

A CASE STUDY OF SERIAL KILLERS

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Abstract

The term "Serial Killer" today has become a catch-phrase with the popular press churning out books and movies centred on the serial killer. Some cases of serial killings appearing in electronic and print media from time to time are summarized in this paper with discussion on the possible causes and background of serial killings and role of forensic medicine and other experts in the investigation of the heinous crime, measures to treat the offenders and check the incidences.

Keywords: Serial Killer, Homicide, Disorganized, Process-Focussed, Act-Focussed, Hedonistic, Psychopath, Schizophrenia, Lie Detector, Narco-analysis, Brain Mapping.

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Introduction

The words homicide, murder and killing can be used synonymously to denote ending life of one human being by an act of another human being. If a person kills several victims of usually of a particular type, over a period of time with varying intervals in between, apparently without motive except for sexual or sadistic gratification, he is described as "serial killer" and such culprit is a special psychiatric entity and invariably a male. The serial killers exist throughout the world and India is no exception rather there seems to be rise in the incidences of serial killings in the country which is attracting considerable media and public attention [1]. The following cases of serial killings are just being quoted and discussed to highlight the issue and sensitize the forensic experts for understanding and evolving the

measures directly or indirectly concerning them.

Case-I: On December 29, 2006 a person Mohinder Singh Pandher aged 53 years, was arrested along with his servant Surendra Kohly aged 36 years from Noida adjoining Nithari village in the suburbs of Delhi. The duo carried out serial killings for two years with 38 children done to death and the dead bodies of the unfortunate victims were dismembered and dumped in drains in and around his Bungalow. Investigating agencies collected skeleton from the drains and autopsy was done on more than 40 bags of human remains there as per CBI sources.

Case-II: "Servant held for sexually abusing and murdering six children" was the headline of a leading national newspaper. Satish alias Surendra who was working as a domestic help in the house of a businessman, confessed to having killed five children and a grownup girl after sexually abusing them. Skeleton and clothes were recovered from gunny bag. Police claimed that the accused was mentally ill.

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Case-III: Mukesh, a father of five years old daughter and one year old son from Mukatsar town in Punjab, confessed to rape and brutally murdering five children whose dead bodies were recovered from a godown. He got married out of love five years ago against the wishes of his parents, confessed to the crime done under the influence of SMAC and dumping the dead bodies.

Case-IV: Khushwant Singh, a noted writer penned down a case of serial murder in an article published in a national daily under "Malice towards one and all." I sat through a sessions trial of the serial killer Raman Raghav a Tamilian, 26 years ago in Bombay who murdered more than a dozen persons including men, women and children sleeping on the pavements during night hours. He had neither enmity against them nor any motive for the killings. He was brought in the court in handcuffs and shackle. When a photographer Jatindra Arys tried to take his picture, he went berserk jumping like a maniac and it took time for him to cool down. His trial was a tame affair. He admitted to the killings and sounded proud of what he had done. He told the judge "*Phansee Lagao*" (Hang me). When the iron rod with which he had smashed the skulls of his victims was shown to him, he fondled it with affection as if it was his child. When the prosecuting lawyer shrank back, he said with a grin on his face "*daro nahin, tumco nahin marney ka*" (don't worry, I won't kill you).

Case-V: Mumbai's "beer man" admits to 15 murders:-The 36 years old suspect Ravindra Kantrulu, had admitted to killing 15 people during his narco-analysis test followed by brain mapping and polygraph tests. Kantarulu said he would make his victims drink beer before killing them. Psychologist said, "He loves see blood." Kantarulu admitted he was a drug addict and that he under the influence of intoxicants like charas, committed crimes. They said "while high on drugs, he would get violent and kill" and the police said he had traumatic childhood.

Discussion

The word "homicide" is derived from the latin word 'homo' and 'cide'. Homo means 'man' and 'cide' means 'I cut' thus homicide is causing death of a human being by a human being. The word "murder" is defined under Section 300 IPC wherein an injury is caused to a person which is sufficient to cause death in the ordinary course of nature, with the intention to cause such injury, and if the bodily injury is intended to be inflicted is likely to cause death, it is labelled as 'culpable homicide' under Section 299 IPC [2]. Homicide or killing of human being by act, procurement or omission on another human being is as old as civilization and is the common end point of different behavioural pathways; it may be the argument between the acquaintances, domestic violence, robberies, drug addiction and terrorism and to a large extent an intimate one [3].

