

Psychology of Child Serial Killer

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Introduction

Serial murder is one type of homicide which involves the killing of three or more people for one month and is characterized by a period of cooling off. The cooling-off period is a time whereby the killers do not commit any murder (Knight, 2006, p. 1192). The people who commit serial murder are known as serial killers. The crime is not recognized in the United States., as there is no current legal code on it. In the history of serial killing, the earliest recorded case of serial killers was in 69 CE in the Roman Empire. The serial killer by the name Locusta was executed for poisoning individuals from the royal family. In the middle ages, there were serial killers recorded in European countries (Vronsky, 2018, p. 15). It has likely been occurring in other parts of the world, though it might not be recorded. Research has attempted to suggest explanations of the behavior of serial killers and provide an analysis of their personal development (Ostrosky & Alfredo, 2017, p. 70). There are two types of serial killers, such as child and adult serial killers, in essence (Harmening, 2014, p. 102). A great number of theories has been developed to address their actions. Most serial killers have psychological issues, and it is through killing that they feel satisfied. History has introduced many serial killers, who are adults, but in recent decades the cases connected with children, who are serial killers, are becoming frequent. They are dangerous, just like the adults, as they indicate the same psychological behavior (Knight, 2006, p. 1198).

Types of Serial Killers

Hedonistic Serial Killers

These are serial killers, who receive pleasure from killing, and thus the experience of murder gives them pleasure. There is a strong link between the violence of the murder and the

sexual gratification. They can have sex with the victim before or after killing the victim (James & Proulx, 2014, p. 595). They plan their crime well, and they dismember the body of the victim after the murder. They have an insatiable hunger when they feel that it could be satisfied only by killing. An example of a serial killer of this category is Jeffrey Dahmer, who was a serial killer in the period between 1978 and 1991 (Ostrosky & Alfredo, 2017, p. 77).

Power and Control Serial Killers

These serial killers need to exercise their power and control the victim. They first humiliate the victim, torture, and then kill their victim. They do not respect the law of the land, and they feel that they are above the law. They also seek sexual gratification. Their main goal is to gain power and domination, and thus killing makes them feel powerful and in control. Anyone they feel to be threatening to them is killed as they assert dominance (Vronsky, 2018, p. 49).

Visionary Serial Killers

The serial killers in this category are considered psychotic, as their visions and other dark forces compel them to commit murder. Whoever these voices and visions tell them to kill; these killers go ahead and kill them. Some of them have undertaken psychiatric tests, which proved their being mentally unstable. Some of this type of serial killers are possessed by evil forces, which drive them to kill.

Mission-Oriented Serial Killers

These are considered as ordinary persons, and they kill a particular group of people. They may focus on killing people from a specific religion, social class, or race. Their goal is to eliminate the group or exterminate as many of its members as possible. An example of these serial killers is Joseph Paul Franklin, who killed young black males, because they had white girlfriends (Vronsky, 2018, p. 78).

Characteristics of Serial Killers

There are numerous characteristics of serial killers, and these are some of them. First, serial killers indicate varying levels of psychopathy, which leads to destructive tendencies. They are mostly categorized in the type of visionary serial killers. They see things and forces which compel them to kill certain people or group of people. After their action, psychotic serial killers are gratified and do not show any remorse. In normal circumstances, they are charming and brilliant. Psychiatrists have identified that these people can be dangerous because people will not know if they are vulnerable until they become victims of their psychopathic actions. (Ostrosky & Alfredo, 2017, p. 73). The second characteristic is that when they were young, most serial killers were abused in the family. The abuse might have been emotional, physical, and sexual. This abuse causes them to be bitter and sometimes seek revenge by killing people (Knight, 2006, p. 1194).

The other characteristic of serial killers is that they are aroused by the activity, and they find pleasure in the action. Another aspect is that some of them experience one or all the Macdonald triad predictors of future violent behavior. The Macdonald triad predictors are a fascination with fire-setting, involvement in sadistic actions, and bed-wetting (Seltzer, 2013, p. 112). The serial killers were isolated during their childhood and teenage years. This isolation involved bullying, and the person is seeking to prove that no one can bully him or her since he or she has grown up. Some of the serial killers' targets are people who bullied them or showed particular behavior associated with bullying (Carlisle, 2017, p. 17). Some other characteristics are that the serial killers might have been involved in petty crimes, and they had trouble staying employed (Ostrosky & Alfredo, 2017, p.81).

