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Analogy of Profiling Male and Female Serial Killers

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Abstract: This paper explores the similarities and differences in the psychological profiles of male and female serial killers through gender aspects, analyzing causes, motives, and methods of crime. The introduction provides an overview of basic concepts, while the sections on definitions and causes of serial murder discuss incoherent aspects due to the flexibility of conceptual determination which affects the empirical understanding of serial murder, including key risk factors contributing to the development of serial killing behavior. The identification of psychological profiles by analogy separates the characteristics of male and female serial killers, focusing on their motivations, methods, and relationships with victims. The discussion includes a comparative analysis and results of individual studies, highlighting differences in profiling strategies between genders and summarizing findings related to serial murders. The conclusion synthesizes the main findings, emphasizing the importance of a gender-specific approach in profiling serial killers for more effective investigation and prevention of these severe crimes.

Keywords: *profiling, serial murder, male serial killers, female serial killers.*

Introduction

Human nature is extremely complex and as such has no limitations. It has the adaptive quality to shape, build, and be driven. Its role is crucial in the lives of human beings, as it drives the flow of human thoughts and activities, providing support in everyday life decisions. One of the disturbing characteristics of today's society, full of contradictions, is the intensity of psychodynamics and the escalation of violence in all forms, in which anyone can become a victim due to the transformation of "ordinary" individuals who induce criminal behavior in a direct or indirect manner. This points to the need for a more comprehensive understanding of human nature, emotional, and psychological dimensions of violence, and the clear tendency towards the brutalization of this phenomenon (Bjelajac, 2023: 25). Human nature is determined by a series of natural, striking characteristics, which include ways of thinking, feeling, and acting, as products of our inherited or innate traits and our individual experiences gained in the environment in which we exist. The fact is that most people always adhere to social norms, as rules of behavior in the society that establishes them. Since these norms are directed towards human consciousness and will, yet do not allow a person to satisfy their needs, human nature is oriented towards greed, callousness, immorality, ruthlessness, or destructiveness, and often to inherent evil, which leads to various criminal activities. In fact, crime arises because the deceptive nature of human nature, which is full of inconsistencies, comes to the fore (Bjelajac, 2023: 25-26). Consequently, by murdering a human being, a fundamental and inalienable human right - the right to life - is taken away. Such an act, which annuls all other aspects of human existence, is considered the gravest crime, which is legally, morally, and broadly speaking, socially unacceptable. This unacceptability is reflected not only through the act of taking someone's life but also through the immense suffering and pain of family, friends, and acquaintances, as well as the disruption of trust, security, and harmony in community life. Although murder is simply defined as an act in which one person causes the death of another, the term "murder" can also be "neutral" as a general concept.

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"Murders can be "justified" or involve criminal liability, depending on the circumstances of the murder and the mental state of the killer. Suppose a falling meteor strikes a person on the head and kills them. Such a death is not murder. The victim is certainly dead, but the cause of death is not the act of another person. Suppose someone gets lost in the woods in winter, falls unconscious in the snow, and is eaten by wolves. The victim is dead, but the death is not murder because it was not caused by the act of another human being. Suppose a person is walking down the street, suffers a heart attack, and dies. The heart attack victim is dead, but the death is not murder because it was not caused by the act of another human being" (The Law of Homicide, Appendix 101: 125). Therefore, to unambiguously classify someone's death as murder, we must establish credible facts that a human being was alive, and that their death was caused by the act of another human being(s). Otherwise, if the act of another person is absent, the death cannot be treated as murder. Moreover, among the different types of murders, criminal justice systems make important distinctions, and penalties are measured depending on the form of guilt (intentional or negligent), the killer's intent, or the danger of the killer's behavior and the circumstances of the act.

Among murderers, in addition to mass murderers (who often have terrorist, religious, ethnic, and political motives) (Zirojević, Bjelajac, 2013), and/or so-called "contract killers," a particularly notable category is that of serial killers. These are individuals who exhibit specific patterns of behavior, having committed three or more murders over a certain period of time, with "cooling off" intervals between crimes. They are characterized by cold-bloodedness, brutality, manipulativeness, a desire for dominance, and a complete lack of empathy. Their crimes are severe and predominantly motivated by deep psychological drives, with a history of abuse and backgrounds of various childhood traumas, personality disorders, or sadistic impulses. The crimes of this type always attract significant attention from the mass media, which further contributes to a sense of fear, unease, and general frustration in society.

