

Exploring the modus operandi of male serial child rapists in South Africa

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This article briefly reports on the results of an explorative study pertaining to the behavioural profile of male serial child rapists. An extensive literature review indicated that there is a dearth of research relating to the serial rape of children, especially in South Africa. As the first study in South Africa to explore the modus operandi employed by serial child rapists, the research conducted by Hall (2018)¹ produced findings which contribute to the scant body of knowledge regarding child serial rapists. A qualitative document case study approach was undertaken in two phases. The first phase entailed a content analysis of police case dockets followed by the second phase where semi-structured interviews were conducted with field experts; this article only reports on the first phase of the study. The research was underpinned, by the routine activities theory which highlighted that children fall victim to serial child rapists as they intersect at a time and place during their daily activities. Most often, children are left vulnerable due to a lack of guardianship. The results showed that serial child rapists tend to operate consistently, exhibiting similar predatory patterns, especially in their approach methods. The exploration of serial child rapists also revealed two distinct profiles, namely opportunists and groomers. However, investigators should consider using already known profile variables of serial rapists when investigating child rape cases because the general behavioural profile of serial rapists in South Africa who target adults is not dissimilar from that of serial rapists who target children.

Keywords: adult child rapists; child rape; offender behaviour; routine activities; serial rape; sexual offences; sexual violence; victim vulnerability

INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

The safety and security of South African citizens is threatened by daily violence. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa aims to protect citizens from violent crime, stipulating that every person has the right to be free from violence (Bezuidenhout & Klopper, 2011: 182, 183). Sadly, this right is not guaranteed as South Africa is known to be one of the most violent countries in the world, with some of the highest prevalence rates of rape and sexual assault (Jewkes, Dunkle, Koss, Levin, Nduna, Jama & Sikweyiya, 2006: 2949; Jewkes, Nduna, Shai & Dunkle, 2012: 4; Naidoo, 2013: 210; Woodhams & Labuschagne, 2012: 550). Africa, in particular South Africa, has the highest prevalence rates of child sexual and physical abuse (Richter & Dawes, 2008: 79; Singh, Parsekar & Nair, 2014: 430). South Africa also exhibits higher incidence rates of stranger rape when compared to countries (Woodhams & Labuschagne, 2012: 550).

There are additional legal frameworks that aim to protect victims against acts of sexual violence such as the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act, No. 32 of 2007 which changed the preceding definition of rape to be more inclusive of various acts that were not previously recognised. Despite the dedicated laws aimed at protecting victims of sexual violence (Jonker & Du Preez, 2012: 22), the country is still plagued by high rates of sexual violence (Marchetti-Mercher, 2003: 6; Peterson, Bhana & McKay, 2005: 1233; Singh et al, 2014: 430; Van der Watt & Van Graan, 2013: 106).

Over the last three reporting periods (2015/2016, 2016/2017, 2017/2018) rape statistics accounted for, on average, 80% of the total sexual offence numbers (SAPS, 2016: 41; SAPS, 2017; SAPS, 2018). The 2017/2018 crime statistics showed an increase of reported rapes and an increase in the total number of sexual offences (SAPS, 2018). However, the Institute for Security Studies warns that the rape statistics recorded by the police cannot be taken as an accurate measure of the extent of rape. It is estimated that the true number of rapes is around nine to 13 times higher than what is recorded because most rape and sexually violent crimes are not reported (Institute for Security Studies, 2015: 4; Jewkes, Sikweyiya, Morrell & Dunkle, 2010: 23; Seedat, Van Niekerk, Jewkes, Suffla & Ratele, 2009: 1011,1013).

Although the official total reported sexual offences against children in South Africa in the 2017/2018 year stood at 23 488 (SAPS, 2018), the true extent of the sexual violence phenomenon is not known. The real incidence of sexual offending against children is likely higher, especially when considering the serious rates of under reporting of incidents involving children (Bartol & Bartol, 2017: 401; Pijoo, 2017; Sadock & Sadock, 2007: 877).

The under reporting of child rape can, in part, be explained by the establishment of a relationship between child and perpetrator in a groomed relationship. One of the key factors in establishing a relationship with a child is to ensure compliancy and maintain secrecy by manipulating the child's trust (Craven, Brown & Gilchrist, 2006: 295; The World Health Organization, 2003: 76). It is widely reported that most of the sexual crimes perpetrated against children are committed by someone known to the victim; a relative, acquaintance or friend (Cox, Andrade, Lungelow, Schloetelburg & Rode, 2007: 950, 952; Gavin, 2014: 159; Kleijn, 2010, 241; Lumphala, 2012; 26; Naidoo, 2013:110; Richter, 2003: 395; Sadock & Sadock, 2007: 876; Seedat et al, 2009: 1013; Wilson, 2012: 6). Sometimes perpetrators are authorities such as sport coaches, counsellors, security guards, child care workers or even religious leaders (Seedat et al, 2009: 1013; Sullivan & Beech, 2004: 42; Umar, 2013: 3).

Experts in South Africa agree that more than 80% of children who are sexually victimised and assaulted are known by their perpetrators (Pijoo, 2017). Research also shows that sexual abuse has been a constant feature at schools in South Africa, as school teachers make up a large portion of the perpetrators who rape children (Naidoo, 2013: 110, The South African Council for Educators, 2017: 11).

