

OFFENDER CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN MALE SERIAL RAPIST: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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ABSTRACT

One of the most potent criminal influences which have spread through modern society is that of serial crime, particularly serial rape of females. In the South African context no research has been conducted on the phenomenon of serial rape and international research has limited application in the local context. This article will focus on the initial findings of an ongoing research project on serial rape in the South African context. The study used police records to determine the offender characteristics of nine male South African serial rapists who offended against 75 female adults and children in an attempt to lay the foundation for a scientific offender profile of these offenders, and to compare those characteristics to U.S. serial rape offenders.

INTRODUCTION

South Africa currently has rape statistics exceeding 50 000 reported cases per year (Quantitative Research Findings, 2005). While the majority of rapes (adult females and children) (74.2%) are committed by people known to the victim, that leaves over 13 000 rapes committed by strangers, the typical victim of choice of the serial rapist. Serial rape has a significant impact on the victim, the community it occurs in, as well as society as a whole. However, due to the elusive nature of the phenomenon the actions of the serial rapist have a much more lasting effect on the victims (Turvey, 1997). Several authors have conducted research on serial rape. For example, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) (Hazelwood & Burgess, 1987) and Stevens (2000; 2001) focused on the serial rape offender while Canter and Larkin (1993) focussed specifically on the environmental range of the serial rapist. Warren, Reboussin, Hazelwood, Cumings, Gibbs and Trumbetta (1998) considered the crime scene and distance correlates of serial rape and Kocsis, Cooksey and Irwin (2002) developed psychological profiling of offender characteristics from crime scene behaviours in serial rape offences. In the South African context research regarding serial rape has yet to be conducted. Experience has revealed that research from abroad cannot necessarily be applied to the South African situation.

The purpose of the study was to develop an initial offender profile for male serial rape offenders against female adults and children in South Africa. Offender profiling is an

investigative tool used in the investigation of psychologically motivated crimes (Ainsworth, 2005; Canter, 2000; Cook & Hinman, 1999; Davis, 1999; Dowden, Bennel & Bloomfield, 2007; Egger, 1999; Hazelwood, 2001; Hicks & Sales, 2006; Homant & Kennedy, 1998; Kocsis, Cooksey & Irwin, 2002; Labuschagne, 2003; Palermo & Kocsis, 2005). Offender profiling can be seen as an informed attempt at providing detailed information regarding a certain type of criminal, as well as a sketch of behavioural patterns and tendencies exhibited by the offender. According to Kocsis, Cooksey, and Irwin (2002:144), criminal psychological profiling can be described as ‘*a technique used during an investigation whereby crime behaviours are analysed for identifying possible distinct offender characteristics*’. The purpose of an offender profile is to assist the investigator by describing the type of individual who could have committed the crime under investigation (Labuschagne, 2003). Having a research based offender profile will allow the investigators to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon and assist investigators in determining, more accurately which type of offenders to focus on and give priority to in an investigation.

SAMPLE AND METHOD

This study, the first of its kind in South Africa, was an exploratory-descriptive analysis of the phenomenon of serial rape in the South African context. The data set consisted of nine convicted male offenders who offended against 75 female victims (adults and children). In this study serial rape was defined as occurring when a male person rapes two or more female victims in different incidents. All the rape series occurred between 1996 and 2006, with seven of the nine series occurring between 2001 and 2003. The victims were from three population groups, black, white and coloured. The ages of the victims ranged from 6 to 53 years of age. The lowest victim number in a series was 3 and the highest victim number was 17. The average number of victims per series was 8,3 and the average length of a series was 8,2 months. In most instances the victim was a stranger to the offender, and they were approached in 83% of the instances by means of a con-approach.

The study was a document study using original South African Police Service (SAPS) case-files and other relevant documentation such as court documents. A behavioural checklist was developed¹ in order to capture the data for analysis. The checklist consisted of three main areas of focus: offender demographics (focus of this article), and victim demographics and modus operandi that formed part of a larger study.

The offender demographics section was divided into several sub-categories:

- the age of the offender at the time of the first incident;
- population group, for example black, white, coloured, Asian or Indian;
- occupation of the offender at the time of the first incident (for example if the offender was a painter he would be classified as a labourer and if the offender was a computer programmer he would be categorised as a professional);
- the educational level of the offender (primary – (grade 1- 6), secondary – (grade 7-12), and higher – (diplomas and university degrees);
- the criminal history of the offender is the final sub-category of the section and consists of all the previous convictions of the offender.