Ultimately, it is questionable to assume that the profile of serial killers is traditionally associated with men. Indeed, the tragic history of crime, supported by numerous studies, shows that women are also capable of committing such severe criminal acts. However, it is indisputable that female serial killers are a rarer occurrence compared to their male counterparts. Their motivations, psychological characteristics, and modus operandi generally differ from those of male serial killers. This paper focuses on the analogy of profiling male and female serial killers, analyzing their key characteristics, motives, methods, and psychological factors that contribute to such acts, which reflect the destructive nature of human beings. Additionally, we highlight the concept of criminal profiling as an important component of criminal investigation, most often associated with investigations of serial crimes, primarily serial murders. This concept has proven effective especially in complex cases where the perpetrator is not immediately known, and the creation of psychological profiles of individual serial killers has directed the investigation in the right direction and laid the foundation for collecting key forensic evidence that led to arrests.

Methodology

In the process of conducting descriptive research, we formalized the research questions in an adequate and concise manner to consider the perspective of identifying the psychological profiles of serial killers through gender aspects. We used qualitative research methods to perform elaboration and provide more detailed explanations, a more comprehensive and broader picture of the analogy of profiling male and female serial killers with distinctions and similarities. Through the method of comparative analysis, we discovered that the psychological profiles of male and female serial killers show significant similarities, but also key differences in motives, behavior patterns, and methods of killing. A deeper understanding of the psychological profile of serial killers can facilitate security experts, criminologists, criminalists, and psychologists in predicting and detecting possible risk factors and behavior patterns that can lead to these severe crimes. Through the skill of profiling, it is possible to more effectively view the motives and methods of these individuals, contributing to more efficient investigation and prevention of crimes.

Definition of Serial Murder

The phenomenon of serial killings is increasingly in the focus of mass media and within the realm of academic research interest. Claims by some authors (Jenkins, 1994), that the phenomenon of se-

rial killings is, in part, an exaggerated social construct, are debatable. Specifically, the estimation of the frequency and prevalence of serial killings is incoherent due to the flexibility of conceptual definitions, which affects the empirical understanding of serial murder. Holmes and DeBurger (Holmes, DeBurger, 1985) suggested that a significant increase in the incidence of serial killings could be the reason for many unsolved murders.

"Nevertheless, while the definition of serial murder is a social construct, the murders themselves are a real physical reality. Deciding which murders fall under the category of "serial murder" is a difficult process. At this point, it seems that there is no standard for making this distinction, either in the media or within scientific research. As a result, figures on the prevalence of serial murders can vary greatly, likely reflecting an individual's personal view of whether serial killing is common or unusual, rather than any objective reality. Establishing a specific definition of serial murder that demonstrates reliability would be the first step in standardizing reporting on prevalence statistics, as well as educating both criminal justice professionals and the public about what exactly is meant by "serial murder." At that point, although the definition of serial murder might still be socially constructed, at least it would be one definition, rather than many separate definitions that are used interchangeably" (Ferguson, et al., 2003). Multiple definitions of serial murder have been used for decades by criminal justice systems, crime prevention agencies, mass media, academic communities, and researchers. Generally, these definitions have shared some common elements but also differed in aspects such as the number of murders involved (variations from two to ten victims), the type of motivation, and the time frame in which the murders occur. Therefore, establishing one universal definition that would set absolute standards in this domain requires balancing all elements and focusing on the number of victims, separate events, time frame, including motivation and understanding the context of the behavior of serial killers.

In the Crime Classification Manual, Douglas, Burgess, Burgess, and Ressler define serial murder as "three or more separate events (murders) in three or more separate locations with a period of emotional cooling off between the murders" (Douglas, et al., 1992:21). "The period of emotional cooling off can last days, weeks, months, or years. This definition speaks to the timeframe in which the murders occur, distinguishing serial murder from other forms of multiple murders such as spree or mass murder. Although the specific number of victims mentioned in the definition may vary, the basis of this definition is generally common to most definitions of serial murder" (Ferguson, et al., 2003; Egger, 1984).

"In an effort to bridge the gap between the many views on issues related to serial killings, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) hosted a multidisciplinary symposium in San Antonio, Texas, from August 29, 2005, to September 2, 2005. The goal of the Symposium was to bring together a group of esteemed experts on serial murders from various fields and specialties to identify shared knowledge about serial murder. The five-day event was attended by a total of 135 experts in the field. Among these individuals were law enforcement officers who had successfully investigated and arrested serial killers; mental health experts, academics, and other specialists who had studied serial killers and shared their expertise through education and publishing; judicial officials who had judged, prosecuted, and defended serial killers; and media representatives who inform and educate the public when serial killers commit crimes. The attendees also reflected the international nature of the problem of serial killings, as there were participants from ten different countries across five continents" (Morton, Ed., 2005: 7). The initiated debates focused on important elements of the conceptual definition of serial murder, such as determining the number of murders that would constitute serial murder, as a clear criterion for initiating investigations. It was suggested that specifying a smaller number of victims would allow criminal investigation agencies more flexibility in allocating resources for potential investigative actions and capturing perpetrators. Essential distinctions were agreed upon that differentiate between serial murder (involving time separation between different murders - separate occasions, cooling-off period, and emotional cooling-off period) and mass murder (four or more murders that occurred during the same incident, without a specific time period between the murders - lack of a cooling-off period). Additionally, discussions about the motivational factor as an indispensable element in various definitions suggested that "motivation does not belong to the general definition, as it would make the definition too complex."