The phenomenon of serial rape is a complex one and is seriously under researched in South Africa (De Wet, 2008: 3). Research investigating South African offenders, derived from a local context, is important for investigators and academics alike to better understand perpetrators' modus operandi (Potgieter & De Wet, 2010: 1).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following section provides a brief overview of literature regarding child rape, modus operandi factors to consider in sexual offence crimes and includes limited information pertaining to serial rapists in South Africa.

Child rape and gender

The revised definition of rape in the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act, No. 32 of 2007 (The Act), accounts for any penetration by any organ, object or parts of an animal into the genitals, anus or mouth of another person as rape, irrespective of the gender of the victim or perpetrator. The penetration occurs without the voluntary consent of the victim. The Act differentiates between sexual assault and rape, with the former referring to sexual acts in which penetration did not occur (Bezuidenhout & Kloppe, 2011: 230-231). The Act is regarded as an important development in the fight against crimes regarding child victims because it enabled the creation of statutory sexual offences and special protection measures to facilitate attempts to fight crimes against vulnerable groups (Jonker & Du Preez, 2012: 22).

Globally, physical and sexual abuse against children is rife and many girls, and boys, are victimised from a young age. Approximately 40% of reported rape victims are children and 15% are younger than 12 years old (Cox et al, 2007: 950; Richter, 2003: 394; Seedat et al, 2009: 1013). The World Health Organization (2017) states that approximately 18% of girls and 8% of boys worldwide have experienced sexual abuse. De Wet, Potgieter and Labuschagne (2010: 42) found that 25% of serial rapists targeted children younger than 16 years of age. Ultimately many young girls are raped before the age of 15 years (Jewkes et al, 2010: 24; Seedat et al, 2009: 1013).

In South Africa, young black female children are especially at risk to be raped (De Wet et al, 2010: 35; The South African Council for Educators, 2017: 11). Adolescent girls are considered easy prey for sexual predators especially because in some South African cultures, children are taught to respect authority and not to question elders. Some sex offenders feel at ease with children because they are often considered trusting, gullible and naïve (Rufo, 2012: 3). However, the victimisation of boys should not be underestimated. Approximately one in ten boys have experienced some form of sexual abuse and violence by the time they reach 18 years of age (Marchetti-Mercer, 2003: 6; Singh et al, 2014: 430). Local research shows that over 40% of high school going boys in South Africa have been raped (Meinck, Cluver, Boyes & Mhlongo, 2014: 19).

Modus operandi

Modus operandi (MO) describes the way in which an offender operates, referring to the actions that are necessary to commit the crime (Bartol & Bartol, 2017: 314; Oliva, 2013: 9; Potgieter & De Wet, 2010: 1). In repeated acts, the characteristic pattern of acts as evidenced in a MO can be used to identify a suspect and predict a possible escalation of offending (Van Der Watt, Van Graan & Labuschagne, 2014: 61).

MO characteristics are vital to the behavioural profiling framework as they can be investigated in order to construct a behavioural profile of serial offenders. Essentially a behavioural profile can assist investigators in identifying perpetrators by indicating similarities and differences across a series of offences (De Wet, 2008: 57; Turvey, 2012: 332). More specifically, MO variables are used in the process of case linkage analysis. Case linkage is used to determine whether one offender commits a series of crimes from an analysis of crime scene behaviours (Hazelwood & Warren, 2003: 587; Hewitt & Beauregard, 2014: 60; Woodhams & Labuschagne, 2012: 545; Woodhams & Bennell, 2015: 1).

Serial rapists are of particular concern to investigators due to the possibility of harming a number of victims before being apprehended (Woodhams & Labuschagne, 2012: 545). The increasing awareness that a large proportion of sexual crimes are serial in nature has motivated scientific efforts to determine ways to link crimes that are perpetrated by a single offender (Hazelwood & Warren, 2003: 588).

The importance of ascertaining MO variables of serial offenders is highlighted because cases that involve serial sex offenders are highly solvable when the offender's patterns, as evidenced by their MO, are identified and linked in a series (Oliva, 2013: 33).

In an examination of the MO of sexual offenders against children, (*cf* Leclerc, Proulx & Beauregard, 2009) the importance and overall purpose of investigating MO variables is highlighted as it relates to the practical, theoretical and situational prevention of sexual offences. Leclerc et al (2009: 11) insist that MO studies must be considered for the prevention of sexual offending, especially against children. Furthermore, they indicate important avenues for research such as examining and understanding the locations of sexual offences, thus determining the relationship between locations used by offenders and their MO. Location of approach and location of attack are considered two important variables when examining the behavioural profile of serial offenders and are relevant to investigate when determining the MO of serial rapists (*cf* De Wet, 2008; *cf* Hall, 2018; *cf* Potgieter & De Wet, 2010; *cf* Woodhams & Labuschagne, 2012).

Approach methods are also considered important variables of MO strategies used by serial rapists (Hewitt & Beauregard, 2014: 63). According to well-sited typologies, there are three common types of approach methods used by rapists (Oliva, 2013: 74-75; Hewitt & Beauregard, 2014: 63):

- a) The con approach is shown when an offender approaches a victim using a type of ruse in order to gain their trust or let the victim's guard down, using forms of manipulation or deception. Once the offender believes that the victim can be overpowered, they will attack.
- b) The blitz approach entails the immediate physical force used to attack or pacify the victim.
- c) The surprise approach is used when an offender hides out, waiting for their victim in a hidden or secluded area. They will use either a weapon or threats to subdue and control the victim. The current research (*cf* Hall, 2018) employed the operational definition of MO to refer to any act or behaviour, which occurred before, during and/or after a rape act.

