

# Conclusion

Over the last few decades, a certain kind of cult has developed around serial murderers in society—they have been put on a pedestal because of the hundreds of films, books, and songs inspired by their deeds. They have ceased to be merely a source of fear and anxiety in citizens' lives, and can, for some, even be the source of inspiration. The remarkable watchability of TV serials such as “Dexter” or “Hannibal” has been noted and while producers may enjoy their popularity, parents are increasingly worried about their children's disturbing interests, which takes on the form of aggression, signs of pathology and sociopathy. Is the cult of people taking innocent lives gathering strength or has it already reached its peak? Irrespective of how this situation develops, the phenomenon of serial murder is compelling for scientists and researchers and the world at large. Although it has been analyzed with the aid of various scientific disciplines (such as psychology, medicine, criminology, criminalistics, victimology), questions continue to be raised to which there are no answers.

The jurisprudence has defined serial murder as a form of multiple murders in order to expedite serial murder investigations. Mass murder, which is often confused with serial murder, constitutes, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigations, the killing of at least four people in the same place and time. It is therefore distinct from serial murder because it does not feature a “cooling off period,” in which the perpetrator does not carry out single acts of murder. This is the only permanent difference between these concepts because the issue of the number of victims is still under discussion today. The number of murders most often accepted by researchers is three (such definition is adopted by Professor B. Hołyst, for example) although there are theories that require only two people to fulfill the criteria of a serial murder. The current FBI definition of serial murder is understood as “the lawless killing of two or more victims by the same perpetrator(s), in separate incidents making up part of a series.”

In the investigation of serial murder cases, the perpetrator is usually unknown; therefore, the creation of a psychological profile of the killer plays an important role. Profiling began as early as the nineteenth century, when Jack the Ripper was terrorizing London, and the law enforcement agencies were powerless and in no

state to take on a sufficient investigation. It was then that they turned to the psychiatrist Thomas Bond to create a comprehensive and full psychological profile of the Ripper. Clearly, taking into account the fact that it was the first profile of such kind, it was not perfect, but it created the momentum for the development of that “art” in science. The first profile that was used by law enforcement agencies in their investigative work was the psychological portrait of the Mad Assassin, created in the 1950s by James Brussel. It was so accurate that it led to the circle of suspects being narrowed down from over 1000 to 3 people, and in addition, the profiler even predicted the clothes that the assassin would be wearing on the day of his capture. The profiler’s next success also contributed to the capture of the Boston Strangler (who killed 11 women). Further, when the FBI created the Department of Behavioral Research to develop investigative techniques, they sought his cooperation on criminal profiling.

Research on the phenomenon of serial murder has led to the comprehensive supplementation of many theories concerning criminological factors (influencing crime). It is currently believed that the development of a murderous mindset and mentality in an individual is hugely influenced by their family situation and (proper) upbringing in childhood. Research conducted by the FBI indicates that approximately 75 % of serial murderers were raised in broken homes, and a significant majority were physically or mentally abused by their carers. Also relevant to domestic life is the material situation, parental alcoholism or chronic illness, that can result in insufficient care of the child. Another criminogenic factor is the impact on the child of his or her peers and the school environment because it is here that a young individual spends most of their time, and their minds are particularly absorbent and open to suggestion during this period. The role of alcohol on criminality is a fairly obvious catalyst for aggressive behavior, as well as in cases of serial murder—a significant proportion of such offenders have consumed alcohol or taken psychoactive substances before committing their crimes.

In recent times, there has been a significant decrease in the number of serial murders committed—it is estimated that they currently comprise approximately 20 % of the figure registered during the 1980s. Naturally, although the “dark figure” should also be taken into account, namely murders that were wrongly classified as single murders rather than as one of a series, there are estimated to be approximately 100 serial murderers in “active operation” in the USA today. The USA is burdened with the highest number, or 76 % of all offenders. In Europe, this figure is 21 % and a mere 3 % in the remaining continents.

A particular characteristic of serial murder is the lack of a typical motive on the part of the perpetrator. Although such crimes may appear to be senseless and groundless to the general public, serial murderers may subjectively perceive a certain justification for their crimes. The Holmes brothers developed the most popular classification of perpetrators’ motives in the doctrine, dividing them into four groups: visionaries, missionaries, hedonists, and power maniacs.

The visionary murderer is an unorganized perpetrator type, who experiences psychotic hallucinations and delusions, compelling him to kill others. Whether his

actions are driven by the pursuit of salvation (where God is commanding him to kill) or by a reflection of the cult of Satan, the characteristic feature of this type of killer is insanity. While experiencing visions, they can completely lose contact with reality, which would explain why they often leave a chaotic crime scene in their wake, replete with physical evidence (fingerprints, bodily fluids, or the instruments used in the killing).