"Symposium participants reviewed previous definitions and extensively discussed the advantages and disadvantages of numerous variations. The consensus among Symposium participants was to create a simple, yet broad definition, designed primarily for use by law enforcement. Various discussion groups at the Symposium agreed on a number of similar factors that would be included in the definition.

This included: one or more offenders; two or more murdered victims; incidents should occur at separate events, at different times; the time period between murders separates serial murder from mass murder. Combining various ideas presented at the symposium, the following definition emerged: Serial murder is the unlawful killing of two or more victims by the same offender/offenders in separate events" (Morton, Ed., 2005: 9). The question is whether such a simple definition of serial murder confirms the limitation of defining serial murder in the context of lack of consensus and uniformity (Keeney, Heide, 1994), which is continuously present in the research literature, making it difficult for criminal enforcement agencies and the criminal justice system to create a more effective response in identification, investigative procedures, and adjudication in these complex and challenging cases.

Causality and the Serial Murderer

"After the arrest of a serial killer, the question always arises: How did this person become a serial killer? The answer lies in the development of the individual from birth to adulthood. Specifically, the behavior a person exhibits is influenced by life experiences, as well as certain biological factors. Serial killers, like all human beings, are a product of their heritage, their upbringing, and the choices they make during their development" (Morton, Ed., 2005: 11). "Every person has their own developmental path, the characteristics of which can often be identified at a very early age. The developmental perspective views the life course of all people as following a path (or trajectory) that may be filled with risk factors. Some risk factors can be described as experiences that are common in the background of many offenders, such as failure in school, alcohol abuse, antisocial peers, or victimization in childhood. Some experts believe that the more a person is exposed to risk, the more likely they are to engage in antisocial behavior throughout their life" (Wasserman, Seracini, 2001). We must understand that the life paths of adult and juvenile offenders can be different and unpredictable. Some lead to serious delinquency and crime that includes the most severe offenses, while others lead to milder forms of juvenile delinquency that disappear as an unpleasant experience after leaving the complex period of adolescence.

Researchers around the world, over a long period of time, continuously and vigorously study risk factors for criminal behavior. Of course, as in all areas of scientific endeavor, there are certain disagreements and differences in the interpretation of the phenomenology and etiology of a phenomenon. In this domain, there is absolute consensus expressed in the view that there is no single path to delinquent behavior, and it is notable that the presence of several risk factors significantly increases the chances of young people engaging in criminal behavior. Numerous studies also indicate a complex interaction of individual factors and a multiplicative effect when several risk factors are present (Bjelajac, 2023: 81). Bjelajac (2023) in his monograph *The Origin of Criminal Behavior* highlights the complex combination of risk factors at the interface of individual – family - interpersonal relations – society, which accumulates the risk of violence among youth. He suggests the following factors:

- **Social Environment Risk Factors**: Socioeconomic status, preschool experiences, educational failure and school absenteeism, quality of after-school care, peer rejection, and association with antisocial peers, among others, can be strong predictors of general delinquency.
- **Parent and Family-Related Risk Factors**: Dysfunctional family, broken home, parenting styles and practices in child-rearing, parental supervision, parental alcohol and substance abuse, sibling influence, parental psychopathology, neglect, and abuse, among others, indicate the crucial role of these factors in predicting criminal behavior.
- **Psychological Risk Factors**: These include personality traits, comorbid psychiatric conditions, value judgments and cognition, affective components, and motivation. Their interactive effects produce varying levels of antisocial states and problematic behaviors. **Attachment Disorder**—a condition affecting mood or behavior that makes it difficult for individuals to form and maintain relationships with others—may be influenced by risk factors such as caregivers with poor parenting skills, parental neglect, and emotional or physical or sexual abuse; parental anger; parents with psychiatric conditions; prenatal exposure to alcohol or drugs. Exposed children may suffer from behavioral disorders, a lack or absence of empathy—which is the ability to understand and share the feelings of others. They may also experience other disorders, such as cognitive-communication disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and oppositional defiant disorder.