South African serial rapists

Generally, offenders who commit two or more of the same type of offence are referred to as serial offenders, whereas offences committed by a serial offender are referred to as a series (Woodhams, Hollin & Bull, 2007: 234). By incorporating the definitions provided by De Wet et al (2010: 36) and De Wet (2008: 8) a serial rapist was operationally defined in this study as someone who has raped on two or more occasions, over separate incidents (Hall, 2018: 7). While male serial child rapists were defined as any male, over the age of 18 years, who has committed the act of rape. The rape must be against a child younger than the age of 18 years. The individual will have raped two or more children, on separate occasions (Hall, 2018: 13).

In a case study of nine serial rape cases, De Wet (2008: 82) found that the nine offenders raped a total of 75 victims across their accumulated series. The age of the offenders (at the time of their first incidents) ranged between 22 years and 44 years, with an average age of 30.4 years. Of the nine offenders, six were Black/African, two were White and one was Coloured. Most of the offenders (56%) were employed as

labourers while two offenders were unemployed (De Wet, 2008: 164). Furthermore, 56% of the offenders had a low education level (grade 1 to 6) and most had a criminal history prior to the rape offences. Out of the 75 victims targeted by the offenders 84% were Black/African, 13% were White and only two victims were Coloured. In seven of the nine series cases, the victims were on average 11.3 years younger than their offender. However, when the victim average was above 26.8 years, the victims were, on average 12.9 years older than their offenders (De Wet, 2008: 168-169). This shows that most of the offenders targeted victims who were younger than they were. Eighty-four percent of the victims in the data set did not know their attacker, while 14% knew their attacker.

In another study of 23 serial rape offenders, Potgieter and De Wet (2010: 2-3) found that the rapists were on average 31.3 years of age. The youngest offender was 20 years at the time of his first rape incident while the oldest was 45 years. The offenders raped a total of 204 female victims. The majority of the offenders were Black/African (74%) and mostly employed as labourers (44%) or were unemployed (43%) at the time of their first offence. Most of the offenders (n=19) had criminal records prior to their rape series, most commonly for robbery. Only 2 of the offenders had a higher/tertiary level of education while the majority had a medium (39%) to low level (35%) of education.

In another investigation of South African serial rapists, Woodhams and Labuschagne (2012: 544) provided a descriptive analysis of 22 serial rapists who committed a total of 119 sexual offences against 123 victims. The data set of this study differed somewhat from the previous two South African studies as in some of the cases (11%) the offenders were not yet apprehended or convicted during the research timeframe (Woodhams & Labuschagne, 2012: 551). The majority of the victims (94%) were female and were mostly teenagers, while 22% were younger than the age of 16 years; on average the victims were 23 years old (Woodhams & Labuschagne, 2012: 552).

The age of the offenders (at the time of their first incidents) ranged from 22 years to 42 years, with an average age of 29 years; and 21 offenders were Black/African while one was Coloured. The age range between the victims and the offenders varied from the offender being 28 years younger than the victim to them being 30 years older than the victim in other instances. Three of the offenders in this data set consistently targeted children (considered 16 years or younger), whereas nine offenders raped both adults and children (Woodhams & Labuschagne, 2012: 553).

MO of South African serial rapists

Generally, the MO of serial rapists in South Africa differs from offenders in other countries (Potgieter & De Wet, 2010: 1). De Wet (2008: 192) found that there were more child victims, younger than 15 years of age, in offenders' rape series when compared to international data sets. De Wet (2008: 193) highlighted international research which showed that most serial rapes occur inside the victim's residence, while local research shows the vast majority of serial rape offences in South Africa occur in isolated, outdoor areas (De Wet, 2008: 193; Potgieter & De Wet, 2010; 7-8; Woodhams & Labuschagne, 2012: 561). A point of similarity between international serial rape typologies and the behaviour exhibited amongst South African offenders is that of the internationally recognised methods of approaching rape victims (De Wet, 2008: 193).

The following description provides a breakdown of evidence regarding approach locations, approach methods, attack locations and attack methods pertaining to three local studies (*cf* De Wet, 2008; *cf* Potgieter & De Wet, 2010; *cf* Woodhams & Labuschagne, 2012).

De Wet (2008: 171-187) divided his investigation and description of offender MO into three sub-sections, namely: approach phase, attack phase and sexual behaviour. According to the results, 74% of the offenders used the con-approach as a method of approaching their victims, while only 11% of the offenders used the surprise approach. During the initial contact, six of the offenders were consistent in terms of their story they used to approach the victims. This involved an offer of employment (four offenders), asking for directions (one offender) and asking to use the bathroom (one offender). The blitz approach was only utilised in 5% of the incidents whereby a victim was immediately attacked. Overall, De Wet (2008: 173) summarised that three offenders solely used the con approach. Generally, the offenders used their preferred method of approach between 75-94% of the time, exhibiting a behavioural consistency in their methods and confirming the notion that serial offenders remain relatively consistent throughout their rape series (De Wet, 2008: 173-174). De Wet indicated that this evidence differed from international research that revealed the surprise method was the most frequently used by serial offenders in the international studies.