The second type of murderer has been classified by researchers as the missionary type, seeing himself as a social savior, but nevertheless not displaying signs of insanity. In contrast to the visionary, he does not hear voices or experience visions, but he does have a formula of his own making, according to which he eliminates “unnecessary” or harmful individuals. The crime scene most often suggests a perpetrator who is organized and well prepared for his “mission.”

The hedonistic killer is a perpetrator intentionally seeking an adrenaline rush through the very act of killing. He does not kill through a sense of obligation to rid society of a certain social group, nor does he kill because of voices and visions—he kills for the sheer pleasure of it. Research shows that literally all of such killers meticulously plan their crimes and then torture their victims. Approximately 90% of them have a totally unemotional approach toward their victims. Many theories suggest that this type of perpetrator has a psychopathic personality.

The power and control maniac is similar to the hedonistic killer in terms of their aim and level of organization, deriving satisfaction from wielding power over others and the awareness that their victims are utterly at their mercy. They are not out of touch with reality; they know full well what they are doing when committing their crimes. They have an “ideal type” of victim, according to which they make their selection, and they sometimes preserve the body (or a part of it) near or within their home, so that they can visit it and gloat over their work.

The above typology concerns serial murderers’ motivation for committing a crime; however, the FBI also created a classification concerning the killer’s level of organization. It was created in order to speed up investigative procedures by categorizing offenders as organized or disorganized. Disorganized types are characterized by impulsiveness and excessive aggression, often being the trigger for taking the life of another. Also relevant is their low IQ and lack of social adaptation.

Spontaneous action implies a lack of ability to foresee the consequences of one’s actions; such perpetrators are often quickly identified by the fact of leaving behind their fingerprints or other telltale signs at the crime scene. They are totally opposite to organized perpetrator types, who act deliberately and on the basis of an earlier-hatched plan. A tendency to perfectionism in their everyday life is also reflected in the crimes they commit, which can be defined as methodical and orderly. This results in the lack of a trail, a careful selection of the site for killing their victim and the unremitting pursuit of perfection (the “perfect crime” syndrome).

Why some people become killers depends on many factors, including psychological, psychiatric, or even biomedical. The starting point for many psychological theories is the thesis of Sigmund Freud on the “id” and the “superego.” The “id” is an individual’s pure urges that are reined in with the aid of the “superego,” provided the latter is appropriately developed in childhood. The behavioral school focuses,

on the other hand, on the theory of man as a reactive system. The external environment drives human behavior, but it also comprises the system of punishment and reward (the reward being the satisfaction derived from the crime committed and the punishment being the conviction and sentencing).

The psychiatric approach to the issue of criminal determination focuses on concepts such as psychosis (in particular, schizophrenia) and psychopathy. These are not identical terms because psychosis is defined as a mental disorder, whereas psychopathy is a personality disorder. Psychosis is a common phenomenon among disorganized killers, usually those with a visionary motive. However, psychotic illnesses or schizophrenia only apply to approximately 1% of all serial murderers. Psychopathic personalities present themselves completely differently. With psychopathy and sociopathy, a mental abnormality increases aggression and a lack of empathy which can cause uncontrolled urges leading to murder.

Biomedical determinants have only been analyzed recently, thanks to developments in science and technology. With the aid of magnetic resonance, research on the brains of criminals, on grey matter in the prefrontal cortex, has shown that they have decidedly fewer of these cells compared to other groups studied. In addition, it has been indicated that damage to the neurocranium can lead to a rise in aggression or the development of an emotional pathology. The most recent research also suggests a connection between irregularities in EEG results and criminality.

In the case of serial murder, the situation is even more complicated because there is no direct link between psychological or biological features and victimization (i.e., the fact of being a victim of a crime). Academics known as the Holmes brothers developed a thesis on the impact on criminal profiling of a victim's definable characteristics; they classified certain groups of information that should be found in every crime scene report. They differentiate information on the victim's physical features, civil status, lifestyle, hobbies, and education, but also issues such as their experiences with the justice system, history of illnesses or everyday activities. Victimologists have repeatedly tried to answer the question of "who most often becomes a victim of crime and why," paving the way for many theories concerning the typology of murder victims.