- **Biological Factors**: There is evidence of a genetic predisposition for the development of serial killers. Genetic testing holds a promising future for studies on criminals, but there is compelling evidence of a combination of genetic, environmental, and behavioral factors that contribute to serial killing (Jarrett, Jarrett, 2023). These factors suggest inherent, hereditary, organic, physiological, and other biological functions that condition delinquent behavior in certain individuals. Within the context of antisocial behavior, two categories of genetic research are emphasized: behavioral genetics and molecular genetics. The predisposition for criminal behavior includes psychophysiological risk factors—such as temperament; environmental risk factors (neurotoxins, exposure to nicotine, alcohol, and drugs, traumatic brain injuries, brain developmental abnormalities, brain plasticity (neuroplasticity), hormones, and neurotransmitters); neuropsychological factors—with impulsivity being one of the leading personality risk factors for criminal behavior.
- **Learning and Situational Factors:** In the context of the origins of criminal behavior. Imitative aspects of social learning in the context of the imitation of criminal models. Frustration: characteristics, causes, and consequences. The role of frustration in criminal behavior. Situational determinants of criminal behavior.
- **Psychopathy, Mental Disorders, and Criminal Behavior:** Numerous psychiatric disorders and neuropsychological conditions may be associated with criminal behavior, aggression, and violence. Among these, psychopathy deserves special attention due to its high prevalence in the population and its interactions with persistent and continuous patterns of aggressive and violent behavior. Additionally, it is a reality that people with mental disorders can develop patterns of criminal behavior, suggesting that certain disorders may be risk factors for specific types of criminal acts.
- **Latent Risk Factors for the Development of Criminal Behavior:** This primarily refers to the contradictory role of mass media, particularly the internet, which represents a hypermedia environment (Bjelajac, Filipović 2020), oscillating between social responsibility and destruction. The destructive aspect is reflected in the influence of mass media on individuals' propensity toward drug abuse (Bjelajac, Matijašević, Počuča, 2012), violence, deviant behavior, and delinquency, which embodies an antisocial influence. Various criminal content featuring serial killers, drug dealers, terrorists, violent offenders, mafia members, thieves, fraudsters, pedophiles, pimps, prostitutes, and human traffickers provides a raw portrayal of certain criminal endeavors and depicts the actors committing social offenses with extensive violence. Simultaneously, it presents an image of the lavish lifestyle and power of criminals, suggesting to gullible viewers that criminal behavior can be profitable. Latent risk factors also include phenomena of alienation and dehumanization (the inability to respond to alienation). Namely, the sense of alienation between individuals can lead to various community issues, increase symptoms of mental and physical disorders, and heighten involvement in criminal activities.

"Thus, there is no single cause or factor that leads to the development of a serial killer. On the contrary, there are numerous factors that contribute to their development. The most significant factor is the personal decision of the serial killer in choosing to engage in their crimes. There were several additional observations regarding causality" (Morton, Ed., 2005: 11-12):

- The predisposition for serial killing, as well as other violent crimes, is of biological, social, and psychological nature and is not limited to any specific characteristic or trait;
- The development of a serial killer involves a combination of these factors, which coexist in rare combinations in certain individuals. They have an appropriate biological predisposition, shaped by their psychological makeup, present at a critical moment in their social development;
- There are no specific combinations of traits or characteristics that distinguish serial killers from other violent offenders;
- There is no generic pattern for a serial killer;
- Serial killers are driven by their own unique motives or reasons;
- Serial killers are not limited to any specific demographic group, such as gender, age, race, or religion;
- Most serial killers who are sexually motivated have eroticized violence during their development. For them, violence and sexual pleasure are inexplicably intertwined in their psyche;
- More research is needed to identify the specific developmental pathways that produce serial killers.

Identification of Psychological Profiles of Serial Killers by Gender Aspects

Working on the psychological profile of serial killers is highly complex and requires specific skills (Bjelajac, Banović, 2024) to overcome numerous difficulties due to the inability to form a universal profile**.** In this context, some of the key challenges include: the complexity of motives and behaviors; the arbitrariness of conclusions and the incompleteness of empirical research; gender differences in terms of motives, methods, and patterns; limited knowledge of etiology and developmental psychology; obstacles in identification and apprehension; a tendency toward lying and manipulation; a delicate combination of personality disorders; characteristics of organized serial killers; characteristics of disorganized serial killers; and the flexibility and dynamism of profiles. Additionally, sensationalism in the media and social perception generate stereotypes about serial killers, such as the beliefs that: all serial killers are dysfunctional loners; they are predominantly white males; they are motivated by sexual urges; they lack defined geographical areas of operation; they cannot control their urge to kill; they are either completely insane or evil geniuses; and they subconsciously want to be caught. These challenges complicate the creation of accurate psychological profiles of serial killers and require a holistic approach that considers many variables. The combination of psychology, criminology, and social analysis aids investigators in developing better profiles, but each profile remains adaptable and largely dependent on the specific characteristics of each individual killer.

