploration of the phenomenon.

In addition to its conceptual and theoretical foundation, the research includes a case study of ten selected, typical AMOK events. These cases are analyzed using a specifically designed methodological framework—a matrix—incorporating 10–11 variables to explore patterns and specific features of each case.

Based on content analysis methodology, the documentation of events (cases) is ensured through a combination of a relatively large number of relevant public sources and official state publications.

2. THE MEANING OF THE TERMS AMOK AND HYBRID (QUASI, SEMI-) PUBLIC SPACE

The phenomenon of AMOK is defined by the eponymous term derived from the Malay word amuk, which denotes a murderous frenzy and represents an extreme form of endangerment to life, health, and safety caused by an individual in a particular state of impaired consciousness.

It refers to a specific medical condition primarily explained from a medical perspective, where the etiology highlights two dimensions: psychogenic (e.g., hysteria) and organic (e.g., epileptoid states, toxic effects, stimulants, or drugs) as the source and cause of this condition (Medical Lexicon, 1992). Most commonly, these situations involve a combination of delirium and twilight states, manifesting as an impulsive need for motor activity and blind aggression, with the individual indiscriminately killing anyone within reach.

An etymological curiosity is that in the 16th century, Portuguese writer and explorer Duarte Barbosa described a murderous tribe on the island of Java as "Amuco", a word later adopted into the English language (Vocabulary.com).

In this context, the present research aims to examine AMOK incidents that have occurred or are likely to occur in specific public environments such as schools, shopping malls, cultural and sports venues, churches, and other public spaces. Due to their nature and features simultaneously possessing a public dimension (intended for public use and relatively unrestricted access) and a private dimension (often privately owned) these places are justifiably referred to as hybrid, quasi-public, or semi-public spaces.

The conducted empirical examination of police tactics as a process confirms both the interdisciplinary and sui generis scientific context of police and criminological science. In relation to the origin of police science, this corresponds to the level of pre-scientific police knowledge (Butorac & Solomun, 2013, pp. 142–147).

3. POLICE RESPONSE TACTICS AND ELEMENTS OF PREVENTION

The tactics of police officers in AMOK situations are characterized by rapid and synchronized action. Police must quickly assess the real-time situation and respond either through immediate or

necessary intervention, aiming to establish direct contact with the attacker as soon as possible and regain control over the incident, followed by reassessment of the newly emerged crisis scenario (Jozić, 2020).

All participants at the scene must be familiar with the characteristics and potential dangers of the first stage of AMOK ("the attack is ongoing; the perpetrator is causing serious harm to people or targeted objects; police officers respond with aggressive movement while covering all operational sectors until the perpetrator is located"). During this initial stage, police officers move at what is referred to as rescue speed, which represents the fastest possible and tactically justified approach aimed at saving endangered lives (Klarić, 2022; Lesar, 2025).

The objective of rescue speed is to neutralize the threat, free hostages, or respond to an active assailant who is indiscriminately targeting unarmed civilians. This approach entails a high level of risk for police units (i.e., a significant chance of officer casualties). To minimize risks to hostages or civilians, police officers often must accept increased personal risk during operational execution (O'Toole, 2000; Šalaj & Šalaj, 2011; Jozić et al., 2020; Klarić, 2022).

The second stage of AMOK is typically marked by a reduction in the intensity of the attack. Uniformed officers or possibly private security personnel attempt to locate the perpetrator, cautiously moving through hallways and rooms, scanning the environment, and identifying potential threats.

The third stage generally indicates a cessation of active violence. However, officers must anticipate that the perpetrator may be barricaded in a room, holding hostages, or attempting to flee the scene by blending into the crowd during evacuation.

The fourth stage occurs once the perpetrator has been brought under control. Once the premises are secured, emergency services are allowed entry, first aid is administered to the injured, and a complete, supervised evacuation to the designated assembly or evacuation zone is carried out.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK – ANALYSIS

The research methodology was adapted to suit the nature of the subject under analysis and includes a case study approach using a sample of 10 selected, typical AMOK events. The cases were analyzed using a specially designed methodological model a matrix (Table 1) which includes an optimal number of 10 real AMOK incidents and 11 variables describing these events in practice (Table 1). Given the limitation of a relatively small sample size (approximately 110 matrix entries), variables were analyzed using descriptive statistical parameters, and both Pearson's correlation coefficient and the chi-square test were calculated.

