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## **Overview: An Exploration of Serial Killings And Serial Killers**

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### **Abstract**

The crime of murder is prevalent in our society since time immemorial and research done by scholars also shows that ancient murder has been located in Rome and moved on to different parts of the world. One of the most intriguing and terrifying subjects in the field of criminology is "Serial Killers". Over the years scholars have studied the phenomenon of serial murder and the modus operandi of serial killers, their motivation, and how they are different from normal killers. Serial Killing also seems to be something that we only hear and see in the movie theatre or a thriller crime book. This research article will examine the definition of serial killers, the characteristics of serial killers, and how psychological and sociological factors influence them.

**Keywords:** Serial killers, Factors influencing serial killers, historical evidence of ancient murder, Modus Operandi of serial killers, Motivation for serial killers.

### **Introduction**

Everyone gets fascinated with movies and books on serial killers which is clearly evident by tv shows like "Dexter", and "The Fall", movies like "The perfume" and songs like "The Ripper". Serial killers have operated throughout the world. Serial killers are people who are dangerous in nature and murder people for fun and sometimes they have a motive for that but finding that motive is elusive as they are beyond the control of their cognitive abilities and are under an irresistible impulse and abnormal psychological gratification. There is

no fixed definition of serial killers as different jurisdiction has different criteria for identifying serial killers. But a general definition that is agreed by all is that "People who murder three or more people over a period of time in a brutal manner and have a cooling off period between each murder" is called a Serial killer. Fantasy is one of the most crucial elements of a serial killer's life, as serial killers are not only pushed to kill by their thought patterns but are instigated to murder by an intrusive fantasy life.

#### **A. Factors Influencing Serial Killers**

Various theories discuss the factors influencing serial killers to commit heinous serial murders these theories range from psychological factors to socio-economic factors.

1. **Psychological Factor:** From a psychological perspective, serial killers are individuals who engage in repetitive acts of homicide, typically targeting strangers for their own gratification. There is no one-size-fits-all explanation for why people become serial killers, but there are several theories that attempt to explain the underlying psychological factors that contribute to this behavior. One prominent theory is that serial killers may have suffered from some form of abuse or neglect during childhood. This may have included physical or sexual abuse, emotional neglect, or abandonment. Such experiences can lead to feelings of anger, resentment, and a desire for power and control over others, which may manifest in violent

behavior later in life. Another theory suggests that serial killers may have a personality disorder, such as antisocial personality disorder or psychopathy. People with these conditions tend to lack empathy and remorse, have a grandiose sense of self-importance, and engage in impulsive and sometimes reckless behavior. This combination of traits can lead them to engage in violent and criminal behavior. It is also possible that some serial killers suffer from a form of psychosis, such as schizophrenia. This condition can lead to delusions and hallucinations that may cause them to act out violently. Finally, some researchers have suggested that certain environmental factors, such as exposure to violence or trauma, may contribute to the development of serial killer behavior.

2. Sociological Factor: There are a variety of sociological factors that may influence an individual to become a serial killer. Some of these factors include:

- Childhood abuse and neglect: Serial killers are more likely to have experienced abuse or neglect during their childhood. This can include physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, as well as neglect by caregivers.
- Social isolation: Serial killers often experience social isolation, meaning they lack social connections and support systems. This can lead to feelings of loneliness and alienation, which can contribute to violent behavior.
- Mental illness: Many serial killers have been diagnosed with a mental illness, such as antisocial personality disorder or schizophrenia. These disorders can affect an individual's ability to form relationships and make them more likely to engage in violent behavior.

- Social learning: Some experts believe that serial killing may be a learned behavior, meaning that an individual may learn violent behavior from their environment or the people around them. For example, a child who grows up in a violent household may learn that violence is an acceptable way to resolve conflict.

- Cultural factors: Cultural factors, such as societal norms and values, may also play a role in influencing an individual to become a serial killer. For example, a culture that glorifies violence or places a high value on individualism may contribute to violent behavior.

B. Thought and Actions Patterns of Serial Killers  
From various studies that had been conducted, it is now possible to identify the thought and action patterns of serial killers which are divided into "five phases" and are repeated in a circular process.

- "Distorted Thinking Phase": "It is the psychological stage common to all serial killers. The subject is unable to properly assess the impact of a deviant act, as he fails to consider the consequences and is more interested in the emotional gratification that can result from his actions".
- "Motivational Phrase": "A single event or set of events, which are real or imagined, because of the transition to this stage. The impetus is perceived as something personal, and the subject feels the need to physically offload and begins the process of hunting his prey/victim".
- "Inner Negative Answer Phase": "At this point, the serial killer has to deal with feelings of deficiency, especially when there are negative messages from the society that surrounds him. And to remove that feeling the killer uses the means he knows best: domination, control, and violence".

- “External Negative Response Phase”: “This element helps the subject to confirm his superiority as a person. There is no kind of interest in the possible consequences of his criminal actions. The behavior has the objective of increasing and stabilizing the sense of power”.
- “The Restoration Phase”: “This phase restores the balance that the subject had at the beginning of the process. Once back in this state of mind, the serial killer reflects on previously ignored dangerous consequences, realizing that his technique needs to be improved by choosing the victims properly and dealing with where to leave the bodies so that they are found easily. The killer also thinks about how to minimize personal risks in upcoming murders”.

