

## Serial Killers Profiling and Target Victims: Is there a connection?

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### Abstract

Although the phenomenon of serial killers has received great attention from media, governments, and public, very little information is known about them and very few theories are presented by researchers specifically their definition and motives for killing. Through cross tabulation analysis of top ninety-eight serial killers, this present study poses six questions that investigate the correlations between, offender's gender, offender's level of education, time span of killing, killing severity, number of victims, killer's type of abuse, motives for killing, and victim's profile. Findings show that males kill more than females and for longer time, less educated serial killers kill more horribly, female serial killers consider their family members easy target, and finally males kill most for enjoyment and sex and females kill for financial gains.

*Keywords:* serial killer, criminal profiling, victims, criminal psychology.

## **Introduction**

In this introductory section, definitions for serial killers, their motives for killing, and Criminal profiling are presented.

### ***Definition of serial killer***

In the last thirty years, several definitions for serial killers have been introduced but law agencies, intelligence department, clinicians, and researchers. While these definitions have common traits, they sharply differ on specific components like, number of victims involved, killing time span, motivation of killing, killing severity and killer's temporal aspects. In addition, some factors should be included to craft a definition of who is classified as a serial killer. These include: number of offenders, number of victims, different times and events, span of killing. Accordingly, serial killer is defined as the felonious killing of two or more victims by the same offender(s), in separate events (Morton, 2005). Kenji Abe (2017) stated in his conclusion that serial killers are different from mass murderers in their initial childhood experiences which lead to aggressive personality. He mentioned that abuse leads to aggression. Meanwhile, negligence leads to withdrawal from social life and might create hostile character. Untreated from those abuses will most likely lead to serial killers (Abe, 2017).

Lee and Choi (2014) also declared the difficulty of finding a unified definition for serial killers. This is due to the nature of variable that need to be included like, age range of the killer, gender, He continued to say that serial killers might be male or female with minimum of 3 to 4 victims and mostly they have use a pattern in their killing which is related mostly with types of victims and the motivation and method of killing. It also includes killers who are geographically transient, relatives or strangers. Schechter (2003) referred to FBI Crime Classification Manual which defined serial killers according to 3 elements. First, Quantity which requires at least 3

victims. Second, place which requires that serial killers kill in different places, and finally is time which requires that there should be a span between one killing to another that might range from hours to months or even years. This span is called “*cooling-off period*”.

Ferguson et al. (2003) defined serial killers according to major three components. First, number of victims killed during several and distinct events. Second, motive for killing which might range from pleasure gaining, relieving stress, financial gain, hatred towards society or other reasons. Lastly, the murders should not occur under the decision and supervision of any organization whether governmental, political or criminal.

### ***Motivations for killing***

Morton (2005) categorized all motivations for serial killers. He mentioned that serial killers kill in these cases: 1) **anger**: when killers show hostility towards specific groups or subgroups in society or even with society as a whole. 2) **criminal enterprise**: when killers benefit in status or receive compensation. 3) **financial gain**: when killers benefit financially after killing. 4) **ideology**: when the offender tries to spread the goals and propaganda of a certain groups in the society. 5) **Power/thrill/ lust**: killers kill for sex or gain some power by gaining the feeling of control over the victim. 6) **psychosis**: when the killer kills because he/she suffers from mental illness or abuse. Mahtabi and Naderi (2014) categorized serial killers' motivations into: profits murder, financial gain, sex, hatred, power and control, revenge, getting attention, fear, contract murder, distress, despair and empathy, cult or missionary.

Morton et al. (2005) categorized motivations of killing into sexual, anger, mental illness, profit, and others. Moreover, the motives depend on the relationship between offenders and victims. These include: stranger (there is no relationship between the killer and the victim), targeted

stranger (where the offender knows the victim but the victim has no clue or previous knowledge about the offender), acquaintance (there is a slight contact between the killer and the victim), familial (this includes blood relatives, small families and extended families), and customer or client (the victim is mostly a prostitute and the offender is a customer, or the victim is a client for the killer).

