

Examining the
psychological
offender profiling
investigation
criminology essay



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Offender Profiling is an investigative tool that is used by psychologists to help them work out exactly why a particular crime has been committed and why a criminal is behaving in a certain way. This tool is used to research the types of crimes people are committing and how an offender picks his or her victim. This method of research also helps the Criminal Justice System at a significant degree. It enables them to make a decision based upon the research and facts, which makes the overall verdict more ethical.

The aim of Offender Profiling is to go beyond the facts and develop a hypothesis about the offender.

Holmes & Holmes (1996) suggests three objectives to meet this aim. These are to: 1) to provide the police with basic information about the certain personality attributes of the offender such as age, family, ethnicity, employment and marital status, 2) to suggest any belongings the offender may have that would lead him to committing this crime and 3) to provide interviewing strategies and suggestions the police may use when questioning a suspect. The British approach on Offender Profiling is very different to the American approach. The British approach does not categorise crimes and try to fit them into theories but takes a more scientific approach to analysing every possible data of a crime and using these to develop the profile, whereas the American approach (FBI) to developing an offender profile is different to this. Their approach has been developed from an initial sample of interviews with 36 convicted serial sexual murderers, together with detailed information from crime scenes i. e. the location and timing of the crimes, medical examination reports, any crimes that have already been committed in the neighbourhood, the victims whereabouts and the amount

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of forensic awareness shown by the offender.[1]This is done in order to help them establish a bigger picture of the crime and help them identify the psychology behind it.

Offender Profiling was first used in the Second World War to see if there were any weaknesses that can be exploited and enhanced for the future. For example, Langer conducted a profiling on Hitler and concluded that if he had lost the Second World War he would commit suicide. He was correct. After the defeat in 1945, Adolf Hitler committed suicide and passed away.

Psychiatrists believe that the basic assumption of Offender Profiling is that the offenders have a certain fingerprint, in other words, certain behaviour at the crime scene which is a reflection of their personality and characteristics. For example, a criminal tying up the victim – the psychological fingerprint behind this would be that the offender wants control and dominance over the offender in order to defeat them. Another example can be shown from a rape case. When an offender has committed rape they would wash the victim. The psychological fingerprint behind this would be that the criminal either feels some sort of remorse so he/she wants cleanse or that they want the case to be so inconspicuous that they even remove the victims' pubic hair.

How Offender Profiling influenced...

Courtroom

The courtroom is very important in the British Criminal Justice System. There are two types of profiling techniques that are used in trials. The first is what we call deductive Offender Profiling, which concerns itself with the particular behavioural evidence of a case. Second is inductive profiling which assumes

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that when a criminal commits a crime, he or she will have a similar background and motive to others who have committed a similar crime. There are related problems of the use of Offender Profiling in the courtroom. The first is unawareness about the nature of Offender Profiling and physical evidence. The second is when the profilers are "too zeal". When these two problems cross in a single case, it may be that an offender profiler gives opinions with strong confidence about circumstances and behaviours that are assumed and not established.[2]

Interviewing

Offender Profiling can help the CJS and the police in terms of suggesting effective ways of interviewing, related to specific criminal types. Not all will react to questioning in the same manner. An effective way of questioning for one person may be ineffective for someone else. This is because not all murderers commit murder for the same reason. This means depending on their reasons for committing a crime, they would need different strategies of questioning. An example can be shown by the murder of a young girl and her boyfriend in which the stepfather was the main suspect but there was no forensic evidence to convict him. When he was questioned in the usual way, he denied any involvement. The profiler suggested that as he was a man who had a great requirement for control, it would be good to ask for his help in solving the crime. Pretending to be doing this, the suspect was given lots of photographs of the crime scene and thinking he was in control of the investigation, became so occupied in talking about the case that he revealed more and more his knowledge with the crime until he eventually gave up and confessed.[3]

Victims

Offender Profiling certainly impacts victims in various ways. The most evident is that it helps police find their offender. The victim may be traumatised as a result of the offence and may feel threatened that the perpetrator will return therefore being scared to leave their home. If the offender is convicted, the victim will be relieved and at least try and continue with their normal life.

Mental health

Ressler (1992) says that mental health professionals have an interest in offender profiling and have also helped research in the study of criminal psychology. Thus, it is suggested that clinicians could be used to help the Criminal Justice System in suggesting ways of profiling and ways of treatment.

Police

Profiling can give the police a new or different direction in their attempt to catch the offender by reducing the list of suspects. This is by giving them information about the choice of victim, the location, anything that was said by the offender and the nature of the offense. These things may help to give the offender more of a personality, and thus help the police in their chase of the offender. Profiling is not aimed to tell the police who actually committed an offence; instead it aims to suggest to them some personality and demographic characteristics that the offender is likely to possess. If for example the police are investigating a number of rapes in the same area, they will be pleased to identify whether the same person has committed

them. They will need to know if they should be looking for one or several offenders. In addition, a profile can help police in reducing their list of suspects and to avoid wasting time on enquiries which are likely to be useless. If a suspect of the police does not match any of the profiler's predictions then the police might spend less time following that particular person. In some case the profile may well fit someone whom the police already suspect and will therefore allow the police officers to concentrate their investigations on the most likely suspect.

