

Chapter 1

About This Study

1.1 Introduction

The phenomenon of serial murder has been reported for more than a hundred years, yet it is only over the last few decades that a specific name was provided to label this phenomenon. But serial murder has always been a crime that has attracted much media attention, such as the case of Jack the Ripper who, even today, is the source of regular documentaries and popular television and film productions. This is perhaps indicative of human kind's morbid fascination with bizarre, extraordinary or so-called abnormal behaviours.

Serial murder has even become useful as a political tool (Jenkins, 1994). For example if one considers the circumstances where the victims often are from a minority group. Politically serial murder may then be used to highlight racial discrimination, such as police 'apathy' when investigating serial murder in a neighbourhood predominantly inhabited by a minority group.

1.2 Previous studies

Despite much popular interest there seems to be little research and no clear consensus on various aspects of serial murder. Furthermore, researchers seem to be unclear of the reasons for serial murder, the profile of the serial murderer, their personality and behaviours. Despite research, the results seem varied and vague in its conclusions. Another aspect which has been lacking is a clear exposition of the theory underlying a serious crime such as serial murder. If a theory is interpreted from the research which analysed the behaviours of the serial murderer, or those of crime in general, the underlying theoretical assumptions seem to be from bio- medical,

sociological, or psychiatric reasoning. In South Africa Pistorius (1996) has formulated hypotheses from a psychoanalytical approach in an attempt to provide a more thorough psychological explanation for this phenomenon.

Much of the research on this topic, as mentioned in coming chapters, has been severely limited by factors such as lack of access to the individuals who have committed such crimes. It is most often based on 'second- hand' reports. Also, the research seems to focus on a psychodynamic approach to this phenomenon. There seems to be a great need for more research involving the actual individuals who committed these crimes; the use of reliable psychometric tests; possible comparison studies of serial murder across cultures and a search for a thorough and substantial theory on behaviour such as serial murder.

1.3 Aims of this study

The study investigates the phenomenon of serial murder from a different angle. The research makes use of first- hand information obtained from actual individuals who committed serial murder and were convicted. Many assumptions have been made about serial murderers because of the lack of access to such individuals. The researcher attempts to look at some of these assumptions, by means of interviews and psychological tests, and try and create an interactional understanding regarding serial murder and the people who commit it. Furthermore it will make use of recognised psychometric tests to clarify assumptions on the behaviours and styles of behaviours of these persons. In future, if researchers are in the position to do the same which may assist in the building up of a database so as to see if there are any patterns in terms of personality, pathology, communication, and interaction. Lastly, new assumptions will be put forward in place of, or in addition to, those made by previous researchers.

The specific aims of the study are to provide an understanding of the interactional styles and communication behaviour of persons who have committed the crime of serial murder. Secondly, the study aims to determine the personalities, intelligence and traits of these persons as part of their patterns of communication. Thirdly, the study will attempt to integrate these findings and formulate a possible theoretical explanation of serial murder as part of man's social order (Haley, 1967).

1.4 The researcher and co- researchers

In this research, the researcher is a qualified clinical psychologist, licensed with the Professional Board for Psychology at the Health Professions Council of South Africa. He has four years experience in the psychiatric hospital environment, three of them as a consultant at a 900 bed in-patient state psychiatric facility, Weskoppies Hospital in South Africa. His job description involves forensic observations for individuals who have been instructed by the judicial system to undergo a 30- day observation while on trial for a crime. Furthermore the researcher acts as a consultant psychologist for a multi- professional team treated adult in- and out- patients at the same hospital. He is also a lecturer in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Pretoria. His research for his masters degree was also on the topic of serial murder.

The co- researcher mentioned in Chapter 4 is also a qualified clinical psychologist and the promotor is a professor of psychology at the University of Pretoria.

1.5 Method

As mentioned, this research makes use of in- depth interviews, an interactional analysis, and psychometric tests to come to its conclusions. The results are integrated under the following

headings: profile considerations, interpersonal considerations and diagnostic considerations. The reason for these specific headings is firstly to examine the individual's approach to the testing which is used to draw many of the conclusions, hence the heading profile considerations. Secondly, since all behaviour is interpersonal communication, the heading *interpersonal considerations* was included, this looks at how these individuals relate to others and how do they behave. This is vital because hunting for diagnostic labels doesn't necessarily lead to a greater understanding, as most clinicians have experienced one depressed person as very different from another, and one person diagnosed with borderline personality disorder very different to another. The third heading investigates what, if any, diagnoses according to the DSM-IV might be relevant to the phenomenon of serial murder since much of the previous literature alludes to certain diagnostic categories. Yet, the information upon which such decisions are made are often second- hand reports, media, reports and court- transcripts.

1.6 Confidentiality and ethical considerations

One of the decisions which had to be taken into account by the researcher is a moral and ethical one. Often it is assumed that since a court case is open to the public, that confidentiality regarding the case and personal information is no longer required.

The researcher, in collaboration with the psychologist who assisted with the research, as well as the promoter, have decided that confidentiality and ethical considerations are still a high priority. This, however, brought a predicament on what information to include and/ or omit. Taking the main aim of the research undertaking into account, namely, the interactional behaviour of the two persons who committed serial murder, the focus was not aimed towards the types of murder or detail regarding the nature of possible sexual acts involved, or with whom, in these.

From another point of view it can be argued that these aspects are essential for any scientific endeavour regarding serial murder. Regardless this possible shortcoming and the fact that both persons committed serial murder, received large amounts of media attention, and were convicted, the researcher had a high regard for both persons and placed a high value on confidentiality.

1.7 Outlay of the thesis

This research begins with an introductory chapter giving a brief outline of what will be expressed throughout the process, then a literature review (chapter 2) to investigate what has already been said about the phenomenon of serial murder. Following these chapters, a look at the theory relevant to this study will be given (chapter 3) after which a chapter describing the method of research and the procedures used to arrive at the conclusions in this study (chapter 4). After this chapter 5 will provide the basic results from the investigation. Following this, a discussion of the results will be compiled, this chapter will also offer critique and highlight certain issues and suggestions for future researchers, and a conclusion.