A FAMILY SYSTEMS ANALYSIS OF SERIAL MURDER

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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 belemtoon.

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
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.

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