Sexual homicide: Case study and literature review

ΔΗΜΟΚΡΙΤΕΙΟ ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΟ ΘΡΑΚΗΣ
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Sexual homicides consist of two key components: (a.) the homicide of a person and (b.) the sexual behavior of the perpetrator. Sexual behavior may occur prior to, during and/or after the homicide. It may be comprised of sexual fantasies, sexual arousal, masturbation, actual penetration, and may even be symbolically expressed through genital mutilation of the victim. The scope of sexual homicide involves numerous parameters to investigate, such as crime-scene patterns, modus operandi, the profile of the sexual homicide offender (SHO) (motive inferences, psychiatric diagnoses, sociodemographic data, history), the victim selection (demographic characteristics, offender-victim interactions) as well as the method of killing.

The purpose of this presentation is to discuss a case of sexual murder involving rape, genital mutilation and human incineration and recap relevant literature on sexual homicide.

MATERIAL AND METHODS: 185 articles were reviewed and evaluated from 1886 up to December 2018 via electronic data bases. Numerous limitations regarding research exist. The major issue encountered in the literature is the lack of homogeneity in study samples.

RESULTS: **INCIDENCE:** The incidence of the phenomenon is imprecise (1-4%) due to non-standardized, still evolving criteria and definitions.

DEMOGRAPHIC STATISTICS: Most offenders (in their first kill) and victims are in their late 20s to early 30s and belong to Caucasian populations. More specifically:

OFFENDERS: The majority of sexual killers are white men (72.3% Caucasians), while women account for only 5% of the FBI databases. Offenders' mean age is 26.9 years. One in nine is under the age of 18 at the time of the first murder.

Marital status: 27.1% in a relationship / marriage; 25.3% parents with children. *Educational level:* Although sexual murderers have an average cognitive ability, they are also of a low educational and occupational status. The incidence of those unemployed was 29.5 percent, and only 0.6 percent had a university degree at the time of the crime.

VICTIMS: The majority are female (80.2%), adults (70%) and their mean age is 28.3 years. Majority of victims: Caucasian. Adult women who are under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs are more often targeted as victims, probably due to greater vulnerability.

PERPETRATOR-VICTIM RELATIONSHIPS: Strangers 60.5%; acquaintances 23%; spouses/ex-spouses 2.6%. The sexual partners of sexual murderers seldom become their victims.

(1) Chan HCO. **Understanding sexual homicide offenders: An integrated approach.** Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan;2015.
(2) Kerr KJ, Beech AR, Murphy D. **Sexual homicide: Definition, motivation and comparison with other forms of sexual offending.** *Aggress Violent Behav.* 2013;18:1–10. (3) Karakasi MV, Vasilikos E, Voultsos P, Vlachaki A, Pavlidis P. **Sexual homicide: Brief review of the literature and case report involving rape, genital mutilation and human arson.** *J Forensic Leg Med.* 2017 Feb;46:1-10.

MOTIVATION: The key motivations of sexual homicide as identified by most empirical studies are: (a.) deviant sexual gratification; (b.) resentment towards women; (c.) avoidance of incarceration.

PSYCHOPATHOLOGY: The majority of sexual homicide offenders (SHO) are non-psychotic at the time of the attack, but experience personality pathology, primitive defenses, pathological object relations, and withdrawal into fantasy in order to deal with social isolation. They are most frequently diagnosed with: mood disorders (especially depression), and drug and/or alcohol abuse disorders. Serial offenders have a higher prevalence of narcissistic, schizoid and/or obsessive-compulsive traits.

CASE REPORT: A mixed case of sexual homicide is described, during which a 34-year-old female victim was brutally raped and murdered by a 27-year-old male offender meeting the criteria for the sexually motivated, disorganized, anger profile, single-victim, sexual homicide perpetrator. The victim suffered multiple blows due to blunt force to the head, vaginal and anal sexual abuse as well as extensive laceration of the soft tissues between the genital and anal area, which resulted in massive bleeding. The SHO used the gasoline of a nearby parked motorbike as an accelerant for ignition. The victim was set in fire while still being alive and due to pain reflexes activated by arson, regained consciousness and started running in the site, while screaming. Her death resulted from multiple severe head injuries, profuse bleeding due to the genital and anal area mutilation as well as second- and third-degree thermal burns. The body was left in view at the death scene. The victim's face was disfigured due to thermal burns. A trophy was collected from the victim (her mobile phone). Subsequently, the offender behaved as normal, slept, opened his store as usual, and even showed interest in the progression of the case by attending the police investigation from across the street. The incident reflected remarkable violence and rage in the hideous sexual torture that the victim suffered while being still alive and the fact that she was also burned to death. The findings of this case-study are consistent with the findings of the formerly conducted research studies summarized in the literature review. Criminal immolation is a very rare phenomenon recorded in the international forensic literature, and this is the only recorded incident that involves human arson in the context of sexual homicide.

CONCLUSION: Over the years, better-structured research studies yield increasingly valid and significant statistical results.