¹ Available from the first author

Frequency and percentage distributions, along with various cross tabulations and tables were used to analyse the data. For the purpose of this article the focus will be on the initial findings of the ongoing research project on the offender demographic information. This information will also be compared to two US studies on male serial rape (Hazelwood & Warren, 1989a, 1989b; Stevens, 2000: 2001).

OFFENDER DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

The offender profile will consist of basic demographic information, which includes population group, age, occupation, educational level, and criminal history. Each characteristic will be discussed in general relating to the whole data set, and then be discussed as per the three population groups that appeared in the study. The reason for this being that population group is a relatively easy characteristic to determine from victim statements and thereby becomes a known characteristic. This is especially relevant to the South African context, where none of the offenders in the initial data set took any precautionary steps to hide their identity from the victims. This study showed that when characteristics are analysed according to population group there were significant differences.

Offender demographic information

Table 1 shows the basic demographic characteristics of the offender data set.

Table 1
Demographic characteristics of offenders (n=9)

		Black (6)	White (2)	Coloured (1)
Population group	Percentage	67%	22%	11%
Age distribution	Average age	32.3	28	24
Occupation	Professional	-	2	-
	Labourer	5	-	-
	Unemployed	1	-	1
Education level	Higher education	-	2	-
	Medium (Gr 7 – Gr 12)	1	-	1
	Lower (Gr 1 – Gr 6)	5	-	-
	None	-	-	-
Criminal history	Attempted murder	-	1	-
	Rape	3	1	-
	Robbery	4	-	-
	Assault	2	-	-
	Burglary	2	-	-
	Other	1	-	1

Table 1 shows that the data set comprised of 67% black, 22% white, and 11% coloured offenders. According to Statistics South Africa the majority of the

population are black (79,5%) followed by white (9,2%), then coloured (8,9%), and Indian/Asian (2,5%) (Quantitative Research Findings, 2005). Thus, in the small sample of this study black offenders were under-represented while white and coloured offenders were over-represented. Indian/Asian offenders were not represented in this study.

The youngest offender in the data set was 22 years old and the oldest offender was 44 years old at the time of the first incident based on police records. In total, 8 out of 9 (88.9%) of the offenders were below 35 years old at the time of the first incident. The overall average age of the offenders at the first incident was 30.4 years. Yet when analysed in relation to population group there were noticeable differences, black offenders were aged 22 to 44 years, with an average of 32.3 years, white offenders were aged 23 to 33 years, with an average of 28, and the only coloured offender was 24 years of age. Therefore the coloured offender began earliest with his serial rape career, followed by the white offenders and then the black offenders. When the mean victim age in a series was below 26.8 years, the offenders were always on average 11.3 years older than their victims mean age. Once the mean victim ages in a series was 32 and above, the offenders were younger than the victims by an average of 12.9 years. This indicates that serial rapists do not typically target victims who are in a similar age range as themselves. Only two offenders targeted victims who were on average no more than five years younger than them. This suggests that investigators or individuals compiling a profile can make more accurate predictions of offender age by calculating the mean age of the victims, by applying the above formula. The offenders mostly targeted victims within their own population groups, but in three of the nine series, the offenders did attack victims outside their own population groups. Black offenders had the highest incidence of targeting victims outside their own population group.

Offenders' occupational categories ranged from unemployed to professional. Table 1 shows that most of the black offenders were labourers, typically involving working as painters, tilers, or cleaners, often referred to as 'piece jobs'. The white offenders were employed in professional capacities. The coloured offender was unemployed. Such a clear division could be an artefact of the Apartheid system in which white people historically had more opportunities, this also appears to be reflected in the education categories below.

