

A FAMILY SYSTEMS ANALYSIS OF SERIAL MURDER

BY

GIADA ALESSIA DEL FABBRO

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OPSOMMING

Die navorsing het op die fenomeen van reeksmoorde vanuit 'n sisteemteoretiese perspektief gefokus. Die doel was om gesinsistemiese insig te verkry met betrekking tot reeksmoorde in 'n Suid-Afrikaanse konteks. Deur gebruik te maak van 'n gesinsistemiese teoretiese raamwerk en die genogram-metode, is gegewens van gesinsisteme van individue wat reeksmoorde gepleeg het, ingesamel, kwalitatief ontleed en deur middel van 'n tematiese inhoudsanalise ondersoek. Die ondersoek het hoofsaaklik emosionele prosesse, multi-generasionele en verhoudingspatrone van gesinsisteme beklemtoon.

Inligting is uit verskeie bronne versamel. Onderhoude is onder andere gevoer met individue wat tans vonnisse uitdien vir reeksmoorde, sowel as met hul gesinslede, asook met professionele persone wat by hierdie persone betrokke was. Inligting is ook uit kliniese observasies en argiefdata verkry. Die resultate van die inhoudsanalise demonstreer aansienlike ooreenkomste, maar dui ook op verskille in die organisering en funksionering van gesinsisteme van individue wat reeksmoorde gepleeg het. Teoretiese insig is ook verkry aangaande die rol van reeksmoorde in gesinsisteme en wat die tans heersende teoretiese perspektiewe met die klem op die enkel individu en lineêre oorsaaklikheid uitdaag.

Hierdie studie bied die geleentheid vir verdere sisteemteoretiese navorsing, veral om die moontlikheid van die betekenis van reeksmoorde in relatief kleiner (bv. ouer-kind of portuurgroepsverhoudings) of groter kontekse (die politieke, kulturele en sosiale sisteme) te ondersoek. Verder bied dit ook geleentheid vir 'n alternatiewe kyk na die fenomeen van

reeksmoord in terme van teoretiese, definiërende, tipologiese, ondersoekende en korrektiewe benaderings.

ABSTRACT

The research aimed to explore the phenomenon of serial murder from a systems theory perspective. The purpose of the study was to develop an understanding of serial murder in a South African context from a family systems approach. Utilizing a family systems theoretical framework and the genogram method, the study, which was qualitative in nature, explored information about the family systems of individuals who committed serial murder via content analysis. The investigation focused mainly on emotional processes, multigenerational and relationship patterns in family systems.

Information was gathered from numerous sources and included interviews conducted *inter alia* with individuals currently incarcerated for serial murder and their family members, and with professionals involved with such individuals; as well as information obtained from clinical observations and archival data. The results of the content analysis demonstrated considerable similarities but also differences in the organization and functioning of the family systems of individuals who committed serial murder. Importantly, the analysis shed novel theoretical light on the role of serial murder within family systems and challenged established dominant theoretical perspectives on serial murder that have emphasized linear, causal and/or individual-focused explanations.

The study opened up considerable opportunities for further exploration of the phenomenon from a systemic perspective, specifically with the focus on the meaning of serial murder in

relatively smaller (e.g., parent-child or peer relationships) or larger (e.g., political, cultural and societal) systems. It also provided opportunities for alternative vistas from which the phenomenon of serial murder can be viewed in terms of theoretical, definitional, typological, investigative and correctional approaches.

10 KEY PHRASES: serial murder; family system; multigenerational patterns; emotional cut-offs; triads; genogram; case study; nuclear family system; violent crime; relationship patterns

AFFIDAVIT

I declare that **A Family Systems Analysis of Serial Murder** is my own work and that all references have been fully acknowledged in the text and the bibliography.

Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at in this research are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Department of Psychology, Faculty of Humanities, South African Police Service or Department of Correctional Services.

GIADA A DEL FABBRO

Johannesburg

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TABLE OF CONTENTS**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS****LIST OF TABLES****LIST OF FIGURES****Chapter**

1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 SERIAL MURDER AS PHENOMENON	2
1.2 MOTIVATIONS FOR THE STUDY	3
1.2.1 Interaction of popular and academic sources	3
1.2.2 Limited available research on serial murder in South Africa	7
1.2.3 The novelty of the systemic perspective	8
1.2.4 Applications to correctional and investigative systems	9
1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY	10
1.4 RESEARCH FOCUS AND DESIGN	11
1.4.1 Research design	11
1.5 A NOTE ON THE PATHOLOGICAL MODEL	11
1.6 RESEARCH OUTLINE	12
1.7 CONCLUSION	12
2. LITERATURE REVIEW: HISTORY, DEFINITIONS AND CATEGORIES OF SERIAL MURDER	14
2.1 DEFINING SERIAL MURDER	14
2.1.1 Mass and spree murder	14