Psychological of Child Serial Killer: The Drive and Motivation

The mental changes that stimulate a child to become a killer originate in the mind. The fantasy to kill is the idea conceived in the mind, and the first victim creates a cyclical mechanism. A cyclical mechanism is an addiction, and in the brain it creates the circular mental process which prompts the person to execute more murders to satisfy his or her fantasy. In mind, the mental images created need to be repeated. The primary drive which prompts the brain is the creations of imagination (Malizia, 2017, p. 45).

For example, if a person was abused and feels rejected by family or isolated by society, the fantasy of killing would occupy his imagination. The image of killing gives pleasure in the mind of a child. The child then replaces the reality in his life with what he has imagined, and this gives the potential killer something new to change his past (Seltzer, 2013, p. 112). The fantasy of having killed someone gives him or her a misguided opportunity to change his or her past and anticipates a better future. Both children and adults, who have created this fantasy, have the potential to kill. The imaginative process gives the person gratification to substitute his unhappy life experiences. The satisfaction originating from the activity cannot be obtained from any other event, but only killing (Malizia, 2017, p. 46).

The child plans every detail in the fantasy. In the imagination, he or she is choosing the victim and the manner of the execution of the crime. Further, he or she establishes the relationship with the victim of the crime. There are some fantasies of sexual perversions, as the majority of serial killers have utilized paraphilia in their murder execution. Before execution, the criminal places himself in the imagination, and then chooses methods in which to assert control and dominance over the victim during execution (James & Jean, 2014, p. 599).

After the formation of this fantasy in mind, any negative emotion can initiate the child to act and commit murder and gain enjoyment in the act. Although in most cases the serial killers are adults, children have also proved to be serial killers. The imagination and creation of killing fantasy begin when children are old enough to imagine anything. According to environmental and family context, in which the children are growing; they have different fantasies and imaginations. If the child grows in a family, where violence or any other abuse is common practice, they will take refuge in the imagination of how they could be living in other conditions or how they can change it (Malizia, 2017, p. 47).

The imagination creates a fantasy on how the child can dominate over other people. These fantasies reach a peak, and then it is time to act. After killing the first time, the cyclical mechanism occurs in the brain whereby the child repeats the killing to have the pleasurable experience he or she felt the first time. The murder period of another victim will depend on the emotional necessity originating from the new fantasies. All serial killers, regardless of their killing motive, have the psychological issue with creating fantasies, which they execute. Some of these fantasies are fueled by observing violence in videos, so the person becomes obsessed with replacing the realities with imaginations from the movies. The execution is triggered when the child feels hurt by others either physically, or emotionally, and decides to exert control by murdering.

A child serial killer differs from an adult in that his or her fantasies are developed as mechanisms in defense of existing traumatic realities that he or she is denying and not accepting. In the case of an adult serial killer, he or she relives the childhood traumatic experiences, but since they are not a victim now, they become the aggressors. The child becomes a serial killer when imaginations and entertaining fantasies are staying just fantasies, not impressing or

satisfying him or her anymore, so he or she decides to embody their fantasies into reality (Miller, 2014, p. 7).

Psychology of Child Serial Killer: Thought Processes

The thought processes are in five phases, and they are circular.

Distorted Thinking

This psychological phase is occurring when the serial killer does not think about the rationality of his or her actions. The subject fails to consider the consequences of the actions he is going to take. He or she does not see the action as the one, which is directed against the law and human morality; and all he or she wants is to enjoy the moment and the emotional gratification from the incident. For a rational human being, the thought of killing another person is quickly brushed off after weighing the consequences of the deviant act. The mind of serial killer is filled with fantasies, and there is no place and time for rational thinking. This thinking places the killer in the center of every action, thus, he or she feels that control over the situation and the consequences (Malizia, 2017, p. 48)

The Motivational Phase

This phase is a thought-processing phase whereby the killer feels the need to act physically. It is the stage, where the subject transfers the fantasies in mind to realities. This phase is initiated by events, which might be real or imagined. The distortion in thinking of the killer turns the event as the reason why he should act.