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) defines "serial murder" as killing of several persons in three or more separate incidents over weeks or extended period and the Behavioural Science Unit of FBI classifies serial killings as:-

- a. **Disorganized:** When there is little evidence of extensive pre-crime planning and the killers tend to be far more violent seeming to kill for the process of killing than the end result. They often engage in dismemberment or abuse of the dead victim meaning the killing is 'Process-Focussed'.
- b. **Organized:** The killers tend to plan out the crimes in great deal and having elaborate disposal schemes for the body. They kill the victim quickly and efficiently and do not mutilate as often as the disorganized offender meaning the killing is 'Act-Focussed'.

Holmes and De Burger divide serial killers into four categories as:

- a. **Visionary:** They are out of touch with reality, may be psychosis or schizophrenics and the crime occurs

as a result of psychotic delusions, like murder in response to voices or visions urging them to kill.

- b. **Mission-oriented:** They have a distinct goal, feeling it is their mission to kill certain kind of people such as prostitutes and homosexuals to clean up the society.
- c. **Hedonistic:** They are psychopathic sexual sadists who torture and kill for pleasure. They kill for the kicks of it acting thrill-seekers.
- d. **Control-oriented:** They enjoy the absolute power over the victim.
- e. Organized crime members, mafia, and street gangs etc. who kill for instrumental / financial / territorial purposes.

Origin: Although a mystery many a times, the foundation for the serial killer is usually laid down in their early life experiences during childhood with harsh childhood punishment and discipline.

Some of the common personality characters amongst the serial killers are:

- a. **Family background:** Many such families have a history of psychological and behavioural problems like alcoholism, drug abuse or sexual abuse and the serial killers were abused physically, emotionally or sexually with poor relationship with family members especially mothers. They suffered a traumatic childhood or came from broken families.
- b. **Goals:** Serial killers do not work for obvious understandable goals but live and die for that which appeals only to them.
- c. **Sexual undertones:** Many researchers have noted sexual undertones in majority serial killers.
- d. **Free will:** Presence of free will is one of the common factors concerning serial killers and evidently they act from a conscious perspective.

- e. **Fantasy:** plays a larger role in the life of serial killer and he uses it as a coping mechanism for day-to-day life as if addicted to it.
- f. **Interpersonal relationship:** There is gradual deterioration of interpersonal relationship from increased reliance on addiction.
- g. **Inability to love:** It is especially evident in the serial killer and considered to be the core of ASPD i.e. antisocial personality disorder described in psychiatry.
- h. **Behaviour:** Highly impulsive and aggressive and they require more thrills than normal people.
- i. **Sadistic nature:** It is an inherent and another feature with fascination for violence, injury and torture.
- j. **Lack of guilt:** Absolute lack of guilt and remorse is a classic feature.
- k. **External motive:** The victim is killed for psychological gain without any external motive.
- l. **Ability to conceal:** The serial killer has abilities to conceal the criminal activities.
- m. **Family bonding:** He never truly bonds to his family, has very few friendships and viewed as loner.
- n. **Negative personality traits:** Preference for autoerotic activity, aggression, chronic lying, rebelliousness and fetish behaviour, inability to distinguish fantasy from reality are some negative personality traits which develop in serial killers resulting in their increased isolation.
- o. **Insecure and instable:** The extreme violence of some killers is because of this insecure and instability fear.
- p. **Unchecked killing:** Unless stopped the serial killer will kill again and again with increase in frequency unless removed from society [4].