2.1.2 Serial murder	15
Definitions of serial murder: international	16
Definitions of serial murder: South Africa	20
2.1.3 Differences and similarities of definitions	23
Quantity of murders	24
The “cooling off” period	24
Motive	26
Sexuality and lust murder	30
Number of perpetrators	32
Gender	33
Victim/offender relationship	34
2.1.4 Concluding remarks of definitions	36
2.1.5 Definition of serial murder for the purposes of this study	40
2.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF SERIAL MURDER	41
2.2.1 History of serial murder: international	42
2.2.2 History of serial murder: South Africa	46
Muti murder	59
2.3 WAYS OF CATEGORIZING SERIAL MURDER	61
2.3.1 Topological classification schemes	61
The FBI’s disorganised/organised typology	62
Holmes and De Burger’s visionary, missionary, hedonist and power/control typology	65
Leibman’s ego-syntonic and ego-dystonic classification	70
2.3.2 Geographical classification	71
2.3.3 Concluding remarks on classification schemes	74

3. LITERATURE REVIEW: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS CONCERNING SERIAL MURDER	75
3.1 ORGANIC THEORIES	76
3.1.1 Neuroanatomy/neurology	76
3.1.2 Genetics	78
3.1.3 Critique of organic theories	79
3.2 PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES	81
3.2.1 Psychodynamic theories	82
The role of fantasy in psychodynamic theories of serial murder	84
The role of primary attachments in psychodynamic theories of serial murder	87
3.2.2 Critique of psychodynamic theories of serial murder	89
3.2.3 Cognitive-behavioural and learning theory models	92
Learning theory	92
Cognitive-behavioural theories	93
Rational choice models	94
An addiction model of serial murder	95
3.2.4 Critique of cognitive-behavioural and learning theory models of serial murder	96
3.2.5 Other theories emphasizing psychological factors	97
3.2.6 Critique of other theories emphasizing psychological factors	103
3.3 SOCIO-CULTURAL THEORIES	105

3.3.1 Sociological and criminological schools and crime	105
Socio-cultural theories focusing specifically upon	
serial murder	108
3.3.2 Seltzer's theory of serial murder and wound culture	112
3.3.3 Cameron and Frazer's social constructionist theory of	
serial murder	113
3.3.4 Holmes and DeBurger's socio-cultural interactionist approach	
to serial murder	114
3.3.5 Jenkins' social constructivist theory of serial murder	115
3.3.6 Simpson and the popular representation of serial murder	116
3.3.7 Feminist theories of serial murder	117
3.3.8 Hook's post-structuralist approach to serial murder	118
3.3.9 Du Plessis' grounded theory approach to serial murder	120
3.3.10 Critique of socio-cultural theories	121
3.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE CURRENT STUDY	122
4. FAMILY SYSTEMS THEORY	126
4.1 DEFINITION OF "THE FAMILY"	126
4.1.1 Dictionary definitions	126
Family as household	128
The family in terms of the function or role of its members	128
Family as ancestry or blood lineage	129
4.1.2 Summary of dictionary definitions	129
4.1.3 Contemporary view and definitions of the family	130
4.1.4 Summary of contemporary definitions of the family	132

4.1.5 A South African definition of the family	134
4.1.6 Conceptualisation of the family for this study	135
4.2 THE CONTEXT OF THE FAMILY	136
4.2.1 The post-modern family	137
4.2.2 The family and deviance	139
4.2.3 The family and larger systems	140
4.3 FAMILY SYSTEMS THEORY	141
4.3.1 Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson's theory of communication and interaction	142
Wholeness	143
Circular or cybernetic causality	144
Feedback	144
Reflexivity	146
Equifinality	147
Types of interaction	147
Pathological communication	148
Definitions of self and other	150
Punctuation	152
4.3.2 Summary of Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson's view	153
4.3.3 Bowen's family theory	154
Differentiation of self	155
Triangles	155
Nuclear family emotional system	162
Family projection process	163
Emotional cut-off	164

Multigenerational transmission process and sibling position	165
Emotional process in society	165
4.3.4 Summary of Bowen's family theory	166
4.3.5 The symptom in the family system	167
4.3.6 The individual in a family systems approach	168
4.4 KEY FAMILY SYSTEM CONCEPTS FOR THIS STUDY	170
4.4.1 Emotional processes	171
4.4.2 Multigenerational patterns	173
4.4.3 Relationship patterns	174
4.5 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER	177
5. METHOD OF RESEARCH	179
5.1 METHODOLOGY	179
5.1.1 Evaluating qualitative research	181
5.2 RESEARCH DESIGN	182
5.3 SAMPLING	183
5.3.1 Case study one: Mr X and family	185
5.3.2 Case study two: Mr Y and family	185
5.4 DATA COLLECTION	187
5.4.1 Clinical observations	187
5.4.2 Interviews	188
5.4.3 Genograms	189
Mapping the family structure	191
Recording family information	191

Showing family relationships	192
5.4.4 Archival data and other records	193
5.5 PROCEDURE	194
5.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	197
5.7 DATA ANALYSIS	197
5.7.1 Discussion of the case study method	198
Yin's criteria for defining a case study	198
The unit of analysis	199
5.7.2 Content analysis	200
5.8 DATA INTEGRATION	201
5.9 CONCLUSION	202
6. RESULTS	203
6.1 CASE STUDY ONE – MR X AND FAMILY	203
6.1.1 Persons interviewed	203
6.1.2 Biographical information	204
6.1.3 Clinical observations	205
Mr X	205
Mr X's family	206
Interaction between mother X and father X	209
6.1.4 Genogram	210
Paternal side of the family system	212
Maternal side of the family system	212
Nuclear family	214
Additional family systems of friends	216