Regarding approach locations, De Wet found that 44% of the victims in the data set were approached while walking alone. The second most common location where victims were approached was their own home (28%). Other approach locations included populated areas such as shops, taxi ranks and bus stops. The serial offenders in this data set made use of two or more locations to approach victims, thus exhibiting less consistency in this behavioural component; an important factor when considering investigators' selection criteria in case linkage (De Wet, 2008: 175). Most of the incidents (75%) entailed separate approach and attack locations. Generally, the offenders in the data set approached the victims at one location and then by means of the method employed in their con stories, lured the victims to isolated, outdoor locations (74%). Choice of attack location presents further evidence of behavioural consistency of serial offenders as six of the offenders in the data set were 100% consistent in their attack location, more specifically, the offenders who committed the attacks outdoors remained consistent. De Wet indicates that White and Coloured offenders prefer to attack indoors, or inside homes or vehicles, while Black/African offenders prefer to use outdoor, isolated locations (De Wet, 2008: 177).

A descriptive study by Potgieter and De Wet (*cf* 2010) outlined the MO of 23 local serial rapists. The authors also made use of the commonly cited approach methods in order to investigate the methods of approach employed by the offenders. Differing from De Wet's results (2008: 172), most of the incidents entailed the use of the blitz approach (43%) followed by the con approach (37%) and the surprise approach (16%) (Potgieter & De Wet, 2010: 6). Similar to the offenders in De Wet's data set (2008: 172) most of the con stories entailed the offer of employment, while the rest entailed stories whereby the offenders asked for directions, offered food and or asked to use the victim's bathroom (Potgieter & De Wet, 2010: 6). Regarding the locations used during the approach phase, emphasis is placed on how the offenders targeted the victims in isolated areas, such as open fields, where they were most often contacted while walking alone (34%) while others (22%) were approached while walking with friends (Potgieter & De Wet, 2010: 7). Other locations used by the offenders included the victim's home, the victim's workplace, taxi ranks, bus stops and shopping areas.

In the same way that the offenders in De Wet's data set (2008: 175) used separate locations to approach and attack their victims, Potgieter and De Wet (2010: 8) found that in 78% of the incidents in their study, the approach and attack locations differed, however in 22% of the cases the locations were the same, such as the victim's home. Congruent with the approach locations, most of the attacks (77%) took place outdoors, in isolated areas such as open fields. Potgieter and De Wet (2010: 8) indicate that the offender was likely aware that he and the victim would be alone at the location for an extended period of time. Most of the offenders ($n=19$) used outdoor locations during their attack, 14 of them used this consistently. Only seven of the 23 offenders made use of indoor locations, and of those seven only two used indoor locations across 100% of their series.

In the third local study the results show similar MO characteristics. Likewise, compared to the other two studies (*cf* De Wet 2008; *cf* Potgieter & De Wet, 2010) most of the victims (72%) were approached while alone. The most common approach method identified was the con approach, used in 76% of the incidents, whereas only 28% of the incidents entailed the surprise approach (Woodhams & Labuschagne, 2012: 555, 560). Woodhams and Labuschagne (2012: 555, 560) outline various types of con approaches identified in their results, which included:

- Con-employ (48%): details the scenarios in which an offender tells the victim that he will help him/her gain employment;
- Con-authority (3%): the offender uses the con approach whereby he pretends to be an authority figure;
- Con-bribe (4%): in this con type approach the victim is bribed, in some way, to follow the offender.

In distinguishing between the adult and child victims, Woodhams and Labuschagne (2012: 561) indicate that the most common approach used to target children was the bribe con and authority figure con approach, whereas when adults were approached the employment offer con was mostly used. Similarly, to the other studies, the offenders in this data set mostly approached (83%) and attacked (79%) their victims in outdoor public locations such as an open field. Only 17% of the victims were attacked indoors in a private location and 6% were attacked in a vehicle. With this as the background the current contribution will highlight the theoretical foundation that guided the research and contextualise the findings of the aforementioned studies. The research findings of the current contribution will also be highlighted against the aforementioned discussion.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The routine activities theory was utilised to highlight that children are victimised by serial child rapists as they traverse at a specific time and place during their respective daily activities. The theory developed by Cohen and Felson in 1979 emphasises that routine activities are an essential part of human life, and crime is a result of opportunity coupled with choice (Finley, 2018: 438; Tibbets & Hemmens, 2010: 106; Wick, Nagoshi, Basham, Jordan, Kim, Nguyen & Lehmann, 2017: 27). According to the theory, the distribution and volume of predatory crimes occurs because of routine activities that take place outside of the home. Routine activities generally refer to activities that are performed by people every day, such as going to school or work, or taking part in various recreational events.

The theory also postulates that there are three components that come together in a specific time and place to create the likelihood of victimisation (Finley, 2018: 438; Tibbets & Hemmens, 2010: 103). Accordingly, the three variables are (McLaughlin, 2007: 252-253; Tibbets & Hemmens, 2010: 103-104; Wick et al., 2017: 27-28): i) the motivated offender, which is assumed using the rational choice theory, ii) the suitable target, which entails four factors namely: *value*, *visibility*, *accessibility* and *inertia*. The *value* is the symbolic desirability or value of the target, calculated from the offender's perspective. The *visibility* refers to the possible risk of being observed during the act. The *accessibility* refers to the ease with which the criminal can access and leave the target without being noticed. Lastly, *inertia* refers to the physical aspects of the target that may hinder its suitability.

The third variable, iii) the absence of a capable guardian implicates the guardianship around the target and refers to how well the target is protected. People or technology can offer guardianship; generally, a guardian against crime is anyone whose presence or proximity discourages crime (Felson, 2008: 71; Wick et al, 2017: 28).