### ***Criminal profiling***

Criminal profiling – sometimes called offender profiling or murderer profiling – is an investigative tool used by law and crimes agencies to identify and analyze the most occurring patterns of serial killers to predict future crimes and detect the most likely victims (Godwin and College, 2002). FBI, for example, has a division called NCAVC “*National Center for The Analysis of Violent Crime*” which investigates crimes scenes to establish criminal profiling for serial killers. The division has three analysis units: BAU 1, BAU 2, and BAU 3 which consider counter-terrorism, crimes against adults, and crimes against children respectively (Miller, 2006). Criminal profilers are psychologists who investigate facts and collect data on crimes at scene and the criminals and victims involved. They attempt to discover discrete behavioral attributes and patterns and hence predict how the killer will most likely act in future crimes. Moreover, Miller continues to say that there are many things considered in establishing criminal profile such as; analysis of criminal act, analysis of crime scene, examination of the victim, investigation of police reports, analysis of autopsy reports, correlations with UNSUB's profile (unknown subject), and research suggestions on criminal profiling.

With the emergence of criminal profiling, there are several terms used to involve most of the types possible including; psychological, criminal personality, criminal investigative, and

behavioral evidence profiling and analyses (Godwin and College, 2002). Regardless, though, the current profiling techniques have a major flaw that they all emphasize on the psychological functions of the offender and not the action itself and what it really consists of. Consequently, these profiles provide little distinction between open and overt crimes and the psycho-dynamic operations which produce the behavior (Godwin and College, 2002). Even though, police officers rely on criminal profiling (CP) in their investigations as they find it very helpful and successful (Snook et al., 2008). They mentioned that CP solved 46% of the last 192 criminal cases under FBI investigations. Similarly, a study conducted in Netherlands in 1993 which surveyed 5 from 6 police officers discovered a high degree of satisfaction and usefulness by using FBI profiling. Likewise, in 1995 a study in UK found out that 92% police officers will seek CP advice in their investigations. Finally, another study in Canada in 2007 concluded that 66% of police officers believed that CP contributed greatly to their crimes investigations.

## **Literature Review**

To explain the behavior and motives of serial killers, it is an attractive idea to shed light upon some approaches that explain them. In this section, researchers will review biological, psychological, and sociological approaches.

### ***Biological, psychological, and sociological approaches***

Biologically speaking, Heydari et al. (2008) observed the most common biological characteristics of serial killers and noted that they have distinctive features like; face asymmetry, irregular ears sizes, either standing out or very small, irregular nose shape, and protruding lips. In terms of psychology of serial killers, many explanations and theories have been presented to explain relations between offenders and victims. For example, the instinct theory debates

whether humans have innate instinct that guides them to kill and be aggressive. The attachment theory looks at our past experiences and early childhood period and focus on the bonding relationship between mothers and their children. The theory argues that any imbalance in this relationship will eventually create and motivate the child to commit crimes and delinquency (Myers et al., 2008).

The sociological approach attempts to explain the connection between the relations among people in society and the motives for them to kill accordingly. Surprisingly, sociology did not present a clear-cut explanation for criminal acts. In this approach, three main theories are presented that explain violent behaviors. First is the anomie theory which argues that tensions, pressure, and restrictions on people which prevent them to succeed force them to be deviants (Myers et al., 2008). The second theory is the labelling theory which postulates that if a person is called deviant and this label is supported and reinforced by community, the individual will accept it and it will affect the person's self-concept, which leads them to consider themselves deviants and start engaging in violent actions (Holmes & Holmes, 1998). The final theory is the control theory which argues that loss of control is a good factor to explain deviant behaviors (Norris, 1988).

### ***Previous studies statistics***

In this section, the researcher intends to highlight some numerical data and statistics regarding offenders' profiles and their victims statistics in order to compare them with this paper results. Beasley (2004) interviewed seven serial killers in order to find common patterns, similarities and differences between them which might explain their deviant behaviors. In terms of killing prime motives, the researcher found out that 4 out 7 (~ 57%) kill for sex and 3 (~43%) kill for financial gain. In addition, 3 out of the 4 (75%) sex offenders do not record psychopath history problems. In terms of victim's gender, the seven serial killers are males and they in sum killed 34 (~72%)

females and 13 (~27.7%) males which might lead to the fact that males tend to kill more females rather than males.

The database of serial killers in Radford University is updated in partnership with Florida Gulf Coast University to provide accurate information for researchers about 4,743 serial killers and 13,105 victims mainly from USA and Canada. In that database, Aamodt (2016) stated the following facts:

Frequency of Serial Killers Gender in 2010	Broad Motives for Killing	Victims sex and race	Method by Which Victim Was Killed
4200 men & 541 women	Enjoyment (thrill, lust, power) 36.86%	White Female (37.14%)	Shot (42.96%)
	Financial Gain (29.59%)	White Male (30.60%)	Strangled (21.71%)
	Anger (16.38%)	Black Female (11.94%)	Stabbed (14.84%)
	Multiple Motives (8.06%)	Black Male (11.82%)	Bludgeoned (9.18%)
	Cult (0.94%)	White Female (37.14%)	Poisoned (7.20%)
	Enjoyment (thrill, lust, power) 36.86%	White Male (30.60%)	Shot (42.96%)
	Financial Gain (29.59%)	Black Female (11.94%)	

