



## Offense Pathways of Non-Serial Sexual Killers



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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** Offending pathways of sexual killers were explored with a focus on whether the pathways for those with a previous conviction for rape or attempted rape differed from those who had no such convictions.

**Methods:** A total of 129 non-serial male sexual killers of females aged 14 years or over, who had been convicted and served a custodial sentence within UK Prison Service, were included in the study. Multidimensional Scaling Analysis (MDS), TwoStep cluster analysis and Chi-square analysis were used to evaluate cognitive problems, sexual and behavioral interests, modus operandi and crime scene characteristics.

**Results:** The study provided support for the existence of three different pathways to offending: *deviancy, grievance and sexually driven*. Offenders with a previous offense for rape/attempted rape clustered significantly into the *sexually driven* group.

**Conclusions:** Sexual killers who fit more closely to the sexually driven group were found to have treatment needs similar to sexual aggressors who have not killed. In addition, more consideration should be given to how we select cases in order for research to better advance our knowledge of sexual homicide.

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### Introduction

A body of research examining typologies of sexual killing consistently identifies the sadistic and the angry types of sexual killers (e.g. Beauregard & Proulx, 2002; Fisher & Beech, 2007). Studies provide an overall picture that sadistic sexual killers tend to struggle with low self-esteem, feel rejected by others and have a propensity for isolation. These perpetrators report having deviant sexual fantasies, use pornography and masturbate compulsively and their offending results from a combination of deviant sexual preferences and hostility towards women with the intention to kill existing prior to the offense. By contrast, angry sexual killers tend to be socially maladapted but not isolated. In the pre-crime phase, they generally feel angry, use psychoactive substances but do not report deviant sexual fantasies. The offending occurs as an extension of antisocial predispositions and, in comparison to sadistic sexual killers, it tends to be poorly planned (Proulx, 2008).

Beauregard, Proulx, and Leclerc (2014) argue that some classification models fail to consider crime characteristics and do not make links between the factors believed to precipitate the offense and the *modus operandi* of the perpetrator. They therefore set out to address this theoretical gap by studying the offense pathways. The concept of 'offense pathways' is central to relapse prevention models, which were integrated from the field of addiction treatment into sexual

offending programs (Ward, Louden, Hudson, & Marshall, 1995). Beauregard and Proulx (2002), who examined the offending processes of non-serial sexual murderers, distinguished two sexual killer pathways (one sadistic and one angry), based on pre-crime and crime factors. They found that offenders following the sadistic pathway were more likely to plan their offense and select the victim prior to committing the crime, commonly used restraints and often humiliated and mutilated the victim.

By contrast, offenses committed by sexual killers on the anger pathway were unplanned, the victims were not likely to be preselected and humiliation, mutilation and the use of restraints were all rare. The authors linked their pathways to the organized/disorganized FBI profiles of the crime scene and noted that, while in their study mutilation was characteristic of the sadistic pathway (corresponding to the organized murderer), the FBI study found mutilation to be more frequent in the disorganized profile (Beauregard & Proulx, 2002).

A study by Beech, Fisher, and Ward (2005) considered cognitive distortions and underlying implicit theories when examining pathways and found that sexual killers can be distinguished by grievance, sexual and sadistic motivation. Sexual killers in the sadistic-motivation group acknowledged in interviews that they had fantasized about taking someone's life and the crime was therefore more likely to be premeditated. While in general offense supportive beliefs were not found to be a strong feature of the group's psychometric profile, they did show problems with grievance thinking, inadequacy, distorted intimacy balance and a lack of emotionally intimate relationships with adults. Half

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of the offenders also held sexual entitlement beliefs. In terms of offense behaviors, sadistic-motivation offenders were more likely to target strangers and use strangulation as a method of killing. Post-mortem sexual interference (i.e. sexual behavior occurring with unconscious or dead victim) and post-mortem mutilation (of genital areas; excluding instances when the body was cut up for disposal purposes) most frequently occurred in this group (Beech, Fisher, & Ward, 2005).

Offenders in the grievance-motivated group tended to lack insight into their own problems and blamed others for the setbacks in their life. They also showed the highest levels of grievance/hostile thinking and highest levels of rape supportive attitudes. When looking at the offenses themselves, these perpetrators appeared to be triggered by something a victim said or did, which often resulted in a violent attack with evidence of 'overkill' being present (Beech, Fisher, & Ward, 2005).

Finally, offenders belonging to the sexually motivated group tended to be sexually preoccupied and held views which, in their own minds, "allowed" them to undertake sexual assaults to satisfy their sexual urges (e.g., 'male sex drive is uncontrollable'). The killing appeared to be instrumental, i.e. carried out in order to either silence the victim or to avoid detection. Subsequently, there was little evidence of 'overkill' or post-mortem sexual interference and mutilation in this group (Beech, Oliver, Fisher, & Beckett, 2005; Beech, Fisher, & Ward, 2005).

In addition, studies aiming to understand risk factors related to recidivism and the intervention needs of sexual killers have examined whether they represent a distinct group of sexual perpetrators who are qualitatively different from other sexual offenders. These studies have concerned the comparison of sexual killers to non-homicide sexual aggressors (perpetrators of rape or attempted rape). For example, Langevin, Ben-Aron, Wright, Marchese, and Handy (1988), found that sexual killers were more often diagnosed with sadism, transvestism and antisocial personality disorder. Proulx and Sauv  tre (2007) also noted that sexual killers were more often diagnosed with sadism. Further, studies by Grubin (1994) and Milsom, Beech, and Webster (2003) found social and emotional loneliness to be significantly more prevalent in sexual killers, although Milsom et al. (2003), while reporting significantly higher levels of social loneliness in adolescence, found little difference in terms of adult emotional loneliness. In line with these findings, Nicole and Proulx (2007) found significantly higher levels of peer isolation in adolescence, but the authors did not comment on levels of emotional loneliness in adulthood.

