

Personality characteristics and criminal behavior

[Psychology](#), [Personality](#)



While a person's personality may not predict criminal behavior, several studies have found a relationship between personality and crime (Listwan et al., 2007). The perpetrators of a particular set of crimes tend to have some common set of offense characteristics. It is therefore imperative for criminal investigators to determine the behavioral patterns and personality characteristics of offenders. This paper describes the offense characteristics of criminals who commit murders, sex offenses, terrorisms, organized crime and acquisitive murder.

The paper will also develop a forensic profile based on the offense characteristics of murderers and sex offenders in order to provide inferences on their personality traits. In addition, the factors that contribute to the offender's maladaptive behaviors, as well as the appropriate personality measures for collecting information, will be discussed. Finally, the paper will explore the differences between the ethical standards applicable to criminal investigations and criminal interview and future recommendation will be suggested.

Part I

The offenders who commit murder, terrorism, sexual offenses, organized crimes and acquisitive crimes tend to have some commonalities in their view of the victims. In most cases, criminals perceive their victims as vehicles to express their desires, as objects with no human significance or as a person who will provide them with some psychological release be it money, sex and other needs (Canter & Youngs, 2009, p. 292-293). Understanding the offender's view of the victim provides a footing for the identification of the offense characteristics of the above-mentioned crimes.

The offense characteristics of murderers include having an occupational or geographical mobility and are generally motivated by situational causes (Morton ; Hilts, 2008).

According to Morton ; Hilts (2008), Murderers also have an IQ that is above average, socially adequate, and are active followers of the media. These individuals use their victims as objects to satisfy their desires such as sexual gratification, finances, revenge and other selfish ambitions (DeLisi, M., ; Scherer, A. M., 2006). Generally, murderers have a high birth order and have a troubled childhood associated with violent and harsh discipline (Morton ; Hilts, 2008). Additionally, murderers have a previous criminal history, and most are males with the masculine image (Canter ; Youngs, 2009, p. 292-293).

Sexual offenders have difficulties in establishing relationships, are socially inadequate, and live alone. According to the Center for Sex Offender Management (n. d.), sexual offenders are motivated by a deviant sexual arousal, preferences or interests. The ignorance of the fact that sexual crime is illegal and harmful to others suggest the pro-offending attitudes or cognitive distortions of the offenders. In addition, sex offenders have interpersonal, intimacy and social deficits and have no empathy towards their victims. Most sex offenders have a history of sexual abuse or maltreatment and demonstrate poor self-management and coping skills (Center for Sex Offender Management, n. d).

Terrorists have several similarities in offense characteristics. Generally, terrorists are non-combatant individuals who subscribe to an

uncompromising ideology to seek justice or influence the target audience's behavior using violence (Navarro, Joe, 2009). Terrorists tend to be isolated and have a poor social achievement. Sometimes the terrorists are motivated by an illogical perception of political, economic and social issues. Another common offense characteristics of terrorists are psychological defects such as schizophrenia or paranoia which produces the violent behaviors. Terrorists pursue violence to exhibit civil disobedience (Navarro, Joe, 2009).

The perpetrators of organized crime usually have a hierarchical structure with governing codes on which crimes to specialize in, how to behave and other strict policies for protecting the organization. Some common offense characteristic of organized crime includes loyalty and commitment of members to the group and punishment of members who stray. Organized crime is motivated by financial gains and thrives on distributing illegal goods and services (Jones & Bartlett Learning, n. d).

The individuals who commit acquisitive crimes are generally involved in drug use, motivated by thrill or pleasure, and have an economical or intelligence reason for their commission of a crime. Sometimes the offender prefers to disguise themselves and have direct contact with the victims while others avoid confrontations (Bandyopadhyay et al, 2012).

Part II

While there are no definitive offense characteristics that are obvious to an individual who commits murder and sexual offenses, the offense characteristics may suggest some definitive behavioral patterns and

personality traits which is helpful to investigators. It is therefore imperative to examine all the offense characteristics while developing a forensic profile.

When developing a forensic profile for a sex offender, it is important to analyze some offense characteristics such as drug influence and criminal history. Studies have revealed that sex offenders often have a high rate of recidivism and a pattern of substance abuse (Canter & Youngs, 2009, p. 302). Another offense characteristics to consider when developing a forensic profile for a sex offender is the possible victims whether young children, adolescents, neighbors or even family members. Deviant sexual interests can also be used to derive inferences concerning the personality of a sexual offender. Some of the possible inferences about the personalities of sex offenders include aggression and neuroticism (Giotakos et al., 2003).

There are several offense characteristics that can be used to develop a forensic profile for a murderer. In some cases, the murderers sexually abuse their victims before murdering them. Serial murderers often exhibit a consistency in their offense characteristics that enable investigators to develop a conclusive forensic profile that leads to their eventual arrest and conviction. Some serial killers such as the Son of Sam of New York in 1970s are difficult to capture due to the length of time it takes to develop an effective criminal profile (Klausner, L., 2017).

The criminal profile for murderers may be classified into disorganized asocial offender and organized nonsocial offender. The disorganized asocial offender has below average IQ, limited education, socially inadequate and living alone. In addition, these individuals have a troubled childhood background and

have problems in employment. For instance, the Son of Sam was given up for adoption at the age of 7, had limited education, and had problems establishing relationships with women which made him target young pretty women (Klausner, L., 2017).