Therefore, locations that have a high convergence of motivated offenders and suitable targets coupled with poor or no guardianship are often referred to as crime hot spots where crime is likely to occur; thus individuals who reside in or near these crime hot spots are at an increased risk of victimisation (Finley, 2018: 438; Siegel, 2004: 93; Tibbets & Hemmens, 2010: 105). More recently the theory has been applied to crimes such as serial murder and sexual abusive behaviour (Deslauriers-Varin & Beaugard, 2013: 124; Deslauriers-Varin & Beaugard, 2014: 254; Felson, 2008: 73; Rufo, 2012: 9).

By applying the theory to child rape, the crimes can be explained, in part, by the absence of effective controls, such as diligent parents or guardians and the presence of motivated offenders choosing vulnerable and attractive targets (Roelofse, 2011: 354-355). The exploitation of absent guardianship is acknowledged within the sexual grooming process whereby child rapists will likely target vulnerable children who are poorly supervised. Research has shown that children who come from families whereby the capable guardian is either relaxed or non-existent are more susceptible to grooming type behaviours. The relaxed guardianship then increases the opportunities for the offender to groom the victim (Williams, 2015: 38). Offenders can also identify and find victims within specific families who they encounter during their routine activities in areas such as shopping centres, playgrounds or sports events (Williams, 2015: 35).

Therefore, the likelihood crimes such as rape will take place is increased when the three variables of the theory are present at any given time and place (Finley, 2018: 438; Siegel, 2004: 92). The motivated offender evaluates the potential target. Accordingly, the symbolic value will refer to the potential sexual attraction and possible gratification or the psychological value of dominance. The visibility and accessibility of children and vulnerable victims is evident across numerous locations in South Africa. Potential sex offenders do not have to search far for vulnerable and suitable targets. Sex offenders employ similar tactics to game poachers or hunters who wait for perfect conditions before targeting their vulnerable prey (Rufo, 2012: 9).

Furthermore, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that criminals, specifically serial sex offenders, operate in limited and specific environments which is an indication that they choose those particular areas, possibly due to their familiarity with the areas or the awareness of limited victim guardianship. The familiarity with such areas, most likely because of their daily non-criminal routine activities, is reflected in the crime site selections (Deslauriers-Varin & Beaugard, 2013: 124; Deslauriers-Varin & Beaugard, 2014: 254; Lundrigan & Czarnomski, 2006: 218).

METHODOLOGY AND ETHICS

The following section outlines the methodology employed in the research study, highlighting the approach, design, techniques and ethical considerations.

Research design and sampling

This study entailed a collective document case study design which was undertaken in two phases. This article only reports on the results obtained from the first phase of the research. Non-probability purposive sampling was utilised to identify relevant case dockets for this study. Content analysis of ten relevant police dockets (totalling ten offenders in the data set) was undertaken (Babbie, 2014: 199-200; Creswell & Poth, 2018: 100). Multiple case dockets, pertaining to convicted serial child rapists, were used to explore serial child rape in South Africa. The case dockets were treated as cases within the collective case study (Creswell, 2013: 97, 99; Creswell & Poth, 2018: 97). The research criteria pertaining to the sample included a male perpetrator, of any age, who committed the act of rape, against two or more child victims on two separate occasions. The cases selected for this study consisted of perpetrators who were classified as “serial rapists” at the time of sentencing, thus the case dockets provided evidence of the offences and the perpetrators’ guilt. The individual investigators, who worked on the specific cases, provided the appropriate case files to the researchers. By additionally employing critical case sampling the researchers maximised the generalisation of information from the selected cases to other cases (Creswell, 2013: 158; Creswell & Poth, 2018: 159).

The case study design allowed the researchers to identify patterns in the behavioural profiles of the serial child rapists (Fouché & Schurink, 2011: 320). The present study was guided within the qualitative research approach which allowed the researchers to use flexible methods throughout the study, with the purpose of exploring and describing the phenomenon of child serial rape (Kumar, 2019: 16).

Data gathering and analysis

A content analysis was performed during a document case study by using a behavioural checklist, developed by the researchers, to capture relevant variables from documents (Bryman, 2012: 289; Clark-Carter, 2010: 104; Kumar, 2019: 231, 402). The variables recorded pertained to various biographic and MO information relating to the serial child rapists. General biographic information relating to the victims was also recorded on the checklist. The documents within the case dockets varied from victim statements, witness statements, court reports, medical reports and social worker reports. Sometimes other relevant documents used within the investigation, such as first responding officer statements, were available and thus were also used to glean the specific information. However, this presented a challenge as the data within the documents was not consistently available across all the case dockets.

Nonetheless, the technique of a content analysis was deemed appropriate because it allows for the analysis of text such as conversations or speeches, personal documents or news media, and also refers to the study of recorded human interactions (Bryman, 2012: 289; Clark-Carter, 2010: 104; Kumar, 2019: 231). Documents in the case dockets were analysed as they reflected interactions that were provided to investigators after the rape incidents (Flick, 2014: 429). The data captured by the checklist was then entered into simple Microsoft Excel worksheets, exclusive to each individual offender and their offence series. Following the analysis of the individual offenders’ series, a general offender profile was analysed using basic descriptive statistics. The available formats of the information suited the qualitative nature of the research.

Ethics

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pretoria. Furthermore, permission to review the case files was received from the Investigative Psychology Section (IPS) within the Forensic Division of the South African Police Service (SAPS), the SAPS Divisional Commissioner: Detective Service as well as the SAPS Head of Strategic Management. The case dockets were provided to the researchers by the individual investigators at the IPS, thus only cases that had been closed, with a guilty conviction, were used.