When looking at apparent motives, Langevin et al. (1988) reported that offenders who raped but did not kill mostly sought sexual release, while sexual killers showed elements of both sex and aggression (although the selection criteria for the former group excluded cases where physical violence and sexual attack co-occurred). Chene and Cusson (2007) noted that pre-crime anger (but not necessarily anger during the attack) was indicative of offences culminating in murder. This is consistent with the results of Grubin (1994), who found that sexual killers tended to suppress their anger, perhaps suggesting the presence of pre-crime phase anger.

Although, as noted above, relevant studies seem to have established some heterogeneous factors that discriminate sexual killers from sexual aggressors, overall the groups share many homogeneous characteristics. For example, sexual killers and sexual aggressors seem similar in terms of general upbringing, own victimisation and family structure (Langevin et al., 1988; Beech, Oliver, Fisher, & Beckett, 2005), with the exception of physical abuse, which is more frequent among sexual killer group (Nicole & Proulx, 2007). There are also only slight differences in terms of previous forensic history (Langevin et al., 1988; Nicole & Proulx, 2007; Beech, Oliver, Fisher, & Beckett, 2005) leading to a general conclusion that there are more similarities than differences between the groups.

Based on this, some scholars suggested that sexual aggressors and sexual killers should not be viewed as two separate groups, because the offences occur at the extremes of a single continuum with circumstantial violence determining the outcome of the offence (Oliver,

Beech, Fisher, & Beckett, 2007; Proulx, Cusson, & Beauregard, 2007; Salfati & Taylor, 2006). Indeed, Proulx and Beauregard (2009) argued that since each type of crime has only a limited number of crime scripts (the sequence of choices and actions in a given situation) because of a limited number of interactions between internal and external constraints and the perpetrator's bounded rationality, the same should hold true for all sexual aggressors. In line with this, Salfati and Taylor (2006) suggested that a single thematic framework of sexual aggressors and sexual killers could be applied and that crime scene factors are important to consider. When conceptualising sexual aggression on a continuum, the authors found that violence represented the underlying theme distinguishing between the types of the offence with rape offenders adopting a more controlled approach in comparison to the expressive violence of the sexual killers. Mieczkowski and Beauregard (2010) also highlighted the importance of crime and victim characteristics and the interactions between these factors but note that the picture is often complex. For example, although it has been suggested that a presence of weapon increases the likelihood of a fatal outcome (e.g. Chene & Cusson, 2007) and the choice of weapon can depend on the interaction of victim characteristics (Chan & Beauregard, *in press*), in some situations where no weapon is involved, the chances of fatality remain strong because other factors such as frustration or anger may have played a role in the offence process (Mieczkowski & Beauregard, 2010). Given that violence and the presence of a weapon insufficiently delineate rapists and sexual killers, in striving for a parsimonious theory of sexual aggression, perhaps some unique facets have not been well accounted for. Specifically, those offenders for whom the act of killing is integral to the sexual assault do not fit the continuum model (Oliver et al., 2007). As we have noted, much of this argument stems from the comparative research which suggested more similarities than differences. However, these comparison studies have generally considered sexual killers as one group. Arguably such operationalization is too broad as studies have consistently shown that there are different types of these perpetrators, with killing playing a different functional role, depending on the pathway being followed. Therefore, when the studies have amalgamated the typologies into a single category of sexual killers and compared them to rapists effectively, the ability to detect any potential differences was attenuated by the fact that the sample contained different types of sexual killer perpetrators.

In a similar strand of enquiry, criminological studies explored the probability of offenders repeating the same type of crimes. This specialization hypothesis questions whether sexual offenders are more likely to repeat a sexual rather than non-sexual offence and whether further specialism occurs within their sexual criminal career (Lussier, 2005; Lussier & Cale, 2013). In support of the specialization hypothesis, rape is not likely to appear in the offending criminal history of non-sexual killers (DeLisi, 2014). With regards to sexual killing, some killings resemble sexual assaults that have resulted in murder (Beech, Oliver, Fisher, & Beckett, 2005; Beech, Fisher, & Ward, 2005; Carter & Hollin, 2014; Kocsis, Cooksey & Irwin, 2002). Kocsis et al. (2002) further speculate that murder may not have been the original intention of the perpetrator. Consequently, if offenders tend to specialize in their criminal careers, it could be argued that sexual killers who had previously raped would be more closely aligned to the sexual aggressors group, as they are sexual aggressors who have killed as a result of circumstantial violence. Given that previous research has found that in UK samples almost one third of sexual killers had a prior rape or attempted rape offence (Grubin, 1994; Oliver et al., 2007), it would be necessary to account for the sexual killers with a previous conviction for rape or attempted rape in order to begin to consider these issues empirically.

The current study aims to examine pathways to sexual killing while also separating sexual killers on the basis of whether or not they had a previous conviction for rape. Consideration can then be given to whether the pathways to offending differ based on this distinction. As previous researchers have postulated that serial and non-serial offenders should be examined separately due to the existence of sufficient differences

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