Understanding the Crime-Comission Process in Sexual Homicide

Symposium Chair: Eric Beauregard, Ph.D.

Despite its continued declining rate (James & Proulx, 2014), sexual homicide continues to attract a lot of attention from the public and the different actors of the criminal justice system. Even academics have been fascinated with homicides of a sexual nature. However, very few empirical studies have been conducted on this particular form of sexual crime. Due in part to the low frequency of sexual homicide, most of the empirical work suffers from small sample sizes, which jeopardizes the generalizability of the findings (Beauregard & Martineau 2012). Another difficulty related to the study of sexual homicide is that this crime constitutes a "hybrid" offense. This raises the question of whether sexual murderers should be considered as murderers, sex offenders, or both. In fact, the research published thus far has highlighted two opposite hypotheses concerning sexual murderers. According to the "distinct offender" hypothesis, these offenders almost exclusively kill their victims and exhibit a lethal intent by the choice of their offending behavior. However, according to the "differential outcome" hypothesis, some sex offenders present diverse lethality levels, suggesting that they may end up killing their victims when certain situational factors are present (e.g., weapon availability; Healey, Beauregard, Beech, & Vettor 2014).

This debate about the distinctiveness of sexual murderers is crucial to a better understanding of this particular sexual offense. In order to comprehend what leads some sex offenders to kill their victims, it is necessary to carefully examine their offending behaviors, as well as compare the sex offenders who kill (i.e., sexual murderers) with sex offenders who, despite being very violent, do not end up killing their victims. The aim of this symposium is to present an investigation of the crime-commission process involved in sexual homicide from three different perspectives using three different types of data. The first paper looks at crime scene behaviors in a sample of Scottish sexual murderers and distinguishes three themes of sexual homicide. The second paper uses a comparative perspective and focuses on how routine activities may explain the choice of a child versus adult victim in a sample of 350 cases of sexual homicide. Finally, the third paper uses official and interview data on sex offenders and examines how psychological (e.g., persistent deviant fantasies, low self-esteem, impulsive personality) and situational (e.g., anger, weapon, victim resistance) factors may lead a sex offender to kill his victim. All three papers will discuss practical and clinical implications.
Crime Scene Behaviours in Scottish Sexual Homicide

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This paper will present the results of analysis of the crime scene behaviours of 51 Scottish sexual homicide perpetrators. Data were gathered from interviews with offenders and records (police, court, prison, social work and mental health). The behaviours are compared to those from samples in other jurisdictions, showing that the Scottish cases are similar to cases from other countries. Crime scene behaviours were analysed using Smallest Space Analysis (SSA), and the themes that emerged were 'sadism', 'rage' and 'criminal'. Crime scene behavioural themes were then analysed in relation to offender characteristics to see if crime scene behavioural themes correlated with specific clinical, situational and background characteristics of offenders.

Goals for the Paper:
1. Describe the characteristics and crime scene behaviours of Scottish sexual killers.
2. Compare the crime scene behaviours to those from samples in other jurisdictions.
3. Ascertain the underlying behavioural themes of these crime scene behaviours.

Understanding Sexual Homicide of Children: A Routine Activity Approach

Eric Beauregard, Ph.D.

According to Felson (1986), “people make choices, but they cannot choose the choices available to them. Nor they can be sure what chain of events will follow from their choices, including choices made by others” (p. 119). This illustrates perfectly the difficulty in understanding the choice of targets involved in different crimes and how the choice of target will influence the actions of the offender. Although most victims of sexual homicide are adult women, some offenders specifically target children. Moreover, it appears that depending on the type of victim, sexual murderers will act differently during the criminal event.

Some have hypothesized that sexual murderers targeting children were different from offenders targeting adult women (e.g., Spehr, Hill, Habermann, Briken, & Berner, 2010). However, others (e.g., Beauregard, Stone, Proulx, & Michaud, 2008) did not find many offender differences, suggesting that both types of offenders were similar. Instead, they found differences as to the choices made to commit the offense, which could be explained through a routine activity perspective (Cohen & Felson, 1979). Therefore, using a sample of 350 cases of sexual homicide from Canada, the aim of the study is to further test these two hypotheses by comparing a group of sexual murderers of children ($N = 79$) and a group of
sexual murderers of adults \((N = 271)\) on a number of indicators related to the offenders and their routine activities.

Results show that sexual murderers of children and sexual murderers of adults present more similarities than differences. However, when examining routine activity indicators, it appears that both groups are different. For instance, sexual murderers of children are more likely to target a victim who is living with an adult, either at home or outside on the street. Child victims are also more likely to be beaten and strangled by the offender. As to sexual murderers of adults, they are more likely to target a victim of thin build who abuses drugs and/or alcohol. Moreover, they are more likely to remain undetected, to stab the victim, and to leave the body in a residence after the murder. Results are discussed in light of routine activity theory and specific measures for situational crime prevention are suggested.

Goals of the Paper:
1. Providing an overview of the differences between different groups of sexual murderers.
2. Providing a better understanding of the differences and similarities between sexual murderers of children and adults as to their characteristics and their routine activities.

Impulsivity, Crime Scene Behaviors, and Deviant Sexual Interests in Sexual Murderers

Jay Healey, Ph.D.
Eric Beauregard, Ph.D.
Jean Proulx, Ph.D.

There are a lack of theoretical models attempting to explain sexual homicide (Arrigo & Purcell, 2001; Burgess et al., 1986; Hickey, 1997). There have been even fewer attempts to explain sexual homicide using mainstream criminological concepts such as impulsivity (Delisi, 2014). Impulsivity is both theoretically and clinically relevant to the understanding of sexual homicide. Several researchers have hypothesized that a subset of sexual murderers, historically described in the empirical literature as highly structured, organized, and driven by a deviant sexual interests to kill their victim(s), would be highly controlled and lack significant amounts of impulsivity. This high level of control permits the murder to carefully plan and execute his crime while avoiding detection. Using the crime scene behaviors of a sample of violent sexual offenders who have either physically injured or killed their victim \(n=229\), the current study investigates the impact of impulsivity on sexual homicide while controlling for crime scene behaviors, deviant sexual interests, and low self-
estem. Low levels of impulsivity, selection of a specific victim, and deviant sexual interests were strongly associated with sexual homicide. The results suggest that a subset of sexual murderers have strong deviant sexual interests, choose victims based on those interests, and exhibit high levels of control presumably to carry out their crimes and express these deviant interests. The clinical implications of the findings will be discussed.

Goals for the Paper:
1. Continued isolation of theoretically relevant factors associated with sexual murderers who have deviant sexual interests.
2. Determine whether impulsivity independently contributes to sexual homicide, while controlling for crime scene behaviors and deviant sexual interests.
3. Discuss the clinical implications of impulsivity and the effects it has on the understanding of sexual homicide.