In Morton's et al. (2005) monograph which represent 5 years of empirical research collected by experts at the FBI's National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime, the following statistics are presented:

- Victims were mostly females (75.4%) and their ages ranged from 8 to 91 years.
- All (100%) of the serial killers were males.
- The average educational level for killers was a high school certificate or further education (70.2%).
- *"The high education level reflects the intelligence level of these offenders". P.14*

- 32.6% of killers were diagnosed by a psychiatric disorder.
- The relationships between the killers and the victims were mostly a customer and client relationship with (41.5%), then comes strangers (31.5%), acquaintances (12.1%), and finally targeted strangers with (11.7%) percentage.
- Customer/client was the most occurring because it involves prostitution.
- Number of victims in the scene ranged from 2 to 23 victims with 2 to 4 victims as the largest group with (60.9%), then 5 to 9 victims with (27.2%), and 10 or more with (12%) percentages.
- The motives for the killers were mostly for sex (81.5%), then for profit (5%), anger (3.1%), mental illness (1.3%), other motives (5.6%), and unknow motives contributed for 5.6% percentages.
- *A review of the literature on serial murder reveals that most of the serial murder cases investigated by law enforcement are sexually motivated. P.19*
- Serial killers preferred to bring victims very close to them and develop intimacy before they killed them.

## **Method**

This section introduces sample selection rationale, research purpose, and statistics of sample.

### ***Participants and data collection***

The sample used in the study is the first 100 serial killers from The Encyclopedia of Serial Killers, August 2017. Then, researcher investigated eight variables about them including: killer's sex, killer's span of killing, killer's level of Education, number of victims, killing severity, motive for Killing, victim's profile, and killer's type of abuse. After data collection, researcher

eliminated two serial killers as some of their data is missing. The sample ended up with ninety-eight serial killers.

### ***Purpose of the study***

The purpose of the study is to investigate the correlation between the eight variables of the study by trying to answer six questions namely;

1. Do males kill more and for a longer time than females?
2. Does low education motivate killers to be serial and severe killers?
3. Does killing become more severe according to killer's sex and number of abuses?
4. Do female serial killers target males and vice versa?
5. Why do males and females kill?
6. Is there a relationship between severity of killing and type of killer's abuse?

### ***Data analysis***

A cross tabulation analysis is used to investigate the relationships between the eight variables of the study. First correlation is made between males, females and span of killing. Second, the correlation between killer's level of education and severity of killing based on the number of victims count. Third, the relationship between killing severity and killer's number of abuses based on sex count. Fourth, a correlation is made between sex and type of victim based on number of victims of the sample. Fifth, the correlational relationship between killing motives and sex based on sex of killers is investigated. Finally, the last correlation investigated is between killing severity and number of abuses based on number of victims. First, statistics about variables is presented. Table 1 and 2 show frequencies of gender, level of education, span of killing, killing severity, types of victims, and killing motives.

Table 1: Frequencies of gender, level of education, and span of killing

Gender		Level of Education	Count of Span of killing		
Males	Females	Never go to school	26	0-4	52
69	29	Dropped from elementary school	15	5-9	20
<b>Killer's Type of Abuse</b>		Dropped from high school	14	10-14	11
No abuse	45	Graduated from high school	24	15-19	5
Physical	6	Received 2-year degree	11	20-24	6
Psychological	13	Received BA	8	25-29	1
Sexual	4			30-34	2
several	30			35-39	1

Table 2: Frequencies of killing severity, types of victims, and killing motives.

Killing Severity	Types of Victims	Killing Motives
Mild (1 method)	31 Females	32 Enjoyment (sex/power)
Moderate (2 methods)	21 Multiple types	17 Financial gain
Intense (3 methods)	11 children	13 Getting attention
Severe (>3)	13 Family member	4 Revenge and anger
Horrible (mutilation)	22 Prostitutes	9 Hatred towards prostitutions/
	Clients/patients	6 hallucinations
	males	4 Cult/Jealousy
	Relatives	2
	Blacks/gays	1
	/infants/students	