"The first stage of analyzing the personality of a serial killer is the assessment of the case, of the victim, of the details from the crime scene and building the general psychological image of a person capable of killing in that specific way by drawing out the unique features of the victim and crime mode. The first question of psychological investigation is the assessment of the organizational typology of the crime scene and killer. One important feature is the victim and crime scene aspect, as they are the first elements to talk about the way a murderer thinks. The psychopath is usually well organized with clean crime scene, certain modalities of killing, with no additional or unneeded lesions, with certain objects placed as statements of his message or emotional involvement or the scene chosen to transmit a certain characteristic about himself. This is the reflexion of a planned murder which means the killer has critical judgment, intelligence and patience and he often does not leave much clues as he is aware of the severity of the act he commits and the importance of not being caught " (Knight, 2006; Heghes, Schiopu, 2021)**.** "The psychotic is usually not organized at all and the characteristic of a psychopathologic murder is usually the disorder of the scene and the aspect of the victim that add up to the image of impulsive, not planned, chaotic act with no emotional control. Crime scenes are usually exceptionally bloody and victims present much more violent aggression marks and deadly injuries are extreme, targeting the head or the heart, which reflects the direct intention but without clean and planned motivation. The problem about the last type of murder is that the lack of control of impulses can belong in the same time to a person with a psychiatric condition and lack of discernment, in a period of crisis (acute psychotic state) or it can also belong to somebody emotionally or intimately involved with the victim, in which case, there are is no doubt of the presence of the discernment. Also, in some individuals, a first emotional crime is the first step and motivation in becoming a serial killer " (Knight, 2006; Heghes, Schiopu, 2021). "The second important feature within psychological investigation resides in the operational model of the killer which usually evolves as the crimes proceed and new elements may appear and the quality of the existing characteristics becomes more sophisticated but also, as the crimes proceed, the ego of the offender becomes more prominent and details about him or emotional details he wants to underline will appear more consistent. This element reflects directly the killer's intelligence but also his psycho-emotional disruptions. The psychological imbalance becomes more and more contrasting. In the first place, the fact that he isn't caught feeds his ego and motivates him into developing more elaborated criminal scenarios, defying the police and building more challenges for them in order to prevent future crimes. On the other hand, frustration and emotional disruption or absence of feelings still pushes him into the search for new victims that can satisfy and balance his inner self. In other words, the imbalance creates more imbalances, and some satisfaction don't completely fill the disruptions but only creates new ones" (Keppel, Birnes, 2003; Heghes, Schiopu, 2021). "The third constitutive element of the killer's profile is the imprint of the murderer's personality and emotional state. Serial murders are characterized by the uniqueness of the crime scene which is a personal choice of the killer and by the victim bodies which tend to be displayed in certain ways that de-personalizes them

as they become a statement for the killer's identity. These elements will form the killer's signature but tis signature evolve and change in the investigation course in order to confuse the inquiry or because the killer's psycho-emotional level is changing" (Pârvulescu, Butoi and Ștefan 2014; Heghes, Schiopu, 2021).

Disrupted connections between emotional regulation and action control are among the most prominent characteristics associated with serial killers. This often involves inconsistent emotional responses and extreme fluctuations between emotional states. (Butoi, Butoi, 2004: 385-389). "Social inadaptation represents a characteristic of extreme deviant behaviors. The social unadapted have roots in a disrupted familial and financial influence with low educational levels. In some cases, the first active symptom of social inadaptation is exactly the criminal offence as many of these individuals blame their difficulties on society or try to repair their problems by eliminating reflections of their trauma from the environment" (Marono, Reid, Yaksic and Keatley, 2020). "Affective immaturity is often another characteristic within serial killer and it resides in a cleavage within the cognitive and affective processes with a stronger proportion of the last. Emotional lack of maturity leads to psychological stiffness and disrupted reactions in order to obtain pleasure in a non-realistic mode. He is capable of intense reactions as a response to lowest level of affective stimuli in order to obtain sometimes, insignificant satisfactions. He is often incapable of self-criticism, of realistic analysis and he is inconsistent and ignorant about important problems" (Keatley, Golightly, Shephard, Yaksic and Reid 2021). "The most spectacular characteristic of serial killers consists in their duplicitous behavior capacity. Being extremely conscient of the severity of his intentions he is able to plan and calculate every step in order to hide his activity and his true nature which himself often despises. He needs an alter-ego that rise to his desires an expectation so he will make all the efforts necessary in order to become a social, honest and morally preoccupied person, the perfect friend and community member, basically he will be the last person anyone would point to in a case of crime. Also, there is a contrast between the 2 sides of a killer because his desires push him and isolates him so much from the society that he needs to get as closer as he can to the community and group acceptance as he can, so, he becomes split between 2 lives and 2 identities" (Duță, 2014).