4.1. Research Objective – Analysis

The objective of this research is to examine the effectiveness of applied police tactics, based on the indicated patterns of analyzed events and responses, with the assumption of validating and implementing best practices. These practices should not only resolve crises but also improve the

effectiveness of preventive measures, ultimately enhancing public safety and mitigating the consequences of such events.

4.2. Case Selection Criteria

The cases analyzed are not spatially or temporally constrained, but were purposefully selected based on credible available sources (official police and governmental reports, media reports, etc.) as those that, based on the majority of their characteristics, fit the definition of AMOK situations.

Given the large number and frequency of AMOK incidents in recent years, a multiple case study approach was applied (embedded multiple–case study) (Yin, 2018; Miočić, 2018).

4.3. Limitations

The research is largely based on open-source data. However, in addition to the already mentioned limitations due to the sample size and randomness, the category of police response is simplified using a binary criterion as an approximation of complex tactical responses in managing such situations, especially in terms of negotiation, evacuation, and possible neutralization of the perpetrator.

5. MATRIX STRUCTURE (VARIABLES)

A total of 10 high-profile, yet operationally different AMOK cases were analyzed, displayed in matrix columns, with 11 structured variables shown in rows of Table 1. As described in the methodology section, the selected variables include: duration, number of fatalities, police response time, type of weapon, and type of space converted into numerical or categorical values, resulting in a total of 110 matrix entries.

It is important to emphasize that AMOK situations are often classified under mass attacks, which in form and impact resemble acts of terrorism. Therefore, identifying the absence of terrorism-related elements, removing political motives or terrorist intent, is crucial for accurate AMOK classification in this often blurred zone.

Table 1

EVENTS		VARIABLES										
		Date/Time	**Location**	**Perpetrator**	**Place Type**	**Duration**	**Weapon Used**	**Victims**	**Police Response**	**Emergency Services**	**Perpetrator Status**	**Reactions**
		** from /to 06:00 – 12:00 12:00 – 18:00 18:00 – 24:00	**Island School Street Mall	** 1 – person 2-5- people 5 and more	**Hybrid/public place	** up to 15 min 15-30 min 30 – +	** firearm Cold weapon vehicle	** - up to 10 10-50 50 - +	** quick up to 10 min Slow up to 20 min	All EMS Firefighters	** arrested Suicide neutralized	** global echo Shock Condemnation
		**- STRUCTURING THE VARIABLES										
1	**Utoya Island Shooting (Norway)**	22.07.2011 17:25	Island	1 male, extremist, psychological issues	Hybrid/public place	60 min	Semi-automatic rifle	69 killed, many injured	Slow (remote location)	EMS, Firefighters	Arrested	Shock, debate on extremism in EU
2	**Sandy Hook School Shooting (USA)**	14.12.2012 09:30	School	1 male, mentally unstable	Hybrid/public place	11 min	Semi-automatic rifle + 2 pistols	27 killed	Quick	EMS, Firefighters	Suicide	Global echo, debate on gun control and mental health
3	**Westgate Mall Attack (Kenya)**	21.09.2013 12:00	Shopping mall	4 males, Al-Shabaab terrorists	Hybrid/public place	Approx. 80 hours	Automatic rifles, grenades	67 killed, 200+ injured	Slow, prolonged	EMS, Firefighters, intl. support	Neutralized	Global echo, terrorism threat highlighted
4	**Charlie Hebdo Shooting (France)**	07.01.2015 10:30	Charlie Hebdo office	2 males, radical Islamist terrorists	Public/Hybrid place	30 min	Automatic weapons, pistols	12 killed, many injured	Quick	EMS	Neutralized	Global echo, protests, freedom of speech