Approach to the serial killer

- a. **Psychiatric approach:** A key in understanding and explaining serial killer as he represents a potent Freudian id residing in us all [5].
 1. Psychosis and Schizophrenia: Overt psychotic illness (especially that characterized by a predominance of positive symptoms of paranoid nature) has a direct influence on some acts of serial killing.
 2. Neurotic disorders: Homicidal behaviour is associated with depression. Murders have higher score on both psychotics and neuroticism inventories than other subjects.
 3. Psychopath personality disorder (PPD): is a persistent disability of mind resulting in abnormally aggressive or irresponsible behaviour that is not the product of psychosis or other illness. Psychopaths behave in a socially unacceptable manner often with adverse effects on themselves and others, they may leave behind them characteristic "Chain of Chaos" and they may show lack of remorse, shallow affect, impulsivity, a grandiose sense of self worth and lack of long term goals.(6)
 4. Substance abuse: Some studies found a prevalence of substance abuse disorders as high as 50% in serial killers with use of alcohol, amphetamines, marijuana or other drugs before the crime.(7)
- b. **Socio-cultural approach:** "When once a certain class of people has been placed by the temporal and spiritual authorities outside the ranks of those whose life has value, then nothing comes more naturally to men than murder" Simone Weil (1909-43) a French philosopher said [8]. Socio-cultural theories of murder have been largely overlooked. However, it might have some bearing on the explanation of serial killing.
- c. **Neurological approach:** Some cases of serial killers had a history of head injury and abnormality on computerized tomography (CT), electroencephalography (EEG) scans and neuropsychological testing. Brain wave abnormality is seen in half of the psychopathic population, but only 15 % of non-psychopathic population shows this abnormality. Injury to the limbic part of brain which controls emotions of anger and fear, it can produce excessive violence [9]. Bizarre fantasies are central to serial killers who originate in the dominant hemisphere of the brain, when it is damaged, the fantasies can become bizarre or deviant.
- d. **Biochemical approach:** Studies have shown a number of neurotransmitters which can influence cortical and sub-cortical mechanisms for aggression and violence in particular, 5-hydroxyindoleacetic acid (5-HIAA) a metabolic bi-product of the neurotransmitter abnormalities may thus play a role in the offence of serial killer [10].
- e. **Role of genetics:** The role of chromosomal disorders has been implicated in criminology. The XYY chromosomal abnormality (males born with extra "Y" or male chromosome) has been associated with "Super maleness" and this increased aggressiveness and violent behaviour.
- f. **Physical factors:** Sheldon (1940) examined body styles and divided human body shapes into three categories i.e. Endomorphs (short and fat), Ectomorphs (tall and thin) and Mesomorphs (Athletic). Mesomorphs were most likely to have a criminal predisposition and studies confirmed these findings.

Homicide Act 1957 (England): This Act brings the conception of diminished responsibility in a psychopath. The Act defines the “psychopathic personality” as a persistent mental disorder or disability of mind which results in abnormally aggressive or seriously irresponsible conduct on the part of the patient requiring or susceptible to treatment, for which he may be compulsorily detained in hospital. The defence took the plea of diminished responsibility in the ground of sexual psychopath, who was unable to control the desire. The appeal was allowed and the charge of murder was converted into manslaughter that is diminished responsibility [11].

Role of Forensic Scientist: Interrogation, questioning and cross questioning are the tools used to be applied earlier by the police or the investigating agencies for getting information from the suspect of crime. Forensic scientists are applying recent scientific methods of suspect interrogation to extract information. Commonly used methods are:

- a. **Lie Detector** (Polygraph): It measures physiological changes caused by sympathetic nervous system during questioning thereby ascertaining if the individual is speaking the truth.
- b. **Narco Test** (Narco-analysis): The individual is given titrated dose of IV thiopental sodium infusion, 2-2.5 mg/kg of body weight / hour of 2.5% solution under medical supervision and quizzed. The person in question under mild anaesthesia will not be able to hide the truth.
- c. **Brain Mapping:** It is done by Radio isotope scan, a further confirmatory test. Photographs are shown to the accused to reconfirm whatever he has said earlier.

These tests are conducted to assist in the investigation but do not have standing in the courts of law.

Conclusions

To establish the relationship between the serial killer, the crime and the possible cause or motive behind such heinous crimes, is

a major challenge for the investigating agency, the forensic and corrective experts. The serial killers may have their own compulsions or reasons behind the crime. Multi disciplinary aetiology and approach can be the answer to this crime against society.

Conflict of Interest

None declared.

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