The document study did not entail human respondents, therefore, as a form of non-intrusive research; the research did not pose any risk to offenders or victims (Clark-Carter, 2010:104; Kumar, 2019: 359, 361, 363). The integrity of the sensitive evidence within the dockets and full confidentiality were maintained. Most the victims’ identities were anonymous to the researchers, thus near full anonymity, on part of the victims, was achieved. Through the presentation of results, the researchers did not use any identifiable information pertaining to offenders or the victims (Kumar, 2019: 363, Strydom, 2011: 119).

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The basic results regarding the victim profile, offender profile and general MO will be outlined and briefly discussed below.

General victim profile

The ten offenders in this study attacked and raped a total of 117 victims, representing an average of 11.7 victims per offence series. When distinguishing between the offenders who raped stranger victims or children known to them, the offenders who targeted stranger children raped more children, on average, across their individual rape series. More specifically, there were seven offenders who raped stranger children, exclusively, across their series. In these series, the offenders raped an average of 15.4 children across their series. In comparison, the three serial rapists in the data set who targeted children known to them raped an average of 2.7 victims in their rape series. Hence, out of the total number of victims in the data set, 108 were raped by strangers, whereas only eight children in the data set were raped by an acquaintance or relative.

Table 1: Victim profile

Offender	No. of victims in series	Gender of victims	Ave. age of victims in series	Relationship to victims
A	3	Female (n=3)	6.6 years old	Known
B	3	Male (n=2) and Female (n=1)	4.6 years old	Known
C	29	Female (n=29)	10.8 years old	Stranger
D	2	Female (n=2)	12 years old	Known
E	11	Female (n=11)	5 years old	Stranger
F	3	Male (n=2) and Female (n=1)	7.3 years old	Stranger
G	11	Male (n=11)	12.4 years old	Stranger
H	8	Female (n=8)	6.8 years old	Stranger
I	9	Female (n=9)	15.7 years old	Stranger
J	38	Female (n=38)	10.8 years old	Stranger

The majority of victims (n=105) were Black/African, while four of the victims were White and two victims were Indian. The population group information was not evident for six of the victims. On average, the offenders targeted children between the ages of four and 16 years. Additionally, the two offenders who targeted the most children across a series both raped female children who were an average age of 10.8 years.

The findings regarding the age of the victim and population group are congruent with literature and the aforementioned studies, which explain that young Black/African girls are especially vulnerable to being raped in South Africa (Potgieter & De Wet, 2010: 2). The results also indicated that the offenders would consistently target a victim type exhibiting some form of victim preference. For example, most of the offenders exclusively targeted either prepubescent or pubescent females across their series, whereas offender G (see Table 1 above) exclusively targeted pubescent males. For the most part, offenders also targeted children within the same population group as themselves.

Despite the notion that the majority of the sexual crimes perpetrated against children are committed by someone known to the victim (Cox et al, 2007: 950, 952; Gavin, 2014: 159; Kleijn, 2010, 241; Lumphala, 2012: 26; Naidoo, 2013: 110; Richter, 2003: 395; Sadock & Sadock, 2007: 876; Seedat et al, 2009: 1013; Wilson, 2012: 6), South African research shows that serial rapists (inclusive of those who solely target children) will most likely target strangers (Bezuidenhout & Klopper, 2011: 233; De Wet, 2008: 8; Park, Schlesinger, Pinizzotto & Davis, 2008: 228; Van der Watt et al, 2014: 63). The results of the current study further support the limited local research as most of the child victims were targeted by strangers. The evidence also corroborates Woodhams and Labuschagne's (2012: 564) study as most of the victims were strangers to the offenders. Likewise, De Wet's (2008: 163) findings indicated that stranger rape in South Africa can be seen as potentially serial in nature. It appears that serial rapists in South Africa tend to target stranger victims more so than victims known to them. This point of departure may be explained in the difference between the opportunistic rapists and the groomer rapists. Considering that the latter are most likely known to their victims, the nature of their sexualised relationship may be a significant reason for the unknown nature of their offending.

General offender profile

A total of ten offenders were included in the data set of the current study. Table 2 depicts the basic offender profile information of the ten serial rapists.

Table 2: Offender profile

Offender	Population group	Age at start of rape series	Highest qualification	Employment type (at time of arrest)	Prior criminal history type
A	Black/African	32 years old	Grade 10	Informal/Part time	None
B	White	17 years old	Tertiary	Formal/Self-employed	None
C	Black/African	34 years old	Unknown high school level	Informal/Part time	Violent
D	White	41 years old	Unknown	Formal/Self-employed	None
E	Black/African	25 years old	Grade 12 (matric)	Unemployed	Non-violent
F	Black/African	35 years old	Grade 12 (matric)	Formal/Self-employed	Violent
G	Black/African	26 years old	Unknown	Unemployed	Violent
H	Black/African	40 years old	Grade 5	Unemployed	Violent and Non-violent
I	Black/African	33 years old	Grade 7	Informal/Part time	Violent and Non-violent
J	Black/African	35 years old	Tertiary	Formal/Self-employed	None