## Findings and Discussions

***Do males kill more and for a longer time than females?*** To answer the question, a cross tabulation is created to identify the correlation between sex of killers, number of victims, and span of killing victims. Based on table statistics, yes males kill (69) more than females (29), and for a longer time. It is evident that all male values for span of killing are greater - or equal to - than females' equivalent. One interesting finding is in the category of 10 to 14 victims count where males spent more time - almost three times - than females (16 to 6 years). The same almost applies to 5 to 9 victims count where males scored 23 years and females scored 14. Does this mean that males are smarter killers than females? This finding is consistent with the database

of serial killers in Radford University mentioned before when it was found that 4200 men were serial killers from the total number of 4741 (88.6%). It is also consistent with Morton's et al. (2005) monograph which found that 100% of serial killers are all males. Garbarino (2015) stated that men carry a gene known as MAOA (Monoamine oxidase A) more than women which is nicknamed "warrior gene". This gene -if connected with other factors- leads to increased opportunity of human to be aggressive and violent. However, if that gene is not attached with abuse, it becomes irrelevant. Another factor might also contribute to the existence of violence and aggression in men which is the antisocial personality disorder. Moreover, Garbarino continues to say that men are more emotionally disconnected than women which encourage them to commit crimes. They want to draw attention and significance by killing others as if they say, "kill now, feel later". (See Table 3 in appendix)

***Does low education motivate killers to be serial and severe killers?*** To answer the question, a cross tabulation is created to identify the correlation between level of education for serial killers, number of victims, and severity of killing process. First, yes low education is the highest in value if we consider low education as somebody never goes to school or drops from elementary stage (1027 out of 2208) which counts for 46.5% percentage of all victims killed and recorded. But, on the other side, bachelor degree holders – who came next highest – scored not too low from the highest category (594 which counts for almost 27%). Next, again yes, the least education level in the table – never go to school and dropped from elementary school – has been recorded the most severe killers (725 out of 1034 which counts for 70%). Does this mean that the least educated serial killers kill more horribly? Supporting the answer to this question, Morton's et al. (2005) monograph findings reported that the average educational level for killers was a high school certificate or further education (70.2%) and that the majority of serial killers (64.1%) had a high

school certificate with 39.1% of them possess college education. Godwin (2000) stated that most serial killers do not possess an educational level beyond high school. Moreover, Godwin discovered that only 16% of 107 serial killers had passed to college or undergraduate. Only 4% graduated from college or obtained BA degree. Though they have less education, most serial killers still possess qualities of being smart through leaving no traces or source of evidence which guide to them (Godwin, 2000). (See Table 4 in appendix)

***Does killing become more severe according to killer's sex and number of abuses?*** To answer the question, a cross tabulation is created to identify the correlation between sex for serial killers, Killer's Type of Abuse, and severity of killing process. The pivot table indicates contradictory results because although the highest score (9 = 41%) of the most severe killers (horrible - mutilation of corpse) is attached to people with several abuses as this supports the question above, but killers with no abuses recorded very high score (8 = 36.4%) compared to several abuses count. On the other hand, it seems that number of abuses does not affect killing severity (45 out of 98 = 46%). (See Table 5 in appendix)

***Do female serial killers target males and vice versa?*** To answer the question, a cross tabulation is created to identify the correlation between sex for serial killers, and type of victim (victim profile) based on number of victims count. According to table statistics, females do not tend to kill males but males tend to target females. More specifically, serial female killers tend to kill family members and infants more than any category else. Those types of victims recorded 30% and 19% respectively. In addition, it is interesting to state that female serial killers never killed prostitutes from the sample of all serial killers and victims recorded. On the other hand, serial male killers tend to kill females as their most preferable target of victims (56%). Next comes patients and prostitutes with percentages of 12.7% and 9.7% respectively. More interestingly,

male serial killers never killed their family members and infants of whatever is the reason. Does it mean that serial female killers consider their family members easy targets and males consider females in general and prostitutes - in specific - their easy target to kill? (See Table 6 in appendix)

***Why do males and females kill?*** To answer the question, a cross tabulation is created to identify the correlation between killing motive and sex of killers based on number of all killers. The results indicate that females kill mostly to achieve financial gains (31%) and equally for enjoyment that includes lust, thrill, sex, and power. Sometimes, they kill to receive attention if they suffer isolation or negligence (17%). On the other hand, males kill mostly to enjoy and specially for sex (81.2%). In general, both sexes kill for enjoyment first (66%) and then for financial gains (11%). Does that mean we need to empower women financially and men should satisfy their sex needs legally and authorities should help them and facilitate their marriage proposals? (See Table 7 in appendix)