Table 1 also shows that 56% of the offenders had a low education level (grade 1 to grade 6), 22% had a medium education (grade 7 to grade 12), and 22% had a higher education (tertiary level). An examination between the population group and the education level of the offender showed that the majority of the offenders possessed a lower education level at the time of the incidents. All of the offenders with lower education levels were black, while the two offenders who possessed a higher education were white. The average age of offenders who possessed lower education levels (grade 1 to grade 6) was 30 years. The offenders who had a higher education level (university degree) had an average age of 28 years. Two offenders, one coloured (24 years) and one black (44 years), had medium education levels. It therefore appears that those with higher education levels started their rape careers earlier than those with lower level educations. Table 1 also shows that the most frequent conviction prior to the series was for robbery (4) and rape (4), burglary (2), assault (2) and other (e.g. theft) (2) were also observed in the criminal histories of the offenders. Only two

of the offenders had no previous criminal convictions. A cross tabulation between the population group and the criminal history of the offenders indicated that black offenders had wider range previous offences of which robbery, rape, and assault were common, while white offenders had fewer but more serious offences such as rape and attempted murder in their recorded criminal history. Therefore, when compiling an offender profile of a suspect, once population group is determined, one can make predictions regarding the possible criminal record of the individual being sought, bearing in mind the small sample size. The offences listed in Table 1 were the offences for which the offenders were convicted. Table 1 does not include cases where the charge was withdrawn or they were found not guilty, or crimes for which they were undetected by the police.

Table 2 highlights the basic information of the offenders obtained from the data set. The table is arranged according to the three population groups represented in the study.

Table 2
Offender data set basic information (n=9)

	Black (6)	Coloured (1)	White (2)
Pop group % for the entire sample	66.6%	11.1%	22.3%
Avg. age (Data set – 30.4)	32.3	*24	28
Occupational category	Labourer	*Unemployed	Professional
Education level	Lower	*Medium	High level
Criminal history	**Rape (3) Robbery(4)	Other (1)	***Attempted murder(1) Rape (1)

*The data set only consisted of one coloured offender.

**One of the black offenders had no criminal record.

***One of the white offenders had no previous criminal record.

COMPARISON TO USA STUDIES ON SERIAL RAPE

Generating a profile of the offender is a multi-faceted exercise, and can include aspects such as basic biographic information, (e.g., age, occupation, education) and can also include aspects that describe the offender’s personality characteristics. The profile may also contain recommendations concerning possible interview techniques that might best be employed with the subject (Ainsworth, 2005:108-109; Girod, 2004:88). The focus of this study was more on static or fixed aspects relating to biographic information.

In comparison to the results of the US research conducted by the FBI (Hazelwood & Warren, 1989a), and research conducted by Stevens, (2000:2001), the current findings differ significantly. Table 3 shows a comparison of the three data sets regarding to the population group of the offenders.

Table 3
Comparison of offender data set - population group (S.A.; FBI; Stevens)

	South Africa (n=9)	*FBI (n=41)	**Stevens (n=61)
White	22%	85%	56%
Black	67%	12%	41%
Coloured	11%	-	-
Indian/Asian	-	-	-
Hispanic	-	2%	3%

* Hazelwood and Warren (1989b:23)

**Stevens (2001:111-112)

The population dynamic for the United States according to the US Census Bureau (2006) is, 73.9% White, 12.4% African or African-American, 4.4% Asian, 0.8% American Indian or Alaska Native, 0.14% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 6.3% some other race, and 2% two (combination) races. Each of the groups also includes individuals who list their ethnicity as Hispanic or Latino. U.S. federal law defines Hispanic or Latino as any person with ancestry from a Spanish-speaking Latin American country or Spain, regardless of race (14.8%). This differs markedly from the South African group, with the local sample having a much higher rate of black offenders and lower rate of white offenders, which can be attributed to the different population dynamic within the South African context. Overall, the variations across the three studies should be treated cautiously due to the small sample sizes of all three studies.

In comparison to the results of the research conducted on serial rape offenders by the FBI (Hazelwood & Warren, 1989a; 1989b) and Stevens (2000:2001), the current study shows several similarities and differences. In the 70 page protocol created by the FBI the average age range of the offenders comprising the US data set was between 23 and 55 years of age (Hazelwood and Warren, 1989a: 15-17). In the study conducted by Stevens the ages ranged from 18 to 52 years, with an average age of 32 years (Stevens, 2000:113). The South African age range for the offenders was from 22 to 44 years. The seemingly common youngest age was between 18 and 23. All three studies show that serial rapists can be active until their mid 40's and 50s, a factor that should be taken into account during the sentencing of these offenders.