An instance is a child, who has grown up in an abusive home, where relatives have sexually abused him. This child entertains himself or herself by thoughts of dominance over a victim, first sexually abusing the victim and then killing him or her. Then, the abuser comes and abuses the child, and the act of abuse motivates him or her. The response is to handle the

situation by going to abuse a victim sexually and kill. The motivation phase drives the subject to look for the potential victim, which matches his fantasies (Williams, 2017, p. 378).

The Inner Negative Answer Phase

The negative messages in society make him have feelings of inadequacy. A child feels the need to strengthen his sense of identity and does this, using all the means he or she knows. These means are violence, domination, and control. An example is when the sexually abused child sees how society treats victims of abuse. He knows he is abused, but does not know how to deal with the situation positively, hence, opts for violence. He feels that through violence and domination, he will adequate, getting a sense of identity. There are numerous options for him to respond to his feeling of inadequacy. However, having fantasies on violence to exert domination, he opts for it as the better option (James & Jean, 2014, p. 601).

The External Negative Response Phase

The thought processes are that he does not view his plans to kill as a criminal act. He feels superior, and this feeling from his fantasies eclipses any criminality and the consequences of his actions. The fantasies originate from his feelings of powerlessness, and it is through them that he finds a solution to reaffirm his power and control over human beings. The possibility of him being caught is not a deterrent. The possibility of a death sentence does not hold him back. All he wants is to enact the violence in the way it has been planned in his imagination. He or she feels that this action will increase his power so he would be able to control everyone. This phase is closely linked to the distorted thinking phase. He thinks that external negative responses will affirm his power. His or her crime will help the society recognize his identity and power (Reid, 2017, p. 298)

The Restoration Phase

This phase is the process that occurs after the serial killer has executed a murder. The balance of thinking is restored, whereby the killer gets to evaluate the risks of his act. He further plans in detail how to hide the bodies of his victims. This phase can be said to be the imagination stage which occurs after the murder, and the killers are working on improving the way he can commit the crimes. The improvement involves how to deal with victims, how to choose them properly, and where to hide their bodies. The phase consists of working on personal safety. After this thought process, the emotional necessity to gratify by killing starts again, and the cyclical thought process goes back to the distorted thinking phase (Malizia, 2017, p. 48).

Psychology of Child Serial Killer: Biological Predisposition

A serial killer acts like a normal human being. The question is, why then does he commit such horrible acts? Child serial killers have been studied to have a certain biological predisposition. Their brain system shows deficits, such as having a low level of frustration, and, thus, they are predisposed to violence (Pustilnik, 2009). The volatility of their brain to frustrations indicates that any stressors trigger them to violence, which they view as the best way to respond to situations. The problem with the brain structure is that it is not able to adapt to challenges of everyday life, and in the long run it causes loneliness. The normal human brain is adaptive to changes and struggles of daily life. In cases where people feel that they are threatened, the normal human brain may be stressed, but when the events and situations cannot be handled properly, they positively adapt to the changes. The serial killer brain cannot adapt, but it is prone to imaginations and fantasies, which satisfy him (Miller, 2014, p. 3).

The fantasies are the criminal activities, which the normal brain structure will repel, as it will apply rationality to making decisions. The biological predisposition of the subject brain does

not view this as criminal activities but looking at them as actions which will satisfy his fantasies (Raine, 2009). The imaginations press the serial killer to execute them, and the brain feels that after execution everything will turn up to be better or improved. After the first murder, the biological predisposition of the brain will force these people to kill another victim. After some time of calmness, the brain sends an impulse to commit the act again, demanding the satisfaction. This period of calmness is described as the "cooling off" period. This time the brain relives fantasies of the murder, and when the relived experience does not satisfy the person anymore, he or she has to commit another new murder. This cyclical mechanism of brain fantasies and murder actions produce a serial killer (Malizia, 2017, p.50).

Psychology of Child Serial Killer: Behavioral Elements

There are behavioral elements of serial killers, which give rise to their murderous deeds, which are sequential. The first element is the imagination. Imagination is the creation of fantasies, which the subject finds to be satisfying for his needs. The imagination develops to a point where the actions are aggressive. The subject becomes dependent on the criminal acts he commits, as they feed his imagination (Keatley, Golightly, Shephard, Yaksic, Reidpage, 2018, p. 9). The existence of symbolism is another behavioral element of a serial killer. In most cases, killer keeps items, which belonged to his or her victim, after the murder. They play the role of a reminder of the action, so they are involved in the process of satisfying fantasies of the killer. The child serial killer communicates with others through serial murder. In some serial killings, the subject even takes photos of himself with the victim's corpse. These pictures are symbolic in the way that they are used for the killer's emotional gratification (Keatley et al., 2018, p. 10).

