



The Perpetrator-Motive Research Design: A strategy for understanding motivations, values, and tactics of criminal offenders[☆]

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ABSTRACT

For decades, applied research in the field of behavioral criminology has been successfully utilized to develop theories and training modalities for the purpose of informing practice. One method for conducting this type of research is in-depth interviews of perpetrators. The Perpetrator-Motive Research Design (PMRD) is a 12-step methodological design, which focuses on gaining a thorough understanding of the motivations, values, needs, and tactics of those who commit offenses against others. PMRD has been employed in a pilot study conducted with captive-takers in the FBI's Global Hostage-Taking Research and Analysis Project (GHoST-RAP). Even though global captive-taking is a major domestic and international security problem that affects the interests of the United States, and poses serious challenges abroad, only a modicum of investigative attention has been directed to this problem. This void is addressed through the tripartite mission of GHoST-RAP: (1) to elicit and describe captive-taker values and paradigms, (2) to determine motivations and methods for captive-taking, and (3) to utilize resultant data to improve strategies for mitigation and prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery activities. In addition, GHoST-RAP will serve to formalize and operationalize the PMRD approach into a well-defined, systematic, and replicable process that can be used to better understand a myriad of offenders and their nominal enterprises.

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Applied behavioral science research has been successfully used in the forensic arena to develop theories and training modalities for the express purpose of informing practice. This focus differs from broader, general research, which emphasizes empirical study purely for the sake of knowledge expansion or development of academic theories. Applied research aims to provide assistance to practitioners in the form of strategic and tactical deliverables, which can be directly applied to their professional activities such as: trend data, case studies, indicators of violence, checklists, threat matrices, and communication strategies. This type of research can be anecdotal or empirical, quantitative or qualitative, or a hybrid. Traditionally, applied research has relied on the context of each particular research question to drive the methodology utilized. These multiple research endeavors have highlighted steps necessary to conduct an effective investigation into perpetrator motivations. Further, the need for a more operationalized, empirical approach that could be utilized for this type of research has become evident. The Perpetrator-Motive Research Design (PMRD) was established as a research methodology to encompass all phases of this type of research.

1. Historical background

Since its inception in 1972 at the FBI Academy in Quantico, Virginia, the FBI's Behavioral Science Unit (BSU) has effectively utilized PMRD methodology in seminal research on a wide range of criminal offenders, most notably serial killers (Ressler, Burgess, & Douglas, 1992), serial rapists (Hazelwood & Burgess, 2001), child molesters (Lanning, 2010), cop killers, juveniles who kill, arsonists (Rider, 1980), spies, and cybercriminals. These research activities have systematically analyzed perpetrator motivations and used findings to develop behavioral typologies. Such efforts have led to the design of tactics and procedures (e.g., use of victimology, crime scene analysis and interpretation, behavioral profiles of unknown offenders) that continue to have considerable value in solving violent crimes and criminal apprehension.

Examples of the early application of PMRD methodology are the pioneering efforts of Roy Hazelwood and his colleagues at BSU (Hazelwood & Burgess, 2001) in the early 1980s, which focused on serial rapists. Incarcerated perpetrators of sexual assault were interviewed at length concerning their motivations, which yielded data attesting to the role of power and anger as primary motivations for this offense behavior. Specifically, power motivation was the basis for the behavior of those offenders who targeted victims based on the perception of them being helpless, defenseless, vulnerable, or unable to resist. By contrast, anger motivation characterized those perpetrators who targeted victims primarily for physical, sexual, or verbal abuse. Hazelwood developed a spectrum classification for perpetrator

behavior, which included Power-Reassurance (fantasy of consent), Power-Assertion (sense of entitlement), Anger-Retaliatio (revenge), and Anger-Excitation (sadism). These findings have subsequently been disseminated to law enforcement agencies worldwide, resulting in enhanced interviews, interrogations, criminal investigations, and implementation of prevention measures (Hazelwood & Burgess, 2001).

The Global Hostage-Taking Research and Analysis Project (GHoST-RAP), developed more recently at BSU, employs a similar approach to studying the motivations of hostage-takers. This involves an updated research design, and a systematic evaluation strategy which yields two major benefits: (1) to provide law enforcement, military, and intelligence agencies with an empirically-driven foundation for supporting and improving work in their respective domains on the problem of global captive-taking; and (2) to assist in establishing a systematic methodology for conducting this type of research with violent offenders.

2. Global captive-taking

Global captive-taking is a significant domestic and international security problem that affects the interests of the United States both domestically and internationally. In addition, captive-taking presents a clear and present danger to those involved in law enforcement, diplomatic, military, and intelligence efforts in both their daily missions, and in the global war on terror. Captive-taking occurs in many forms and locales, including: terrorist, insurgent, border, home, school, workplace, correctional, and state-sponsored (e.g., Booth, Van Hasselt & Vecchi, 2011; Booth, Vecchi, Finney, Van Hasselt & Romano, 2009; Daniels, Royster, & Vecchi, 2007; Van Hasselt et al., 2005). Indeed, global captive-taking is conceptualized and organized based on the various contexts in which it occurs. The first major division occurs between domestic and international environments. The domestic environment involves captive-taking on two levels based on known motivations where the captive is held for instrumental or expressive reasons. Captives held for instrumental reasons are termed "hostages" and are held as leverage in order to influence a third party (e.g., families, law enforcement, political organizations). Those held for expressive reasons are termed "victims", and are held as an object of distaste by the perpetrator, usually with the intent to avoid third party interactions or negotiations. Domestic captive-taking almost always necessitates a law enforcement response (Van Hasselt et al., 2005).

International environments involve captive-taking on only one level based on expected motivations where the captive is held for instrumental reasons as a hostage. International captive-taking is handled, in part, by the United States law enforcement, intelligence community, and military,

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