6.1.5 Archival data and supplementary interview data	216
Interview with prison psychologist	217
Interview with psychiatrist involved in Mr X's competency to stand trial assessment	217
Additional data sources	219
6.2 CASE STUDY TWO – MR Y AND FAMILY	219
6.2.1 Persons interviewed	219
6.2.2 Biographical information	221
6.2.3 Clinical observations	221
Mr Y	221
6.2.4 Genogram	225
Paternal side of the family system	227
Maternal side of the family system	228
Nuclear family system	228
Mr Y	231
Additional family system of Mr Y's co-accused, Mr H	235
6.2.5 Supplementary data sources	237
Interview with prison psychologist, Ms V	237
Interview with Mr Y's cellmate, Mr Z	238
Additional data sources	239
6.3 CONCLUDING REMARKS	241
7. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS	242
7.1 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS OF CASE STUDY ONE – MR X AND HIS FAMILY	242

7.1.1 Genogram interpretation	243
Category one: family structure	243
Category two: life cycle fit	251
Category three: pattern repetition across generations	255
Category four: life events and family functioning	261
Category five: relational patterns and triads	268
Category six: family balance and imbalance	279
7.1.2 Thematic content analysis	293
Themes relating to emotional processes in the X family system	294
Themes relating to multigenerational patterns in the X family system	307
Themes relating to relationship patterns in the X family system	312
Summary of themes	326
7.2 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS OF CASE STUDY TWO – MR Y AND FAMILY	327
7.2.1 Genogram interpretation	327
Category one: family structure	328
Category two: life cycle fit	339
Category three: pattern repetition across generations	345
Category four: life events and family functioning	354
Category five: relational patterns and triads	364
Category six: family balance and imbalance	381
7.2.2 Thematic content analysis	397
Themes relating to emotional processes in the Y family system	397
Themes concerning multigenerational patterns in the Y family	

system	409
Themes concerning relationship patterns in the Y family system	419
Summary of themes	432
8. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, CRITIQUE AND RECOMMENDATIONS	435
8.1 COMPARISON OF MR X AND MR Y AND THEIR FAMILIES	435
8.1.1 Biographical information and genogram	435
Emotional processes	438
Multigenerational patterns	441
Relationship patterns	442
8.2 CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE GENERAL LITERATURE	445
8.3 DEFINITIONS	446
8.4 HISTORY	447
8.5 CLASSIFICATION SYSTEMS OF TYPOLOGIES	448
8.6 THEORETICAL ASPECTS	449
8.7 METHODOLOGY	451
8.7.1 Evaluation of qualitative research	452
8.8 CRITIQUE	456
8.9 RECOMMENDATIONS	459
REFERENCES	461

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LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1.	South African serial murder cases 1936-2003	52
Table 2.2.	Disorganised/organised typology	64
Table 2.3.	Holmes and DeBurger typology of serial murder	69
Table 8.1.	Comparison between Mr X and Mr Y (biographical information and genogram).....	437

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.	Diagrammatic Representation of a Family System.....	178
Figure 2.	Mr X's Genogram.....	211
Figure 3.	Mr Y's Genogram.....	226
Figure 4.	Maternal Grandfather's Remarriages.....	250
Figure 5.	Pattern of Relationships in X Family System.....	259
Figure 6.	Parent-Child Triad One.....	268
Figure 7.	Parent-Child Triad Two.....	269
Figure 8.	Parent-Child Triad Three.....	270
Figure 9.	Couples Triad One.....	272
Figure 10.	Multigenerational Triad One.....	273
Figure 11.	Multigenerational Triad Two.....	274
Figure 12.	Multigenerational Triad Three.....	274
Figure 13.	Triad: Other.....	276
Figure 14.	Roles in the X Family System.....	283
Figure 15.	Household One for Mr Y.....	329
Figure 16.	Household Two for Mr Y.....	329
Figure 17.	Household Three for Mr Y.....	330
Figure 18.	Father Y's Sibling Constellation.....	331
Figure 19.	Mother Y's Sibling Constellation.....	333
Figure 20.	Parent-Child Triad One.....	365
Figure 21.	Parent-Child Triad Two.....	366
Figure 22.	Parent-Child Triad Three –Supplementary.....	367
Figure 23.	Divorced/Remarried Triad One.....	369

Figure 24.	Divorced/Remarried Triad Two.....	370
Figure 25.	Foster/Adopted Triad One.....	372
Figure 26.	Multigenerational Triad One.....	374
Figure 27.	Triad Other: One.....	377
Figure 28.	Triad Other: Two.....	378
Figure 29.	Emotional Processes in X and Y Family Systems.....	439
Figure 30.	Emotional Cut-Offs in the X and Y Family Systems.....	440