How Offender Profiling was used in real life cases

During the period 1982-86, 24 sexual assaults occurred in North London near to railways. It was believed that one man committed all these crimes, though on some occasions he had someone that helped him out. Between 1985 and 1986 three murders occurred, and forensic evidence together with certain aspects of the attackers suggested that there were links between the rapes and murders. In 1986, police forces in South England were struggling to find the Railway Rapist, which then turned in to the Railway Killer. Dr. David Canter, a psychologist and criminologist was invited to compose British crime's first offender profile. When the offender, John Duffy, was later arrested and convicted, it turned out that 13 of Canter's 17 announcements about the offender were correct.

The case of Adrian Babb is another instance where Offender Profiling has been successful and therefore very helpful to the CJS. Between 1986 and 1988, seven attacks on elderly women took place in tower blocks in south Birmingham. Women aged 70-80 were followed into the lifts by a stocky young man who overwhelmed them and took them to the top floor of the <https://assignbuster.com/examining-the-psychological-offender-profiling-investigation-criminology-essay/>

tower block, where he raped them and escaped. The same patterns of the crimes suggested that the offense was committed by the same man.

Because the criminal had a limited range of locations, victims and actions, this suggested that the offender was operating a limited world, wherein he was constrained in his actions. Victims reported the offender as black, athletic, without body scent and carrying a sports bag. He had no attempt to hide himself, thus he had no fear of being recognised and convicted.

Canter labelled his approach Investigative Psychology, where he believes that offender goes beyond what he originally thought of Offender Profiling and covers a branch of applied psychology. Canter has a certain strategy that he uses within this investigation which helps him in finding the offender. He firstly tries to understand the types of crime individuals are likely to become involved in and the way the crime will be carried out. After that he tries to understand the way a criminal behaviour processes and how the crime mirrors their behaviour in their daily life. These led him to believe that there are associated activities that happen when a crime is being committed. He also believes that actions of offenders at the crime scene are likely to reveal something about their background.

The important attributes Canter looks out for within his research are: location, biography, social and personal characteristics and occupational/ educational history. One other aspect of profiling is the methodological collection of data and statistical analysis. An example of this is when Canter and Heritage (1990) combed through the victim statements of 66 UK sexual assaults and with the use of statistics, they were able to identify clear patterns in the form of the attack.

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It is possible to group how the victim is treated in three ways, each giving clue to the offender. First is when the criminal treats the victim as a person - this is when a conversation is involved in the duration of the attack, asking things to the with the woman's love and personal life or complimenting her on her looks and body. This type of criminal believes that he is developing some sort of relationship with the victim and incorrectly thinks that the sexual assault produces closeness. The second is when the victim is treated as an object - in this case, the victim may be blindfolded, while the offender tends to be covered. The offender here will mainly be concerned with control in the interaction of the rape. The third and final is when the victim is treated as vehicle - when this is the case the offender uses violence to degrade the victim. The actions here are a mirror of the offenders' anger and aggression.

The third real life case I will discuss in the report is the case of Rachel Nickell, wherein Offender Profiling was used to help the police officers find the offender and help the CJS make a fair verdict. On 15th July 1992, a 23 year old model, Rachel Nickell, was walking with her son and her dog in Wimbledon Common when she was attacked and brutally killed. Alex (Nickell's two year old son) was thrown into the bushes while Nickell was sexually assaulted, stabbed 49 times and had her throat cut. Another hiker who was also walking in the Common discovered Alex clinging to his mother's dead body, crying and pleading with her to get up. It was later found that Alex stuck a piece of paper on his mother's forehead in place of a plaster in attempt to make his mum better.

The police tried their best to find the criminal but failed to do so. They felt under pressure and as a result, turned to a Forensic psychologist named Paul <https://assignbuster.com/examining-the-psychological-offender-profiling-investigation-criminology-essay/>

Britton, an expert in the science of Offender Profiling, and asked him to conduct an offender profile for this crime case. Britton had previously helped the police identify the killers of Jamie Bulger in Liverpool, and had worked on the Frederick West ' House of Horrors' murders in Gloucester, and was felt to be the right man for the job.[4]A suspect was eventually identified by Britton and it was noted that he seemed to fit the profile well. A complex operation was planned by Britton, which was aiming to tempt Stagg into a confession using an undercover female police officer who faked a romantic interest in Stagg and a liking for Satanism. However, despite her efforts Stagg did not confess.

Effectiveness of Offender Profiling in each case

Canter (1990) is the UK's leading profiling expert; his approach looks out for the behaviour of the offender during the crime. In his approach no assumptions are made about the criminal and the approach relies heavily on facts. Canter believes that his approach has several advantages over crime scene analysis. First, his type of Offender Profiling draws directly on widely known psychological concepts. Second, his approach could be used extensively and should not be limited to just rape and murder. Finally, in his approach there is less chance for biased decision making. Canter argues that his approach is more scientific than the FBI's and as a result, his profiles are more useful in helping the police catch the actual offender and the CJS to make a fair verdict.[5]

John Duffy, ' Railway Rapist'

For John Duffy's case, Canter created a profile with the following key facts

belonging to the rapist:

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The rapist would live in the area near some of the attacks.

