When the Type of Victim Sheds Light on the Sexual Murderer’s Profile

Jonathan James, Ph.D. Candidate
University of Montreal

Jean Proulx, Ph.D.
University of Montreal

Eric Beauregard, Ph.D.
Simon Fraser University

While empirical research on sexual murderers has intensified over the last decade (36 studies between 2005 and 2015), only four studies have rigorously distinguished sexual murderers on the basis of the sex and age of the murder victims (Greenall & Richardson, 2014; Greenall & Wright, 2015; Healey, Lussier, & Beauregard, 2012; Proulx, Beauregard, Cusson, & Nicole, 2007). Previous studies have demonstrated that sexual murderers of children (Beauregard, Stone, Proulx, & Michaud, 2008; Firestone, Bradford, Greenberg, Larose, 1998; Firestone, Bradford, Greenberg, Larose, & Curry, 1998; Firestone, Bradford, Greenberg, & Nunes, 2000), sexual murderers of men (Beauregard & Proulx, 2007), and sexual murderers of women (Beauregard & Proulx, 2002) differ in their pattern of childhood victimization, developmental pathway, criminal career, and modus operandi (precrime, percrime, postcrime).

The objective of this study was to compare the developmental pathway, general and sexual lifestyle, and modus operandi of the three groups of sexual murderers. Information on 88 sexual murderers (sexual murderers of children: n = 11; sexual murderers of men: n = 12; sexual murderers of women: n = 65) incarcerated in Quebec (Canada) was collected by two criminologists. Each participant was evaluated using several psychometric instruments. Information on childhood and adolescence characteristics, sexual and general lifestyle, precrime and postcrime factors, and modus operandi was collected during a semi-structured interview based on the Computerized Sex Offenders Questionnaire (St-Yves, Proulx, & McKibben, 1994). Bivariate analyses ($X^2$ et ANOVA) were used to identify and compare the most salient characteristics of each group of sexual murderers.

Sexual murderers of children were characterized by intrafamilial sexual victimization in childhood (i.e. incest) and by deviant sexuality in both adolescence (i.e. work as a prostitute) and adulthood (paraphilias, hands-off sexual offences). These participants reported feeling rejected and abandoned, and reported having experienced negative emotions (i.e. sadness, depression) prior to their murders. Their crimes were planned and took place in the daytime, and they hid the body of their victim. Sexual murderers of men were characterized by extrafamilial childhood victimization and by internal (nightmares) and external (angry temperament) problems in childhood. They reported feeling rejected and abandoned, and having had a conflictual relationship with their victim. Their crime was shaped by feelings of injustice (a “they deserved it” cognitive distortion). Their crime was impulsive, their approach was coercive (i.e. involved a weapon), and they performed a
variety of sexual acts (e.g. fellatio, masturbation) on the victim, who was intoxicated (drugs, alcohol) during the crime. Sexual murderers of women were characterized by a wide range of internal and external problems in childhood (e.g. daydreaming, chronic lying, social isolation, drinking). In the year and the 48 hours preceding their crime, they felt unvalued. Typically, they were hostile towards women, and their anger was exacerbated by precrime consumption of alcohol. Their crime was impulsive, their approach coercive, and their anger, which persisted through the crime, drive them to use excessive violence to neutralize the victim. They did not hide the body of the victim.

These results suggest that the age and sex of the victim may be markers of the heterogeneity of sexual murderers. While the modus operandi of sexual murderers of children was shaped by depressive affects and feelings of rejection, that of sexual murderers of men was shaped by feelings of injustice, and that of sexual murderers of women was by intense anger towards women and society. The forensic and theoretical implications of these results will be discussed.

Goals of the Poster Presentation:

1. Compare the characteristics of different groups of sexual murderers (sexual murderers of children, sexual murderers of men, and sexual murderers of women).
2. Provide a better understanding of the heterogeneous nature of sexual murderers.
3. Determine the impact of immediate precursors to the crime in each group of sexual murderer.