Regarding population groups, the majority of the offenders (n=8) were Black/African which is congruent with other local studies of serial rapists (De Wet, 2008: 164; Potgieter & De Wet, 2010: 2-3; Woodhams & Labuschagne, 2012: 564). The over-representation of Black/African males in the sample reflects the general population demographics in South Africa. According to Statistics South Africa (2018: 8-9) over 80% of males in the country are Black/African. The average age that the offenders began their rape series was 31.8 years old, which is consistent with other local studies that evidenced most serial offenders begin their rape series near to, or after, the age of 30 years (De Wet, 2008: 82; Potgieter & De Wet, 2010: 2-3, Woodhams & Labuschagne, 2012: 552). Fifty percent of the offenders (n=5) were unemployed at the time they were arrested for their rape series which could be explained by the lower levels of education evidenced in the sample. In particular, two offenders only had a primary school level of education. Three of the offenders' educational histories were not apparent in the data however, it can be assumed, based on their employment status, that at least two of them had low-levels of education. The current findings are consistent with other South African research, particularly De Wet's findings (2008: 164), which showed that most of the serial rapists had a low-level of education (between grades one and six). Regarding criminal histories most of the offenders in the current study (n=6) exhibited prior criminal histories, of which theft, assault and assault with the intention to cause grievous bodily harm, were most common. Only one offender had a prior conviction for rape. Other local research also highlights that offenders will most likely have a prior criminal record before their rape series begins (Potgieter & De Wet, 2010: 2-3).

Modus operandi

Table 3 indicates a basic behavioural profile of the offenders, which consists of the employed methods of approach as well as the locations of the approach and attacks.

Table 3: General MO employed by the offenders

Offender	Method of approach	Location of approach	Location of attack
A	Groomed	Indoors, residential	Indoors, residential
B	Groomed	Indoors, residential/commercial	Indoors, residential/commercial
C	Con approach	Outdoors, residential/recreational	Outdoors, field/veld
D	Groomed	Outdoors, recreational	Indoors*, recreational
E	Con approach	Outdoors, residential	Outdoors, field/veld, residential
F	Con approach	Outdoors, residential	Outdoors, residential
G	Con and blitz approach	Outdoors (n=7), indoors (n=1), residential	Outdoors, field/veld, residential
H	Con and blitz approach	Outdoors, residential/recreational	Outdoors, field/veld, residential
I	Con approach	Outdoors, residential	Outdoors, field/veld
J	Con and blitz approach	Outdoors, residential	Outdoors (n=34) and indoors (n=4), residential

*one victim in this series was raped inside the offender's car (classified as indoors in this study)

The three offenders who were known to their victims groomed the children through on-going, sexualised relationships. The contexts in which they approached and attacked their victims were consistent (e.g. offender B met his victims in his home, through his photography business or via his mother's friends, and thus he used the contact time with the children to groom them and subsequently rape them in the same location). Conversely, the offenders who targeted strange children off the street attacked their victims in separate locations to the approach sites, thus consistent with other local research regarding separate approach and attack locations (De Wet, 2008: 175; Potgieter & De Wet, 2010: 8). Some attack sites were further away than others as some children recalled walking a long distance from areas familiar to them.

In many of the cases, it was evident that the offenders operated in what professionals refer to as a "comfort zone". For example, data evidenced that offender E committed all of his rape acts within a 5.5-kilometre radius, while offender J operated within a 10-kilometre radius of his residence and former employment locations. Literature supports the notion of a "comfort zone" showing that serial rapists repeatedly use the same geographic space to approach and/or attack their victims (De Wet, 2008: 70; Deslauriers-Varin & Beauregard, 2013: 124; Lundrigan & Czarnomski, 2006: 218; Potgieter & De Wet, 2010: 9). This is also supported by the routine activity theory as the spatial behaviour of sexual offenders is often related to their non-criminal routine activities.

The opportunist offenders (who targeted stranger children) would first approach their victims using some type of con story to lure the children away, and into their attack locations which were most often a walking distance away. Similarly, the con approach was found to be the most commonly used method employed by the offenders profiled in De Wet's study (2008: 171) and was most frequently used by offenders described by Woodhams and Labuschagne (2012: 555, 566). Some offenders in the present study also employed aspects of the blitz type approach by simply walking up to the victims and overpowering them. This was found to be the most common approach in another local study that also included adult victims (Potgieter & De Wet, 2010: 7).

Almost half of the victims (n=50) in the current study were alone when they were approached which also correlates to De Wet's study (2008: 174) and Woodhams and Labuschagne's research (2012: 554) whereby most of the victims were approached while walking alone. The rest of the victims in the current sample were either walking with friends or siblings of a similar age when they were approached; there were no adults supervising the children in the sample. This supports the tenet of the routine activities theory that an offender will choose an area and victim as a result of their awareness of being undetected and lack of potential guardianship (Felson, 2008: 71; Potgieter & De Wet, 2010: 9,11; Roelofse, 2011: 354-355).

The most common approach location used by the offender was an outdoor location, in residential or recreational areas. This was consistent with other local research which highlighted that outdoor, isolated locations are most often used by serial rapists (De Wet, 2008: 175-177; Potgieter & De Wet, 2010: 8; Woodhams & Labuschagne, 2012: 561). This is comparable to SAPS data which revealed that most of the sexual offences during 2015/2016 occurred indoors (SAPS, 2016: 42-43). Indeed, all but two of the victims in the current research sample, who were approached by opportunist type offenders, were approached outdoors in residential areas (generally in or around residential informal settlements) or in recreational parks. The contexts in which victims were approached varied from walking to or from school or the shops, playing outside their residence, walking to or from a friend or relatives house, or while walking to or from public transport places. As prescribed by the routine activities approach, victims can be victimised while conducting their daily routine activities such as walking to and from school or going to the shops; consequently, as the motivated offender and suitable target converge at a specific time and place (Andresen, 2010: 15).