The organized nonsocial murderers have an IQ that is above average, socially adequate, and may be living with a partner (DeLisi, M., & Scherer, A. M., 2006). These offense characteristics enable profilers to infer on the personality traits of the offenders and develop an accurate forensic profile that enables them to identify the offenders and put them to justice.

The maladaptive behaviors exhibited by murderers and sexual offenders may be as a result of some defects in the emotional functioning, cognitive functioning, and environmental influences. Based on the offense characteristics of sexual offenders, they often have a history of mistreatment, poor self-managing and coping skills, socially inadequate and have intimacy deficits (Center for Sex Offender Management, n. d). These characteristics affect their emotional competency and contribute to maladaptive behaviors such as negative moods, stressful lifestyle, poor communication and deviant sexual interests (Ward & Beech, 2006, p. 55).

Those who commit sex offenses often exhibit emotional loneliness, low-esteem, intimacy deficit, problems in developing relationships, and are often suspicious. These emotional, social and cognitive factors trigger their urge to indulge themselves in sex offenses, murder, and other offenses. The emotional, cognitive and social factors that result to a murderous

maladaptive behavior include empathy deficit, lack of remorse, socially inadequate, and selfish desire to satisfy their needs using people as objects (Morton & Hilts, 2008).

There are several tests and personality measures that can be used to collect additional information regarding sex offenders and murderers. For instance, the Multi-directional Scaling (MDS) test can be used to determine the personality traits that are associated with the propensity to engage in the behavioral patterns of murderers and sex offenders (Canter & Youngs, 2009). The MSD can help profilers to gather additional information on the recurring personality traits of murderers and sex offenders which can be used to determine the possibility of recidivism and predict crime.

In addition, the information can help in suggesting the appropriate therapeutic measures to control maladaptive behaviors and prevent future crimes. Another test that can be used to gather additional information is the Abel Assessment for Sexual Interest -3 (AASI-3). This test is appropriate in gathering information about sexual interests, propensity to recidivate, offender's dangerousness and other sexual pathological activities. The Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) is another suitable test for gathering additional information about the personality traits that motivates the behaviors of murderers and sex offenders.

The collateral information that is necessary for learning more about murderers and sexual offenders include their behavioral patterns as well as the secondary perpetrators. The offenders can be classified as primary, secondary, charismatic as well as distempered and often lack feelings and

empathy when committing a crime (Bartol ; Bartol, 2008). Collateral information regarding sex offenders may include a medical history of therapy, propensity to commit deviant sexual acts.

For murderers, the collateral information may involve the family history of family illnesses, latent pre-existing behavioral pattern, peer pressure and bullying. Other information that may give more insights about sex offenders and murderers include religious beliefs, employment history, place of residence, family dynamics, social relationships, cultural nuances and other factors that could have motivated the commission of the criminal act. This information is important in solidifying the decisions and recommendations by psychologist professionals and law enforcement.

Part III

There are several differences in the ethical standards applicable in psychological interviews and those that used by criminal investigators. While the psychologists are guided by the ethical guidelines of the American Psychological Association (APA), the forensic investigators are guided by the specialty guidelines. The understanding of the ethical codes, principles, and guidelines is imperative for professionals in both fields to avoid violations and maintain professional credibility.

In criminal investigations, the main objective is to obtain facts, collect evidence and apprehend the person responsible for the commission of the crime in question. Criminal investigators have an ethical obligation to maintain the security and validity of evidence and information obtained with regards to the crime committed. This includes securing the crime scene and

protecting the evidence from being compromised. Another ethical obligation in a criminal investigation is ensuring that care is provided to the victims and that the victims are protected from further harm. Psychological interviews, on the other hand, are focused on assessing the mental status of an offender or suspect and provide appropriate treatment.

In doing so, psychologists have an ethical obligation to act in the best interest as provided by the APA ethical codes. When performing legal duties, psychologists are expected to observe the APA ethical codes as well as the legal guidelines of their district area. The information provided in psychological interviews should not be biased and confidentiality is maintained as provided by the ethical codes (APA codes of ethics, 2013).

There are many things that should be done in order to enhance and improve the credibility and effectiveness of psychological profiling. One of the relevant recommendations is the provision of training to persons responsible for psychological profiling. This is important in ensuring that the profiler has proficient skills and knowledge on the use of different data collection tools and techniques for psychological profiling and prevent errors that arise from inaccurate information. Another future recommendation is an increased focus on education and research on psychological training. This would ensure that psychological profiling is scientifically advanced to encompass new knowledge on the behavioral patterns and personality traits that accurately predict the propensity of the commission of a crime.

There are several major ethical considerations that psychologists and investigators need to follow during the investigation. The main ethical

considerations for psychologists is confidentiality, reliability, and objectivity for the offender or suspect. The psychologists are to act in the best interest of their clients and do no harm by punishing the offenders for their wrongdoings (APA codes of ethics, 2013).

Instead, the psychologist has a legal obligation to provide treatment and interventions to ensure that the offender has a healthy mental status. On the other hand, the main ethical considerations for investigators is the collection and maintenance of evidence and the solving the crime committed by the offender. The investigators have an ethical consideration to ensure that justice is served which included punishment for the offenders.