"From a psychological point of view, the personality system is a complex interconnection of cognitive features, emotional elements, personal familial history and its imprint on the individual identity, social environment influences and intelligence structure. Personality is a psychological property of self that integrates an individual into his environment by projecting his character, attitude, impulses, behavior, emotions and thinking pattern in the outer world. Basically, the biological integrity and the brain function level are the bases for upcoming cognitive and emotional filters that will form a person's bio-psycho-social balance and construct his personality. It is a dynamic structure and never a passive, static characteristic. This is the foundation of the behavior sciences, including forensic psychiatry and psychology. In this matter there are 2 plans of assessment of personality, especially in the case of serial killers and those are the personality components and personality types each being formed on biologic, psychologic and social directions" (Knight, 2007). Some of the common psychological characteristics shared by male and female serial killers include:

- **Lack or absence of empathy and emotional connection:** Emotional coldness, indifference, emotional emptiness, alienation, impaired social interactions;
- **Personality disorder:** Antisocial personality disorder – difficulties in interpersonal relationships, work, partnerships, destructiveness and/or self-destructiveness, impulsivity, manipulativeness, and callousness, as well as an addiction to adrenaline. They may also have narcissistic personality disorder, characterized by an inflated sense of self-worth and uniqueness;
- **Traumatic childhood experiences:** Neglect, abandonment, psychological and physical abuse, and sexual abuse;
- **Sadistic tendencies:** Enjoyment in hurting and humiliating others, dominance over their victims, and a sense of power through their suffering;
- **Drive for control over victims:** A reaction to emotional deprivation, heightened sexual arousal, and devaluation of the victim. This may manifest in how they select, stalk, and kill their victims.
- **Ritualization of the crime through the repetition of certain actions**: Specific patterns in the way they commit murders. Each crime holds ritual elements and symbolism for the killer, which contributes to a sense of emotional fulfillment, stability, control, and enjoyment in the act;

- **High intelligence and manipulative abilities**: The ability to plan and emotionally manipulate. Many serial killers are superficially charming and attempt to show an understanding of human emotions to get closer to potential victims (Bjelajac, Filipović, 2022).
- **Obsessive fantasies and obsessions**: Including fantasies about killing, violence, and domination. It makes sense that many serial killers are voyeurs—they experience sexual gratification from secretly observing others and fantasizing about sexual acts;
- **Masked life and dual identity**: Most serial killers skillfully conceal their true identity, posing as ordinary community members, family people, dedicated to their wives, children, and their professions.

Motives for Murder	**Male Serial Killers**: Sadism and sexual gratification; Control and domination with a sense of power; Need for excitement – adrenaline addiction; Hatred and revenge; Financial gain.	**Female Serial Killers:** Financial gain (inheritance, life insurance payout, or victim's personal property); Personal and emotional revenge; Hidden sadism; Social or family environment (regaining control over their life, eliminating a "burden," or revenge due to poor relationships); Psychopathology and mental disorders (loss of sense of reality); "Angels of death."
Methods of Killing	**Male Serial Killers:** Physical violence (strangling, stabbing, suffocating, hanging); Sexually motivated violence with murder; Use of firearms (when contact with the victim is not a priority); Torture and sadistic methods; Body mutilation; Poisoning; Experimenting with the victim and specific "rituals."	**Female Serial Killers:** Use subtle methods; Poisoning; Suffocation or strangulation; Medications and overdosing; Starvation or neglect; Insulin and injections; Suffocation with a pillow or mechanical asphyxiation; "Quiet" killing through caregiving ("Angels of Death," e.g., nurses); Manipulation of unfortunate circumstances.
Attitude Toward Victims	**Male Serial Killers:** They choose unknown victims, strangers, or people on the social margins (homeless individuals, prostitutes) or those from vulnerable groups over whom they can demonstrate control and dominance; They typically have no emotional connection with their victims and view them as objects to fulfill their sadistic or sexual needs; They often use violence or intimidation as the primary method of controlling their victims; They are frequently driven by a sense of power and control over their victims, with the act of killing being the culmination of their sadistic fantasies; They are often more explicit and brutal, and their crimes may be more visible due to the violent methods they use.	**Female Serial Killers:** They choose victims from their close environment who trust them or depend on them; They often have an emotional connection with their victims or at least rationalize their crimes through this connection; They use trust as a means of manipulation, often developing long-term relationships with their victims; They are generally motivated by pragmatic reasons, such as financial gain or a sense of solving a problem; They are more inclined to use covert methods, killing in ways that make the deaths appear as natural or accidental.
Psychological Profiles and Personality Disorders	**Male Serial Killers:** They often display characteristics of antisocial personality disorder, psychopathy, and narcissistic personality disorder; They tend to be more impulsive and exhibit a greater degree of sadism and aggression.	**Female Serial Killers:** They display less pronounced antisocial personality disorder; They may exhibit characteristics of borderline personality disorder or Munchausen syndrome, through which they attempt to elicit attention or sympathy; They may show a tendency for manipulation and a "quiet" expression of control.
Repetition and Behavioral Pattern	**Male Serial Killers:** They often develop ritualized behavior patterns, repeating specific steps during each murder; They frequently have obsessive fantasies that they envision in advance and attempt to fulfill through their crimes.	**Female Serial Killers:** They are more likely to use a consistent method, often choosing a series of crimes that appear as accidents or natural deaths; This methodical approach helps them maintain the belief that they will avoid suspicion and capture.