#### C. Various Types of Serial Killers

As with any other things, there has been classification of serial killers into four categories based on the aim of the killings. These categories are made so that serial killers can be easily identified to which category they fall into and it will help law enforcement agencies to understand the motive of the serial killer and how to catch him or her. The four categories are as follows:

- Hedonistic Killers: As the name suggests this type of serial killer kills people for the thrill of killing, evading the police. They want media attention on them and send their message through the media. They keep organized records of their killings also, it is seen that thrill-seeker serial killers usually use weapons or rape their victims before killing them. After killing a victim they hide the body and move on to the next victim and they also want law enforcement to find the body hidden by them.
- Mission-Oriented Killers: These are individuals who feel compelled to kill in order to rid the world of a particular type

of person or group. The most common target groups of these killers are women, drug dealers, prostitutes, and homosexuals. All the murders committed by them are organized in nature. This type of killers are easiest to catch due to their selection of certain groups for killings.

- Visionary Killers: These are killers who believe that they are acting on the orders of a higher power or hearing voices that tell them to kill. They feel they are getting compelled to do the killings or they fear they will face dire consequences. Past records show that the higher order seen or heard by them is either the god or the devil. Their killings are unorganized in nature as they kill people whenever they listen or see the higher authority commanding them to do so.
- Power and Control Killers: These are individuals who derive pleasure from the control and domination they have over their victims. They enjoy agony, pain, and intimidation from their victims. Research shows that this type of killer has faced childhood abuse and was timid in nature but as time passed they wanted to feel power and control and become this type of killer and it is also known that they rape their victims without any lust.

#### D. Provision Of Serial Killing In IPC

The concept of serial killers and killings is absent in the provision of the “India Penal Code(IPC)” the only section that deals with this type of crime are section “299”, section “300”, and section “84”.

3. Section 299: “Whoever causes death by doing an act with the intention of causing death, or with the intention of causing such bodily injury as is likely to cause death, or with the knowledge that he is likely by such act to cause death, commits the offense of culpable homicide”.

4. Section 300: “Except in the cases hereinafter excepted, culpable homicide is

murder, if the act by which the death is caused is done with the intention of causing death, or If it is done with the intention of causing such bodily injury as the offender knows to be likely to cause the death of the person to whom the harm is caused, or If it is done with the intention of causing bodily injury to any person and the bodily injury intended to be inflicted is sufficient in the ordinary course of nature to cause death, or If the person committing the act knows that it is so imminently dangerous that it must, in all probability, cause death or such bodily injury as is likely to cause death, and commits such act without any excuse for incurring the risk of causing death or such injury as aforesaid”.

5. Section 84: “Nothing is an offense which is done by a person who, at the time of doing it, by reason of unsoundness of mind, is incapable of knowing the nature of the act, or that he is doing what is either wrong or contrary to law”.

E. Most Dangerous Serial Killers Of All Time

- “Ted Bundy - Active in the 1970s, Bundy was known for his charm and good looks, which he used to lure young women to their deaths. He confessed to killing at least 30 people across several states”.
- “Jeffrey Dahmer - Known as the “Milwaukee Cannibal,” Dahmer was convicted of killing 17 young men and boys between 1978 and 1991. He also committed acts of necrophilia and cannibalism”.
- “John Wayne Gacy - Also known as the “Killer Clown,” Gacy was convicted of killing 33 young men and boys in the 1970s. He buried many of his victims in the crawl space beneath his home”.
- “Gary Ridgway - Known as the “Green River Killer,” Ridgway was convicted of killing 49 women in Washington state in the 1980s and 1990s”.
- “Andrei Chikatilo - Dubbed the “Butcher of Rostov,” Chikatilo was convicted of killing at least 52 women and children in the Soviet

Union between 1978 and 1990. He was known for mutilating his victims' bodies”.

- “Dennis Rader - Also known as the “BTK Killer” (short for “Bind, Torture, Kill”), Rader killed 10 people in Kansas between 1974 and 1991. He sent letters taunting police and newspapers during his killing spree”.
- “Pedro Lopez - Known as the “Monster of the Andes,” Lopez was convicted of killing over 300 young girls in South America in the 1970s”.
- “Richard Ramirez - Known as the “Night Stalker,” Ramirez was convicted of killing 13 people in California in the mid-1980s. He was known for breaking into people's homes and terrorizing them before killing them”.
- “Albert Fish - Active in the early 1900s, Fish was known for his sadism and cannibalism. He confessed to killing three children and was suspected of many more”.
- “Harold Shipman - A British doctor, Shipman was convicted of killing 15 patients in the 1990s. He is suspected of killing over 200 people during his medical career”.
- “Robert Hansen - Known as the “Butcher Baker,” Hansen was convicted of killing at least 17 women in Alaska between 1971 and 1983. He would abduct his victims, rape them, and then release them into the wilderness to hunt like animals”.
- “Ed Gein - Active in the 1950s, Gein was known for his gruesome acts of murder and body snatching. He inspired the character of Norman Bates in the book and movie “Psycho.”
- “Aileen Wuornos - A sex worker and serial killer, Wuornos was convicted of killing seven men in Florida between 1989 and 1990. She claimed that all of her victims had either raped or attempted to rape her”.

### Conclusion

The concept of serial killing and serial killers continues to baffle psychologist, researchers, and law enforcement agencies no one is able to understand fully the mind of serial killers and how is it work. Many profiles of serial killers are made to find a pattern in their minds still it is a

work in progress and we will know the results in the future, the one field that can really help in this niche of a concept is “forensic science”. It's also important to throw some light on the other research on serial killers which mainly focuses on the childhood development of the serial killer but many serial killers have been found with a normal childhood which concludes the fact that all serial killers are not born out of dysfunctional childhood. Hence, my recommendation will be to also focus on the events of adolescence and adulthood in the life of serial killers to find out the reasons and risk factors.

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