5	**Nice Truck Attack (France)**	14.07.2016 19:30	Promenade	1 male, Islamist terrorist	Public place	15 min	Truck	86 killed, 400+ injured	Quick	EMS, Firefighters	Neutralized	Global echo, condemnation, public space security debate
6	**Las Vegas Mass Shooting (USA)**	01.10.2017 22:05	Open area	1 male, unknown motive	Public place	10 min	Modified semi-automatic rifles	58 killed, 850+ injured	Quick	EMS, Firefighters, civilian volunteers	Suicide	Global echo, debate on gun control and mental health
7	**London Bridge Knife Attack (UK)**	03.06.2017 22:00	Street	3 males, Islamic extremists	Public place	30 min	Knives + vehicle	8 killed, many injured	Quick	EMS, Firefighters	Neutralized	Condemnation, public security debate
9	**Finsbury Park Car Attack (UK)**	19.06.2017 17:20	Park	1 male, far-right extremist	Public place	10 min	Van	1 killed, multiple injured	Quick	EMS	Arrested	Condemnation, public space security debate
9	**Knife Attack in School (Croatia)**	20.12.2024 09:50	Primary school	1 male, psychological issues	Hybrid/public place	10 min	Knife	1 killed, multiple injured	Quick	EMS	Arrested	Wide echo, school safety debate, new measures
10	**School Shooting (Serbia)**	03.05.2023 08:40	Primary school	1 male unknown	Hybrid/public place	5 min	Handgun	10 killed, multiple injured	Quick	EMS	Arrested, self-reported	Wide echo, gun control debate, legal consequences

6. RESEARCH RESULTS

In the analysis of AMOK situations as the subject of research, due to the relatively small sample size (N=10), but the optimal number of relevant variables (11 per event), only the statistical results of the variables that most directly characterize and determine the observed phenomena are presented. Therefore, the results of four significant variables are interpreted statistically, while the remaining seven are supplemented through qualitative interpretation.

Table 2. Results of descriptive statistics for the variables: duration of the attack (min), number of perpetrators, and number of victims

Variable	n	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Median (C)	Min	Max	Range
Duration of attack	8	22.0	17.62	13.0	10	60	50
Number of attackers	10	1.6	1.07	1.0	1	4	3
Number of victims	10	33.9	32.59	19.5	1	86	85

Table 3. Results of Pearson's r Correlation Coefficient for the Variables: Duration of Attack (min), Number of Attackers, and Number of Victims.

Variable	Duration of attack	Number of attackers	Number of victims
Duration of attack	–		
Number of attackers	0.26	–	
Number of victims	0.28	0.081	–

Chi-Square Test Results

Table 4. Frequency Table for Categorical Responses on Attack Duration

Response Category	n	Percent	Valid Percent
up to 15 min	5	50.0%	55.6%
15 to 30 min	2	20.0%	22.2%
more than 30 min	2	20.0%	22.2%
NA	1	10.0%	-
Total	10	100.0%	100.0%

Table 5: Chi-Square Test for "Attack Duration Time"

Chi-Square (χ^2)	p-value	df
53.333	0	16

Table 6: Standardized Residuals for the Variable Attack Duration

Response Category	Standardized Residual
up to 15 min	6.333
15 to 30 min	2.083
more than 30 min	2.083

Police Response Speed

Table 7: Frequency Table for Categorical Responses on Response Speed

Response Category	n	Percent
fast	8	80.0%
very slow	2	20.0%
Total	10	100.0%

Table 8: Standardized Residuals for Response Speed

Response Category	Standardized Residual
very slow	1.897
fast	9.961

Table 9: Chi-Square Test for Response Speed

Chi-Square (χ^2)	p-value	df
105.6	0.001	16

Police Intervention Speed and Attack Duration

Table 10: Frequency Table for Police Intervention Speed and Attack Duration

Police Intervention Speed	15 to 30 min	up to 15 min	more than 30 min	NA	Total
fast	2 (20.00%)	5 (50.00%)	0 (0.00%)	1 (10.00%)	8 (80.00%)
very slow	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	2 (20.00%)	0 (0.00%)	2 (20.00%)
Total	2 (20.00%)	5 (50.00%)	2 (20.00%)	1 (10.00%)	10 (100.00%)

Table 11: Chi-Square Test for Police Intervention Speed and Attack Duration

Chi-Square (χ^2)	p-value	df
9	0.011	2

7. DISCUSSION

Based on the results of descriptive statistics for the variables "attack duration" (in minutes), number of perpetrators, and number of victims (Table 2), it can be concluded that the average duration of an attack was 22 minutes with a standard deviation of 17.62 minutes (Table 2). On average, there was one perpetrator per AMOK event, with a standard deviation of 1.07, and the average number of victims per attack was 33.9, with a standard deviation of 32.59 (Table 2).