Figure 1. An Analogy of the Similarities and Differences Between Male and Female Serial Killers

"Enough serial killers have a history of arson, preteen bedwetting, and torturing small animals that the traits are considered signs that someone might be a serial killer. This trio, known as the Macdonald triad, is not without controversy. Some argue these traits are more likely an indicator of neglect or abuse than of future serial killing. At the same time, abuse and neglect are in and of themselves said to be indicators of serial killing. Many of them are so pleased with their crimes that they can't help but tell others. Some even get caught because they told the wrong person! And then, when in jail, some killers are known to take credit for crimes that weren't even their own just to heighten their reputation" (Kharakh, 2017).

It is evident that male and female serial killers share some common psychological characteristics, but there are also significant differences reflected in their motives, methods, and behavioral patterns. Specifically, male serial killers tend to exhibit tendencies toward physical violence and sadistic methods, while females are more inclined to use subtler methods and are often driven by financial or emotional motives. Research suggests that female serial killers possess specific characteristics. The following analogy provides an overview of these similarities and differences:

Discussion

"It a known fact that serial killers are statistically more men than females. The main characteristic of the serial killers, the disruptive emotional state, is not something to characterize women but can be a psychological trait of males. Women are known for aggressive manifestation in extreme heightened emotional states and the victim is almost always someone from the intimate close group. Searching for strangers is not something women usually do as they need to affectively connect even in a negative way. Some studies suggest that this difference between criminal acts in males and females represents a remanence of pre-evolutive instinctual characteristics of the social models. Men had the role of the hunter in order to sustain the family and women were always close to the house, keeping it organized and affectively merged. This is one of the explanations for the instinctual psychological aspects of the two genres when involved in criminal activity" (Harrison, Hughes and Gott, 2019).

"Some studies have attempted to investigate and describe the demographic, behavioral, and background characteristics of female serial killers. A series of postulates about male serial murderers were developed after an extensive literature review. Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources on 14 female serial murderers in the United States. A preliminary profile of female serial murderers was then compared to the current knowledge of male serial murderers. Overall, there were generally more differences than similarities between male and female serial murderers. Results suggested differences in nine areas: victim damage, victim torture, weapon/method, stalking versus luring behaviors, crime scene organization, reasons for the murders, substance abuse history, psychiatric diagnosis, and household composition. Similarities appeared in five areas: broken homes, childhood abuse, race, educational level, and occupation" (Keeney, Heide, 1994).

"The book *Hunting Humans: An Encyclopedia of Modern Serial Killers* describes the lives and crimes of several hundred serial killers from the 20th century and summarizes findings related to serial killings. The narratives focus on 544 cases of serial murders, involving about 750 individual murderers and an estimated 5,336 to 6,368 victims. Seventy-four percent of the murderers were from the United States, where 85 percent were male, 8 percent were female, and the sex was undetermined in the cases in which the offender was still at large. In addition, 82 percent of American serial killers were white, 15 percent were black, and 2.5 percent were Hispanic. Eighty- seven percent operated alone, while 10 percent committed their crimes in pairs or groups. Some committed their crimes in specific geographic areas, while others traveled widely. Motives were often psychological, with strong sado-sexual overtones and evidence of compulsive behavior. Six percent of the cases involved greed. Since 1969, 8 percent of the cases involved practitioners of Satanism, while another 5 percent involved members of the medical profession" (Newton,1990).