There is a general division into children and young people, women, elderly people, the mentally ill, as well as immigrants and foreigners. Each category of person is, to a certain extent, vulnerable of becoming a crime target. Children demonstrate a weaker mental ability than adults and are more susceptible to manipulation. The majority of women are weaker than men, and mentally ill people, due to their lower abilities of perception, do not sufficiently assess the situation they may find themselves in.

According to Hentig, immigrants and foreigners are the object of victimization either because of racial prejudice or an inability to adapt to the culture of a given country. The psychological categorization of victims includes those suffering from depression (limited responsiveness caused by depression is a factor encouraging an assault on a given person), those seeking profit (through their blind pursuit of enrichment, they cease to be cautious), tormentors (by meting out violence to their victims over such a long period, they themselves become destroyed by their victims), and those who are thoughtless and impertinent, driven by their urges and desires.

The role of the victim in the genesis of crime can be considered as either one of predestination or one of provocation. Predestination implies a certain kind of susceptibility to or risk of becoming a victim, for which the latter may be culpable or non-culpable. Provocation, on the other hand, involves behavior that encourages or stimulates an offender to commit a crime. Non-culpable provocation means that there is no awareness that the behavior may encourage the offender, whereas culpable provocation involves a suspicion, however slight, that a particular behavior may be provocative to the perpetrator. An example of a culpable victim is one who is careless, leading to conditions described as convenient for someone bent on committing a crime.

The role of the victim can take on three forms—object, vehicle, or person. The victim as object is characterized by the random nature of the selection, where the perpetrator displays no feelings whatsoever toward the victim. The victim as vehicle is a metaphorical concept. It means that they are used as means of offloading the perpetrator's desires and expectations, their aggression, and anger. The role of the victim as "person" boils down to the killer's irrational and delusional conviction that the victim is a specific person from the perpetrator's life (e.g., their mother, or former lover). In addition, the perpetrator believes that they are linked by a "connection" and emotional tie stemming from the crime.

John Douglas, an FBI special agent, maintained that in order to understand an artist, you have to look at his work. The same applies to serial murder—in order to solve the mystery of the identity of the perpetrator, you have to create a complete psychological profile—which allows you to define his motive and type, as well as to narrow down the circle of suspects. Complementary to the psychological profile, which indicates the psychophysical traits of the perpetrator, is geoprofiling. This focuses on determining the direction the investigation should take and in pinpointing the suspect's likely place of residence.

Criminal profiling should achieve the following fundamental aims: provide the authorities with a psychological portrait of the criminal and the projected evolution of his behavior, narrow down the circle of suspects, create a network of connections between events that may make up a series on the basis of similarities in the *modus operandi*.

The prosecution and investigation of serial murder is considerably hindered by various factors. Firstly, the fragmentation of the investigative services causes such disintegration that there is not enough communication between particular institutions. Despite developed technologies, the police are constantly grappling with problems of "blind leads" due to insufficient cooperation. Strictly linked to the issue of fragmentation is the insufficient competence of the services themselves, which is borne out, for example, by commencing an investigative activity a little too late, improperly conducted autopsies or inspections or the misuse of resources in the form of temporary arrests. Americans researching problems in the prosecution and investigation of crime, accused the services of relying too heavily on intuition and experience rather than theoretical knowledge, using terminology that is unclear (or too removed from reality) and a lack of common aims and work standards.

Some researchers of the problem maintain that “each murder is a kind of angry monologue directed at the social order.” There is a trap which the researcher and the reader alike can easily fall into as they delve deeper into the psyche of a serial murderer. A certain inclination to get emotionally engaged in perpetrators’ lives and a temporary blocking out of their evildoings comes into play. Such amnesia is disastrous and there should be no place for it; however, it has been observed many times over in our times. Although the phenomenon discussed herein is increasingly better analyzed, it continues to intrigue society like nothing else. As already mentioned in this study, “we have been fascinated with murder since Cain killed Abel” and this tendency is unlikely to abate. Bloody acts of murder have been with us since the birth of mankind and will continue to be with us for as long as mankind is on earth.

# Annex

List of questions used in the interview conducted for this study:

1. *What is the role of the victim in the genesis of crime?*
2. *How does a perpetrator choose a victim that could potentially be one that nobody will look for?*
3. *What is the current detection rate of serial murder in the USA and what are the best solutions used to investigate this type of crime?*
4. *What is the impact of the latest psychological or medical research on the detection rate of serial murders?*
5. *What do you consider the greatest problem as regards the investigation and prosecution of serial murders?*
6. *How serious is the issue of the dark figure with regard to serial killers?*
7. *What are the chances for improvement in the detection rate?*
8. *Has there been a case of a serial killer being caught recently in the USA?*



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