Then there is a behavioral element of ritualism. The killer has already developed a plan on how to execute the murder. There is a pattern the killer has created in his imagination, and it

is the pattern which will be repeated in every murder that he commits. An example is a serial killer who follows a specific pattern in tracking the victim or leaves messages with the victim's blood on the wall. This pattern might appear abnormal to investigators, but it is a ritual that represents the victim thinking processes. The other element of behavior is compulsion (Reid, 2017, p. 296). This behavior is fueled by internal desires of the killer and the need to satisfy those desires. Serial murders' investigations have revealed that the first murder is done with gentleness, but as the killer progresses with other murders, he or she is becoming more brutal. This increase in brutality is the serial killer's need for more violence in his actions. The high level of violence is an expression of his psychological needs (Seltzer, 2013, p. 187).

Psychology of Child Serial Killer: The Phases to Serial Murder Execution

The Motivational Phase

This phase is the initial phase of the serial killer, as it represents the source of the behavior to kill. There are primary motivations and secondary motivations. The primary motivations are physiological needs of the individual, and his desire to feed them. The secondary motivations are complex behaviors, such as the desire to control others and the environment, in which the killer lives. This phase includes all the thought processes, which determine that the current situation in which the subject is living is terrible, so there is a need to address the situation. The killer perceives that the environment and all its forces (human beings inclusive) are against him, and thus he has to respond to the negative environment (Malizia, 2017, p. 52).

The Criminal Fantasy Phase

The subject develops fantasies after perceiving that situations and people are all against him. The fantasies are on how to respond to the situation. However, due to the brain complexities, killer, not possessing an ability to positive adaptation to current conditions, is

producing fantasies. His or her fantasies promote the idea to exert control over others through violence, and they see as the best way raping and killing. The sex fantasy creates a desirable method of sexually manipulating their victims and then killing them. The serial killer finds comfort in these fantasies, and that is why most of them take a long time in imaginations (Ryan, Willmott, Sherretts, Kielkiewicz, 2017, p. 2).

The Mental Anticipation of the Effects Phase

The subject in his mind anticipates the consequences of his actions. They commit crimes, and they anticipate their outcomes. In carrying out a murder, they mostly expect control over the individual or strengthening their self-esteem. The serial killer wants the crime to achieve an atmosphere where he is in control (Malizia, 2017, p. 52).

The Design Phase

This phase involves balances of the actions and consequences, and making the selection of the individual. The subject plans who he is going to kill, when he or she will do this, and methods to kill the target. If there are challenges in undertaking the murder, the killer will have to change his plans. However, there is a preconceived murder pattern and method in the brain, and that is what he incorporates in his design (Miller, 2014, p. 6).

The Execution Phase

This phase is connected with embodiment of killer's motivations and plans, which, when fulfilled, are signifying that murderer got success in exerting control over another human being. The sensations, produced by the act, determine whether the person will continue murdering or not.

The Satisfaction Phase

The subject is emotionally gratified. The execution of another murder is depending on numerous factors. The experiences of the first murder will determine, if he undertakes another. Sometimes, if the killing of a single person satisfied his needs, the subject would not commit another crime. However, a single murder may meet his inner needs, and, after a while, the pattern of killing is repeated. This person develops to being a serial killer, so it will be a cyclical pattern, meant to feed his mental fantasies (Reid, 2017, p. 301).

Socio-Environmental Factors and Making of Serial Killers

The Socio-Environmental Factors

There are social factors which affect the behavior of serial killers. The family, being the basic unit of society, is determinant of if a child will become a serial killer. The family needs to provide love and empathy and develop a whole person, who has a balanced personality. However, some families are dysfunctional, and they develop individuals who grow up to be serial killers. Children are exposed to traumas in the family and later in life they exhibit criminal tendencies. The other socio-environmental factor is society. Children in their growth, who feel isolated by the community, might develop deviant behavior. The gatherings, organized by society, most of these children do not attend, as they are bored with them, moreover, they feel excluded. They develop dislike for members of the community and activities, which results in fantasies to exert dominance on the situation (Stone, 2001, p. 12).

