



Sexual homicide: Brief review of the literature and case report involving rape, genital mutilation and human arson



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ABSTRACT

The objective of the current paper is to report a new case of sexual murder involving human arson and summarize the literature on the phenomenon of sexual homicide. The present case study is unprecedented in Greece and a rarity in international literature due to the fact that the victim suffered genital mutilation and incineration while still alive. The evaluation consisted of 176 articles; 53 were reviewed by the authors. The results revealed sparse, but significant, research findings. The authors discuss the limitations regarding research, incidence of the phenomenon, crime-scene patterns, offender characteristics (killing methods, motive inferences, sociodemographic data, classifications, psychopathology, *modus operandi*), and victim selection. The incidence of the phenomenon is unclear (1–4%) due to non-standardized criteria. It is an expression of displaced anger or sexual sadism and/or a way to elude detection (ancillary benefit). Most offenders (in their first kill) and victims were in their late 20s to early 30s and belong to Caucasian populations. Personal weapons were commonly used against women, strangulation is the prevalent killing method against children, and firearms against men. Most of the sexual homicide perpetrators are non-psychotic at the time of the attack, but experience personality pathology, primitive defenses, pathological object relations, and withdrawal into fantasy in order to deal with social isolation.

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1. Introduction

Sexual homicides consist of two key components: the homicide of a person and the sexual behavior of the perpetrator. The homicide may be an impulsive, wrathful killing during sexual

intercourse, triggered by the victim's rebuff and/or the perpetrator's intoxication (by alcohol and/or drugs) or an act meticulously planned for days or even weeks before the attack. The first is usually charged as a degree of manslaughter, whereas the latter is charged as first-degree or aggravated murder.^{1,2}

Sexual behavior may occur prior to, during and/or after the homicide. It is comprised of sexual fantasies, sexual arousal, masturbation, actual penetration, and may even be symbolically expressed through genital mutilation of the victim.^{1,3}

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2. Methodology

This paper briefly updates the relevant literature on sexual homicide and reports a new case of sexual murder involving rape, genital mutilation and human arson. An exhaustive systematic review was carried out on sexual murder incidents by searching the electronic data bases of PubMed, Google search, Google Scholar, Heal Link, EMBASE, Scopus and Cochrane Library. The search terms were: “sexual homicide,” “sexual murder,” “erotophonophilia,” “lust murder,” “sexual offenders,” “catathymia,” “rape murder,” “sexual assault,” “homicide,” “violent offenders,” “molest,” “rape,” “paraphilia,” “sex crime,” “sexual violence,” “sadistic violence,” “lust killing,” “necrophilia,” “lethal sexual assault,” “violent crime.” No language restriction was applied.

Overall one hundred seventy-six (176) articles and books deriving from various scientific areas concerning sexual homicide dating from 1886 to January 2016 were thoroughly studied. All 176 articles were reviewed and evaluated by the authors. Sparse, but significant, findings were revealed from virtually all empirical studies concerning sexual homicide that had already been conducted.

Regarding the issue of sexual homicide, many limitations arise. The scope of sexual homicide poses many difficulties in the methodology of the research studies conducted, as there are numerous parameters to investigate, such as the scene of the crime (*modus operandi*, crime-scene patterns), the characteristics of the offender (motive inferences, psychiatric diagnoses, sociodemographic data, history, phallometric features classifications), the victim selection (demographic characteristics, offender-victim interactions) as well as the weapon and method of killing (forensic aspects). Therefore, empirical studies of sexual homicide incidents vary in several parameters regarding both methodology and examined material.

The major issue encountered in the literature is the lack of homogeneity in study samples. Many factors contribute negatively to this matter. The definition of the term “sexual homicide” has been evolving over the years. The occasionally different definitions that have been employed have, in turn, led to diversified criteria for selection of the participants. Subsequently, the vague quality of the different samples examined in empirical research studies is largely attributable to the non-standardized definition describing this phenomenon. Furthermore, the available material for evaluation is very scarce, which requires long-term studies.

In addition, many studies use mixed samples, which do not specify the demographics of the perpetrators and victims, such as the offenders' age and gender as well as the type of victims (e.g., adult males, adult females, minors and the elderly). This lack of specification leads to intensified ambiguity and heterogeneity among samples, which, in turn, complicate their retrospective comparison.

Furthermore, the sources from which information is extracted also vary among different studies (e.g., self-reports, interviews, clinical examination, institutional records, psychiatric court reports, police data, public media reports, crime-scene investigation reports or pictures), which lead to the investigation of different aspects of the crime.

An additional obstacle for a proper comparison of samples from different studies is the selection of similarly deviant control groups, which consist of sexual offenders, psychopaths, and non-sexual homicide perpetrators instead of healthy non-offending populations. Consequently, the comparison is made between varying samples and, thus, the results that are obtained may be neither comparable nor representative of specific offender groups.

For the reasons outlined above, research studies of high validity and robust methodology as well as the most recent articles were

selected for the synthesis of the present brief review, while one hundred twenty-three (123) articles were not included. All the articles have been evaluated and supplemented by searches of the bibliographies of key papers. The studies were reviewed in order to investigate the incidence of sexual homicide, characteristics of offenders and victims, crime-scene patterns as well as methods of killing and *modus operandi*. As explained above, all the following statistics and typologies are derived from empirical studies examining small and heterogeneous samples. Most empirical and statistical studies converge and approximate on these percentages. Nevertheless, over the years, as the understanding of this phenomenon increasingly deepens through better-structured and more-standardized research studies, statistically significant variables are likely to evolve and lead to more concrete, valid, and reliable statistical results, definitions, and classifications.

In addition, the following case study is written in compliance with the Helsinki Declaration of 1975, as revised in 1983. The complete anonymity of the victim and the offender has been assured.

3. Literature synthesis

3.1. Incidence

The prevalence of sexual homicide is unclear. Crimes involving sexual homicide are frequently registered as homicides of “unknown motive,” due to non-standardized criteria and underlying dynamics that are difficult to interpret. In addition, most official crime databases do not disclose the specific manner of a committed homicide. It is estimated, however, that sexual homicides constitute from one percent of the total homicides reported by the police in the USA every year to approximately four percent in Canada.^{1,4–9}

3.2. Offender characteristics – sociodemographic variables

3.2.1. Race and gender

The majority of sexual murderers are white males (72.3% Caucasians), while females represent only five percent in the FBI database cases. (N = 3977 from 1976 to 2007).^{5–10}

3.2.2. Mean age

Mean age of sexual murderers is 26.9. (N = 3977) One out of nine (11.4%) were young persons (under 18) at the time of the first murder. (N = 166).^{1,4–10}

3.2.3. Marital status

27.1% lived in a relationship, and 25.3% had children. (N = 166).

3.2.4. Level of education

Although sexual murderers have an average cognitive ability, they are also of a low educational and occupational status. The incidence of those unemployed was 29.5%, and only 0.6% had a university degree at the time of the crime (N = 166).

3.2.5. Autonomy

Forty percent were still living with their parents at the time of the homicide, while 50% lived independently. (N = 166).^{1,4,7,9}

3.3. Victimology

In general, the majority of the victims are female (80.2%), adults (70%) and their mean age is 28.3 (N = 86).^{1,4,6–13} Regarding the subcategories of the perpetrator-victim relationships, strangers comprise 60.5 percent, acquaintances 23%, spouses/ex-spouses 2.6%, and male strangers 2.6% (N = 38). Sexual partners of the

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