In comparison to the current findings the occupations of the offenders are very similar across all three of the studies. Hazelwood and Warren (1989a:13) indicated that 54% of their respondents indicated a stable employment, 38% of the offenders stated that their employment was unstable, and eight percent characterised themselves as 'chronically unemployed'. The types of employment held by the offenders in their study ranged from unskilled jobs (labourers) to white-collar occupations (business managers). According to the research conducted by Stevens (2000:113) 62% of the offenders had 'menial' jobs, 11% had white-collar jobs, and 27% were unemployed. A large percentage of the offenders (56%) in the current study were employed as labourers or in unskilled positions. A smaller percentage (22%), were unemployed and 22% were employed in a professional capacity.

In the Hazelwood and Warren (1989a) research, the education level of the offenders ranged from five to seventeen years of formal education, with an average of 11.3

years. Twenty-five of the respondents (61%) obtained a high school diploma and nine (22%) held either a bachelor's or associate degree. Stevens (2000:111) found that the offenders possessed an average education level equivalent to the eighth grade, prior to their convictions. In comparison with the South African data set, 55% offenders possessed a lower education, while 22% of the offenders had tertiary level education. Therefore, in general, it would appear that South African serial rape offenders are less educated than their US counterparts.

In the research conducted by Stevens (2000:113), offenders were convicted for homicide (5%), armed robbery (5%), for assault (28%), for sexual assault (28%), for parole violations (17%), for larceny (10%), and for drugs and alcohol abuse (7%). The arrest history of the offenders in the FBI research ranged from a variety of property offences, nuisance sexual offences (peeping tom, voyeurism), and other sexual assaults (Hazelwood & Warren, 1989a). In comparison to the current data set, the offender's criminal histories consisted of attempted murder, rape, robbery, assault, and burglary. The results did differ slightly, but the variance can possibly be attributed to the smaller sample size of the initial study.

CONCLUSION

The serial rapist negatively influences the lives of an untold number of victims and is responsible for the expenditure of money, human resources, and time by law enforcement in efforts to apprehend them. In the South African context no research regarding this phenomenon had been conducted and international research regarding serial rape, specifically the research aimed at compiling a general profile of the male serial rapist, cannot be effectively applied to the South African context. This study aimed at exploring the phenomenon of serial rape, focusing on who the South African male serial rapist is. Such research is of great value in terms of generating new data which can not only add to the dearth of scientific knowledge within the South African context but also supplement international findings and in the process facilitate future research. This study highlighted certain features which can be of use when compiling an initial offender profile. It is important to note that due to the low number of offenders (9) utilised in the initial research project, and the diverse nature of the data set compiling a single offender profile would be subject to criticism. To that extent, a basic overview of the offenders in terms of the population representation will be given. The average age of the black offenders (6), who made up the majority of the initial data set (66%) in the data set was 32.3 years. The black offenders were generally employed as labourers at the time of the incidents and possessed low levels of education. The criminal records of these offenders consisted mostly of previous convictions for robbery and rape. The data set only consisted of one coloured offender who was 24 at the time of the first incident. He was unemployed and obtained a medium education level. He also had a previous criminal conviction for theft. The average age of the two white offenders was 28 years. They were employed in a professional capacity and possessed high levels of education. One of the white offenders had previous convictions for rape and attempted murder. The offenders mostly targeted victims within their own population groups, but in three of the nine series, the offenders did attack victims outside their own population groups. Black offenders had the highest incidence of targeting victims outside their own population group. The victims in general were younger than the offenders by an average of 11.3 years. There were two series where the offenders were younger than their victims by

an average of 12.9 years. The average number of victims per series was 8.3, the lowest victim total in a series was three and the highest victim total was seventeen. The research also showed that in some respects the South African serial rapist does share some similar basic biographical information with their US counterparts, but also illustrated that the South African male serial rapist differs from US offenders in certain respects. The differences observed, despite the small initial sample size, during the research highlights the value of the current research conducted from a local perspective, as well as the need for further research into the phenomenon to try and replicate the results with a larger sample size. This paper aims to be the starting point in the scientific discussion and exploration of the male serial rapist (against women and children) within the South African context.

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