There are triggering events, which are typical to other individuals, but for the serial killers, it is the trigger that begins their criminal fantasies, which later develop to aggressive behavior. The event might be the abandonment by a loved one, which might trigger this person to violent actions. There is also the social factor of sub-cultures existing in a society. Children

might grow up in a criminal environment where the child is taught how to kill. These subcultures have a massive influence on their members, so some members of the society are seen as a target to their violence.

An example is an adolescent criminal gang, which targets law enforcement officers. When one of the members becomes a serial killer, the target victims will mostly be police officers (Ryan et al., 2017, p. 2). Some of the killers are influenced by parents, who are criminals or belong to criminal entities. The children are recruited by being taught to hate those who are not part of the criminal gang. The other socio-environment factor is the response of the perceived environment. After the first act of defiance, the way the society treats the child determines his future involvement in criminal activities (Malizia, 2017, p. 54).

The Individual Factor

These individual factors are the personal traits and the characteristics, which are causing a predisposal to acts of violence. Psychological aspects are an essential trait, which determines the behavior of an individual. If the child displays forms of mental illness and psychotic behaviors, he can easily be influenced and become a serial killer. Some people have a predisposition to evil, and they engage in activities that are meant to harm others. The sexuality of a person is another individual factor. During the period of child's development, the sexual fantasies determine the adult behavior, which is likely to be exhibited by the child. If the child has developed sexual pervasiveness, he would like to display the trait, that's why he becomes a potential serial killer in order to feed his sexual fantasies (Malizia, 2017, p. 55).

An imaginative life is an individual factor, which also determines if the child is a potential serial killer. They use fantasy to develop plans for the murder of another person, which is the central point of a serial killer. He or she builds imagination where the victims are treated as

objects. Most serial killers are motivated by murder, and some do not even justify why they should kill (Stone, 2001, p. 10). The ability to process trauma is an essential individual factor in determining a serial killer. The brain of human beings reacts differently to trauma. Serial killers handle shocks in a different way, which involves trying to exert influence on the individual, who caused the trauma. In other cases, the subject cannot find the ways of dealing with stress, and after the creation of fantasies in the brain, he opts for murder.

The Relational Factor

The serial killer does not know how to communicate with others. He or she does not have the mental capacity to decide what to do and the consequences they might face. They are distorted in thinking, and their actions are to impress their fantasies at the expense of human life. They do not have empathy on the loss of life or situations which will make others cringe with fear. They do not know how to spend time with others, but prefer to stay in loneliness. They communicate with themselves through the fantasies they create, and they listen more to their imaginative thinking than they listen to society and the consequences of their actions (Miller, 2014, p. 8).

The communication between the child and the family is crucial in his or her development. If the parents keep demeaning their child, it compromises the development of positive personality. Another relational factor is how the child communicates with their friends, and for adults how they communicate with sexual partners. Abandonment by friends creates humiliation, and when they cannot accept the refusal, they become angry and seek revenge (Stone, 2001, p. 10). They also relate to society by maintaining friendships, which hide their murderous plans. However, these relationships are superficial as the subject cannot treat other people as equals with the same feelings. The way the individual relates to acts of violence is also essential. If the

child enjoys acts of violence meted upon others, he may in the future commit murder crimes as justifiable means of solving a problem. However, the relation of an individual to abuse is determined by how often and the level of violence when he/she is a child (Malizia, 2017, p. 56).

Conclusion

Child serial killers and adult serial killers exhibit similar characteristics. The fear of death, which normal persons have is absent in serial killers. They enjoy the act of killing, which gives them emotional gratification. They are attracted to kill, as they gain pleasure from the action. In their early childhood, they exhibit one or all the behaviors of the MacDonald triad. The psychological activities are analyzed from the drive of the killer to the phases of execution. The need begins from the mental fantasies created by the lone individuals. The killers transition these fantasies to realities, and they create a cyclical mechanism of their behavior. This cyclical mechanism of thought processes ends up with the action of killing, thus makes a serial killer. Their biological disposition of the brain is that they cannot adapt to traumatic events, or events others view as usual challenges in life. They perceive the events as threats and their need to respond to them and fulfill their mental fantasies. The psychological predispositions to murder are aggravated by environmental factors, which can be classified as social, individual, and relational. The environmental factors are triggers to the serial killers to execute their fantasies, and one murder, when repeated, turns the person to become a serial killer.

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