Generally, the results of the study did not differ drastically from those of similar studies that included both adults and children in their data sets. Overall the researchers determined that the evidence across the whole study shows that there are at least two offender types who rape children in a serial nature. Firstly, the opportunist who can be described as someone who targets stranger children off the street, abducts and rapes them, and leaves them at the scene. Secondly, the groomer can be described as someone who establishes a relationship with their victim, oftentimes engaging in a wider range of sexual activities.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

A key challenge to the current study was the availability of consistent information pertaining to the variables under investigation. Police case dockets are not intended for social research purposes and as a

result, the information required for the behavioural checklist was not consistently presented across each case file, reducing the obtainability of reliable information (This challenge was, however, addressed by including primary information gathered from the interviews with numerous professional experts with valuable experience in dealing with the offenders and/or victims of child serial rape).

Another factor which compounded the limited availability of information was the victims' recall of their attacks. The young age of many of the victims and the nature of the traumatic experiences meant that some victim statements were lacking in detail. Furthermore, different investigation techniques employed by police officers and investigators meant that each case docket included varying levels of detailed information.

Since the data was interpreted according to their propensity to the phenomenon the probability of potential researcher-bias exists. Although all efforts were taken to limit this, the nature of the study is inherently susceptible to researcher-bias. Therefore, the data that was analysed in the case dockets may be open to other interpretations.

The number of accessible case dockets, which met all the research criteria, was also limiting; on-going cases could not be included in the data set. Offenders who were initially found guilty, but then successfully appealed their cases, were not included in the research sample. Nonetheless, this limitation was overcome by employing critical case sampling to maximise the generalisation of information from the selected cases.

Future research

Due to the scope of the study, the researchers did not investigate any offender psychological variables or motivational indicators. Despite various works providing numerous possible motivations for rape, many social and behavioural scientists warn that, despite their own experience, they are unable to answer why serial rapists target their victims, particularly children. Their opinions are also consistent with other literature warning that no singular profile regarding sex offenders exists. Nonetheless, future researchers who want to explore the motivational aspects of serial rapists may look to ground their research in psychological theories, making use of commonly cited international offender typologies (such as the Massachusetts Treatment Centre Rapist Typology, Version 3 [MTC:R3] or the Groth typology). This may allow for profile comparisons between local and international offenders.

Future researchers should look to distinguish between the general offenders' MO in order to further conceptualise and elucidate the distinct typologies that are applicable to the local context, thus expanding upon the profile typologies uncovered in this study. Only three offenders in the data set presented evidence of grooming type behaviours across their series; this behaviour could be further investigated, either by using a larger sample of cases or by gathering other forms of primary data.

Even though the overwhelming majority of the victims in the data set were targeted by strangers on the street, some of the evidence highlighted the hidden nature of sexual grooming by individuals known to the victims. Cases in which children are raped as a result of a groomed sexual relationship may make up for a large proportion of the unreported rapes that occur against children. Therefore, it may be valuable for future researchers to investigate the specific processes and strategies that are used by these offenders.

CONCLUSION

This article highlights that although general aspects of offender behaviour can be identified and discussed, there is no precise, singular profile which fits all serial rapists, nor is there a distinct behavioural pattern to accommodate each aspect of behaviour. Furthermore, given the lack of empirical research on serial rape in South Africa, even less is known about offender behaviours and their targeted victims in the local context. Nonetheless, the results showed that certain common variables are apparent and should be acknowledged. In particular, congruent with the routine activities theory, serial child rapists will target children who appear to be easy targets, thus substantiating general knowledge that indicates children who are alone, or unaccompanied by adults, in outdoor residential areas are at an increased risk of being targeted by serial rapists. By identifying locations where potential child victims are at risk of being targeted by serial rapists, authorities could look to increase their presence in the areas to increase guardianship. Furthermore, by highlighting potential hot spot areas with increased numbers of vulnerable victims, a greater public awareness of the potential hazards facing individuals in the specific areas can be created. The importance of appropriate guardianship extends beyond the physical presence and supervision of adults. Positive role models and guardians in children's lives will also reduce their

vulnerability to sexual offenders. This information should be used in crime prevention strategies and awareness campaigns, stressing the importance of adequate adult supervision.

This study also elucidated two distinct behavioural profiles of serial child rapists, namely; the opportunists and the groomers. The opportunists are most often strangers who manipulate the victims in opportunistic and sometimes predatory ways. The groomers are most often those known to their victims, and therefore are the ones most trusted by them. Through the establishment of sexualised relationships with the children, these groomers manipulate and threaten the children into compliance, compounding the problem surrounding the under reporting of sexually violent crimes. The results also show that the general behavioural profile of serial rapists in South Africa who target adults is not dissimilar from that of the serial rapists who target children. This information could prove valuable to law enforcement officials who are investigating child rape offences that they suspect may be of a serial nature. By employing already known evidence regarding serial rapists, they can investigate cases of child rape in similar ways.

Sadly, many children are raped and sexually assaulted in South Africa. While vulnerable children are present across all sectors of society, young Black-African females in poor, impoverished socio-economic circumstances are at an especially high risk of being targeted. Sex offenders, including serial child rapists, function normally in society, oftentimes in unassuming ways, performing their own routine activities which often intersect with the routine activities of their victims. However, from the data in the study and similar peer studies one can deduce that Black-African males, with low levels of education and histories of various criminal offences represent the majority of this category of rape offenders in South Africa. The conclusions and findings presented in this article are directly applicable to South African cases as they were derived from local contexts.

Endnote:

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