He would be living with his girlfriend or wife and will not have a child.

He would be in his late 20s; his blood fluids would contain ABO antigens and he would be right-handed.

He would be skilled in his job and work only at the weekends.

He knows the railway system very well.

He would have a criminal record of violence.

This profile represents the use of behavioural characteristics to search for a criminal instead of pure forensic evidence from the crime scene. Out of 2000 suspects, Canter pinpointed the 1505th suspect, John Duffy, who was the actual offender. Duffy fit most of the profile, including a criminal conviction for raping his wife. The profile Canter developed matched 13 out of 17 details about Duffy's characteristics. The remaining that didn't match Duffy was the biological characteristics; the offender was a lot shorter than victims remembered and many had described him as having black or even ginger hair. From the accuracy, it is evident that Offender Profiling has been a very effective investigative tool to use in this crime case.[6]

Adrian Babb

For Adrian Babb's case, Canter created a profile with the following key facts belonging to the attacker:

Not violent because force is only used when necessary

Athletic body suggests that that offender has an interest of solitary sports e. g. swimming or body-building

Cleanliness and organisation suggests that he was obsessive

No attempt to cover him or hide forensic evidence suggests that he was not aware of the procedures and therefore has not convicted before for this type of crime

Ease with elderly women suggests that he dealt with elderly people in non-offence background

Knowledge of tower blocks suggests that he lives in one

Based on this profile, a police officer searched through the records of minor sexual offenders and found a match between Babb's fingerprints and those at the crime scene. It is evident that Offender Profiling has been a very effective tool to utilise in this case because it has helped the police catch the offender. From the above, we can see that Canters predictions were very accurate. As Canter clearly stated in the profile, the offender must have had no forensic awareness or knowledge of the likely procedures as he made no attempt to disguise himself. This was a very valuable point that led to the arrest of Babb. As Canter also predicted, Babb attended the swimming pool very often hence the cleanliness and the lack of body odour and also looked after sessions for the elderly.

Rachel Nickell

Britton's first task was to set up a clear picture of the kind of person Rachel was by interviewing her family and friends. His initial thoughts related to Alex, Nickell's son. The fact that Alex was not harmed meant that Rachel had not known the offender and so this was not likely to be a domestic murder. The nature of the attack pointed towards a violent sexual psychopath.

Based on his past interactions with sexual killers, Britton drew up a profile of the offender with the following points:

The offender would be aged between 20 and 30 because the majority of sexual attacks are committed by young men

He would not have the ability to relate to women in normal conversation.

He would either have a history of failed or unsatisfactory relationships or no relationship history

He would suffer from some form of sexual dysfunction

He would be attracted to pornography which would play a role in his sexual fantasy life

He would only have average intelligence and education because the attack was brutal

If employed, he would work in an unskilled or labouring occupation

He would be single and have a relatively isolated lifestyle

He would have lonely hobbies and interests

He would live within easy walking distance of Wimbledon Common and would be thoroughly familiar with it

He would be very likely to kill another young woman at some point in the future.

Colin Stagg was the named that cropped up four times after the murderers profile was broadcasted on 'Crimewatch'. Stagg fitted Britton's profile precisely. During the police interview Stagg denied any involvement in the crime, but his answers to questions made stronger the match with Britton's profile. The police' could find no physical evidence connecting Stagg to the murder but he remained the number one suspect. The complex operation which was planned by Britton had an adverse effect on the whole case. The evidence of Britton's profile and the information obtained from Lizzie James was thrown out of court and the defence argued that Britton's evidence was speculative and supported only by his instinct. Stagg was set free and Rachel's killer was never found. This shows how Offender Profiling can be misused, misunderstood and misinterpreted if not conducted in a scientific way.

Conclusion

There are many arguments discussing the effectiveness of Offender Profiling, some of which are positive and some which are negative. Even though there have been less publicised cases where Offender Profiling was less accurate e. g. Copson (1995), it can still be a very useful tool in terms of helping the police find the offender. However it is important for the police to be careful <https://assignbuster.com/examining-the-psychological-offender-profiling-investigation-criminology-essay/>

not to be blinded to other possibilities. Occasionally criminals do not fit the profile and over use could lead to misjudgement of the Criminal Justice System. Offender profiling is more prediction than science based and therefore the validity is debated. Due to the fact that there is no hard evidence to work from, it is not possible to gain a definite result. Stereotype can be another factor that affects the way a criminal is profiled. For example, it may be that most rapists are single men that live on their own or with their parents but this may not always be the case and could lead to an inaccurate profile being created if the criminal is a married man who lives with his family.

To assess the effectiveness of this investigative tool different research has been conducted. For example, Britton (1992) sent out questionnaires to the Criminal Investigation Department to identify the number of cases where an offender had been profiled led to arrest. He found that the results were mostly negative in the sense that most cases that were profiled did not lead to arrest. However, the majority of the respondents commented that it could have had a lot of potential in their experience of Offender Profiling.[7]