Pearson's correlation coefficient showed no statistically significant correlation between the observed variables. According to other authors, the duration of attacks and the number of perpetrators and victims (e.g., school shootings) depend on a wide range of known and unknown endogenous and exogenous factors (e.g., motivation, frustration, psychological stress, duration of depressive or dark periods) (Artwohl & Christensen, 1997; O'Toole, 2000; Artwohl & Christensen, 2020; Everbridge, 2024).

Using the χ^2 test, a statistically significant difference was found in the number of attacks lasting up to 15 minutes compared to those lasting 15–30 minutes or more than 30 minutes (χ^2 (16) = 53.33, $p < 0.001$) (Tables 4 and 5). This result is relevant as it highlights the need to incorporate the observed frequencies of attack durations into operational plans and response protocols of special police units, in accordance with best practices from previous AMOK incidents.

The dominant attack duration of 15 minutes suggests a need to adjust tactical and situational plans of AMOK prevention teams to enable timely intervention.

A comparison of "police response time and attack duration" (Tables 10 and 11), analyzed using the χ^2 test, revealed differences in frequency distribution across time intervals (under 15 minutes, 15–30 minutes, and over 30 minutes). These differences indicate a likely association between response speed and attack duration (χ^2 (2)=9, p=0.011). Slower response times may result in longer attacks and potentially higher casualty counts.

According to available literature, AMOK attacks typically last for a short period, which underscores the importance of the first responding police unit's ability to locate, identify, and neutralize the immediate threat quickly.

Furthermore, Table 1 demonstrates that the use of specific weapons (e.g., trucks, automatic or semi-automatic firearms, hand grenades) results in a notably high number of casualties up to 86 killed and 400 injured.

Regarding possible points of intervention to prevent or mitigate unpredictable AMOK scenarios (the third research question), it is important to note that these are situationally determined by the type, number, and characteristics of police officers. In extraordinary circumstances such as AMOK incidents, general police officers may be forced to act individually ("One man CQB" – Close Quarters Battle) without support from specialist units (Blair & Schweit, 2014; Klarić, 2022; Stolnik & Jozić, 2024). This mode of action demands immediate entry and precise individual action in confined and unfamiliar spaces, with the primary aim of stopping and controlling the immediate threat. All uniformed forces should continuously develop and enhance techniques of direct entry and tactical response in unfamiliar environments, particularly with the goal of subduing the attacker.

8. CONCLUSION

The research highlights the need for well-prepared and trained teams, including specialized units, capable of recognizing high-risk and highly complex crisis situations. These units should be able to identify dangerous behavioral patterns and respond efficiently and safely within the shortest possible time frame.

One of the most significant factors in preventing or mitigating unpredictable AMOK incidents is situational training of a larger number of frontline police officers, who may find themselves in a position where they must act independently, without support from other officers. Critical elements in police preparedness and response to AMOK events include: risk assessment, access control, surveillance, mass communication, well-trained personnel, adequate protective equipment, and delegated authority.

The obtained χ^2 test result (χ^2 (16) = 53.33, $p < 0.001$) is a key determinant of police AMOK tactics, suggesting the necessity of a rapid response in the initial stage of situational intervention. The

prerequisite for implementing “rescue speed” is the existence of trained and prepared teams and specialist units ready for decisive crisis intervention.
The sudden nature of AMOK events and their occurrence across all types of public and semi-public spaces demands the highest level of police efficiency during the first phase, where “rescue speed” can significantly reduce the impact of an attack.
The conducted research indicates the importance of designing training and education models where members of intervention forces, general police units, as well as private security personnel, are trained through specific AMOK response scenarios in hybrid public spaces.
It is valuable, as a guiding principle, to emphasize that there is no single best method, training, or specialist preparation, and that the appropriate tactical response in various crisis scenarios may follow the suggested AMOK protocol: “run, alert others, hide, fight.”

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