SEXUAL HOMICIDE

Getting Away with Murder: A Thematic Approach to Detection Avoidance in Sexual Homicides

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Introduction

Studies of sexual homicide most often examine factors that distinguish or predict the emergence of sexual *murderers*, rather than the incidence of sexual *murders.* However, when police and crime scene investigators begin their investigation of a sexual homicide case, they generally do not know who committed the crime; therefore, they are unable to apply known relationships about offender-specific traits. Yet, what *is* always known at the scene of any sexual homicide is the collection of relevant crime scene factors. There is very little research examining types of sexual homicides from a perspective that does not require knowledge of the offender's identity and, thus, can be of aid to investigators before a suspect has been detected. The current study hopes to fill this gap.

Methods

To address the above issues, the current study examines crime scene factors of 350 sexual homicides using ViCLAS (Violent Crime Linkage Analysis System) data and latent class analyses to determine offense types. A theme approach is most compatible with this research due to the interrelatedness of many crime scene factors. What is of most use to police is not how each variable is related to some outcome but, rather, how to better investigate a sexual homicide as a whole, using knowledge of complete crime types. This is then followed by an examination of those cases that, as yet, remain unsolved to determine the types of offenses that result in an unsolved case status and that, arguably, have been more problematic and challenging for police investigators to solve.

Results

Results suggest that there are three classes of sexual homicide: the Sloppy/Reckless type; the Violent/Sadistic type; and the Forensically Aware type. These distinct categories appear to arise due to differing priorities of the offenders who commit these types of crimes. Sloppy/Reckless offenses are committed with the major focus being sex, Violent/Sadistic offenses revolve around the use of violence and torture within the offense, and Forensically Aware offenses are committed with detection avoidance as the main priority. Within the unsolved sample, there exist two distinct classes: the Forensically Aware type and the Not Forensically Aware (Lucky) type. While it was expected that Forensically Aware offenders would be more likely to "get away" with their crime, the most intriguing category is the "Lucky" offense type, which includes sloppy, unplanned, and unsophisticated sexual homicides, yet the offenders still manage to elude law enforcement.

Implications

The current results could aid in police investigations of sexual homicides by allowing the almost immediate determination of the type of offense just by looking at observable crime scene factors. Determining the type of offense could help investigators get an idea of what to look for during their investigation and at the crime scene (e.g., evidence of sex versus violence). If the offense is thought to be a Forensically Aware crime, this would likely require more police work, as these are the offenses least likely to be cleared by police. In such cases, law enforcement must stay ahead of the criminals and must not discount the power of circumstantial evidence.

Sexual Homicide: A Comparison between Sexual Murders and Rapists in Scotland

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The NHS Lothian Serious Offender Liaison Service provides specialist psychological/psychiatric consultation to help criminal justice agencies manage serious offenders with personality disorders and/or paraphilias. Over the last six years the clinicians in the service have assessed 50 sexual offenders who have killed or attempted to kill their victims. These cases have been compared with 75 non-homicidal sexual offenders looking at the following variables: demographic data, offending history, psychiatric history, psychiatric diagnosis, personality disorders, psychopathy, actuarial and structured professional judgement risk assessment (Risk Matrix 2000 and Risk for Sexual Violence Protocol), behavioural ratings of sexual deviance (Screening Scale for Pedophilic Interests and the Sexual Sadism Scale). Homicidal sexual offenders were older, tended to have adult female victims, had higher rates of personality disorders (particularly narcissistic and schizoid), were more psychopathic (particularly with respect to factor 1 of the PCL-R) and were more sadistic. These results will be discussed in the context of similar studies from other jurisdictions; and the implications and the implications for the assessment and management of sexual offenders will be outlined.