***Is there a relationship between severity of killing and type of killer's abuse?*** To answer the question, a cross tabulation is created to identify the correlation between killing severity and type of killer's abuse based on number of victims. First, the pivot table shows that in addition to several abuses and no abuses cases which are the highest – 45.9% and 28.5% respectively, killer's psychological abuse causes high rate of killing with a percentage of almost 20% of cases. Then, the answer to the above question seems unclear because there are two contradictions. If the serial killer has several abuses, then he/she will kill severely and horribly (688 out of 1034 with 66.54%). But on the other hand, several abuses killers recorded moderate way of killing which refutes the first assumption that several abuses cause more severity of killing. Moreover, serial killers with no abuses recorded with intense and severe methods of killing with 55/120 (45.8%)

and 164/287 (57%) respectively form the grand total of victims. Finally, it can be inferred that there is no relationship between killer's type of abuse and severity of his/her killing based on the statistics shown in the table. (*See Table 8 in appendix*)

## **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of the study, there seems to be some indicators that might predict the emergence of serial killers. For example, students dropping out from their schools and the feeling of negligence or exposure to abuses raise the opportunity for them to think negatively about society which might lead them to seek revenge and hence become serial killers. In addition, legal relationships through marriage or other ways of bonding might decrease the opportunity to be serial killers especially for males who seek lust and who considers marriage as a dream. To them as well as to females, family stability might be a solution to fulfill their roles in society and accordingly be positive citizens in their societies.

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## Appendices

**Table 3: Killing span and gender**

Count of Span of Killing			
Row Labels	Female	Male	Grand Total
0-4	7	10	17
5-9	14	23	37
10-14	6	16	22
15-19	0	5	5
20-24	1	1	2
25-29	0	3	3
30-34	0	2	2
35-39	0	1	1
40-44	0	1	1
45-49	1	1	2
65-69	0	1	1
70-74	0	1	1
100-104	0	1	1
130-134	0	1	1
250-254	0	1	1
595-600	0	1	1
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>98</b>

**Table 4: Killers educational level and severity of killing**

Sum of No of Victims						
Row Labels	horrible - mutilation of corpse	severe - more than three methods used	intense - three methods used	moderate - two methods used	mild - one method used	Grand Total
Never go to school	9	48	56	43	102	258
Dropped from elementary school	716	14	0	24	15	769
Dropped from high school	8	20	13	20	61	122
Graduated from high school	101	63	42	90	24	320
Received 2-year college degree	6	12	0	48	79	145
Received bachelor degree	194	130	9	8	253	594
Grand Total	1034	287	120	233	534	2208

**Table 5: Type of killer's abuse and severity of killing**

Row Labels	Count of Sex					Grand Total
	horrible - mutilation of corpse	severe - more than three methods used	intense - three methods used	moderate - two methods used	mild - one method used	
Several abuses	9	2	5	6	8	30
Physical abuse	2	0	0	3	1	6
Psychological abuse	3	3	1	3	3	13
Sexual abuse	0	2	1	0	1	4
No abuse	8	6	4	9	18	45
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>98</b>

**Table 6: Type of victims and gender**

Row Labels	Sum of No of Victims		Grand Total
	Female	Male	
Blacks	0	19	19
Children and teenagers	18	117	135
Clients and patients	27	250	277
Family members	74	0	74
Females	23	1103	1126
Gays	0	5	5
Infants	46	0	46
Males	11	84	95
Multiple types of victims	38	168	206
Prostitutes	0	192	192
Relatives	7	10	17
Students	0	16	16
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>244</b>	<b>1964</b>	<b>2208</b>

**Table 7: Killing motives and gender**

Row Labels	Count of Sex		
	Female	Male	Grand Total
Cult or missionary	0	1	1
Enjoyment (thrill/lust/sex/power)	9	56	65
Financial gain	9	2	11
Getting attention	5	0	5
Hallucinations	0	3	3
Hatred towards prostitutes or females	0	3	3
Jealousy	1	0	1
Mental disorders	1	1	2
More than one motive	0	3	3
Revenge and anger	4	0	4
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>98</b>

**Table 8: Severity of killing and type of killer's abuse**

Row Labels	Sum of No of Victims					Grand Total
	No abuse	Physical abuse	Psychological abuse	Sexual abuse	Several abuses	
Mild - one method used	128	8	267	7	124	534
Moderate - two methods used	63	49	13	0	108	233
Intense - three methods used	55	0	9	13	43	120
Severe - more than three methods used	164	0	58	14	51	287
Horrible - mutilation of corpse	220	32	94	0	688	1034
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>630</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>441</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>1014</b>	<b>2208</b>