Conclusion

Despite the limitations in defining serial murder, this article appears to have fulfilled its purpose in examining current trends and issues in the way serial murder is defined. It is particularly important that it

highlights a catalog of various risk factors that, in interaction, lead to these severe crimes and that may contribute to antisocial and violent behavior in serial killers, with an emphasis on how these factors may manifest differently in men and women.

This paper emphasizes the importance of differences and similarities in the psychological profiles of male and female serial killers, as well as the need for a gender-specific approach in profiling them. Research shows that male serial killers are primarily driven by motives such as domination, sexual sadism (although there are female serial killers with sexually motivated behavior, for example, **Aileen Wuornos** – an American serial killer who killed seven men between 1989 and 1990), and the need for control, which often manifests through openly violent and brutal methods such as physical assault, strangulation, or stabbing. On the other hand, female serial killers are more often motivated by pragmatic reasons, such as financial gain—for instance, the monetary benefit from murder (for example, **Belle Gunness** – a Norwegian-American serial killer who, at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, killed numerous husbands and lovers for financial gain), the elimination of perceived burdens, or a pseudo-maternal instinct, as in cases of so-called "care-based" murders. Their methods, such as poisoning and other subtle approaches, often allow these crimes to go unnoticed for extended periods (for example, **Ana Drakšin** – known as the "Banat Witch" or Grandma Anujka, is considered one of the first serial killers in Yugoslavia and is known worldwide. Grandma Anujka is accused of being involved in the poisoning of at least 50, and by some estimates up to 150 or more people).

In terms of the "subtle" approaches toward victims by female serial killers, the aspects of motives, methods of killing, and attitudes toward victims are difficult to discern and evaluate. Historically, some female serial killers have shown brutality comparable to their "male counterparts." For example: **Elizabeth Báthory** – a Hungarian countess from the 16th century, accused of murdering hundreds of young girls; **Juana Barraza** – known as "La Mataviejitas," a Mexican serial killer who targeted elderly women; **Judith Neelley** – who, together with her partner, committed brutal murders of teenagers in Alabama and Georgia in 1982. Her crimes included kidnapping, torture, and murder, ranking her among the most ruthless serial killers; **Carol Bundy** – partner of serial killer Douglas Clark, with whom she committed a series of murders in Los Angeles in the 1980s, which included sadistic acts; **Karla Homolka** – a Canadian serial killer who, along with her husband Paul Bernardo, committed the rape and murder of teenage girls in the early 1990s, including Karla's younger sister; **Leonarda Cianciulli** – an Italian serial killer known as the "Soap-Maker of Correggio," who used parts of her victims' bodies to make soap and cakes. These women, through their brutal acts, have left a profound mark on the complex dynamics of this phenomenon.

The analysis also indicates different behavioral patterns and attitudes toward victims. While male serial killers typically choose victims who are strangers, demonstrating a sense of complete domination and control over them, female serial killers are more likely to select people from their close environment, such as family members, partners, or patients, using manipulation and trust to gain access to their victims (for example, **Mary Ann Cotton** – a British serial killer from the 19th century who killed more than 20 people, including members of her family; **Nannie Doss** – an American serial killer known as "The Giggling Granny," responsible for the deaths of around a dozen family members during the 20th century; **Gwendolyn Graham** – together with her partner Catherine May Wood, committed a series of murders in a nursing home in Michigan during the 1980s. Both worked as nurses and claimed to kill as part of a twisted game related to emotions and control). These gender differences in victim selection and killing methods indicate that understanding the context, as well as a personalized approach to profiling, is crucial for the success of criminal investigations.

Considering gender aspects in profiling serial killers contributes to the accuracy and efficiency of identifying and tracking suspicious behaviors. A differentiated approach allows investigators and criminal psychology experts to adapt profiling methods to specific behavioral patterns and motives. This research indicates that it is essential to further develop gender-specific profiling methods to achieve more effective prevention and detection of serial killers, as well as to enhance the understanding of the psychological factors behind their crimes. Generally speaking, psychological factors that drive female serial killers include a low level or absence of empathy, a pathological need for attention and control, and emotional traumatic experiences from childhood. Many female serial killers have experienced abuse in early childhood—whether physical, emotional, or sexual—which may shape their later antisocial behavior. Some are driven by anger, a desire for power/excitement, while others are led to violent actions due to psychoses or severe mental states that may involve auditory and/or visual hallucinations and paranoid, grandiose,

or bizarre delusions.

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Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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