

A Cross-National Study of Sexual Murderers in France and Canada

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Abstract

Due to the inherent rarity of sexual homicide, most studies have been based on small samples, typically approximately 10 murderers (e.g. Langevin, Ben-Aron, Wright, Marchese, & Handy, 1988), although a few rare samples of hundreds of murderers have also been analysed (e.g. Stefanska, Carter, Higgs, Bishopp, & Beech, 2015). However, even in these cases, only a limited number of domains were considered (e.g. socio-demographics, modus operandi, victimology), and within these domains, only a limited number of factors and indicators were analysed. Furthermore, the small sample sizes have typically limited the analytical techniques available to researchers to case studies or descriptive and bivariate analyses. One strategy to overcoming these obstacles is the construction of cross-national samples of sexual murderers. A prerequisite for the construction

of such samples is the validation of the hypothesis that sexual murderers from different countries are sufficiently homogeneous to be merged into a single sample. To date, no empirical study has verified this hypothesis. Consequently, the aim of this study was to compare Canadian and French sexual murderers, in order to identify their similarities and differences. To this end, the developmental antecedents, general and sexual lifestyles, and precrime, crime and postcrime factors of 142 sexual murderers (French sexual murderers, n=56; Canadian sexual murderers, n=86) were analysed. Apart from nationality, French and Canadian sexual murderers are more similar than different. This observation may be the result of the choice-structuring properties of the crime, i.e., that there are only a limited number of ways of committing any given crime. Thus, both *angry* and *sadistic* sexual murderers were present in the French and Canadian samples, albeit in different proportions. It therefore appears that country-specific socio-cultural factors may favour different types of homicide, by influencing coping strategies (e.g., drug abuse, deviant sexuality).

Keywords:

French sexual murderers; Canadian sexual murderers; cross-national study; developmental antecedents; general and sexual lifestyle; modus operandi

Goals and objectives:

1. **Verify** the hypothesis that sexual murderers from different countries are sufficiently homogeneous to be merged into a single sample.
2. **Compare** Canadian and French sexual murderers in order to identify their similarities and differences and, consequently, to establish the generalizability of results and the boundary conditions under which they do or do not hold.
3. **Lay** the foundations for the cross-national samples of sexual murderers.

Serial and non-serial sexual murderers: An exploratory study of developmental antecedents

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Abstract

The trial of individuals accused of sexual murder requires considerable preparation from investigative teams and psychosocial professionals. One objective is to collect as much information as possible on the accused's childhood, in order to answer one of the main questions posed by professionals and the general public: "What was it in this person's childhood that made him into a sexual murderer?" To this end, the accused, his family, his childhood friends, his neighbours, and his teachers are interviewed extensively: "Could you tell us about your childhood? What type of child was he? What was he like in class? How would you describe his family?" etc. The information collected serves not only to understand the origins of the murder and the meaning of the crime for the murderer, but also to identify the risk factors associated with his sexual homicide, in order to

attenuate them and thus reduce the risk of recidivism. Although many studies have suggested that a variety of characteristics may be developmental risk factors in non-serial and serial sexual murderers (e.g., sexual victimization, empathy deficits), only two empirical developmental models have been proposed (Burgess et al., 1986; Nicole & Proulx, 2007a); both these models are based on small samples of sexual murderers—and, in the case of the FBI model, the sample is unrepresentative, as it comprises serial murderers only. Although the studies by Proulx and colleagues (James & Proulx, 2014; Nicole & Proulx 2007a, 2007b) shed some empirical light on the developmental antecedents of non-serial murderers, there remains only a limited empirical basis for distinguishing developmental antecedents of serial and non-serial sexual murderers. Consequently, the objective of this study was to identify similarities and differences in the developmental antecedents of serial and non-serial sexual murderers. To this end, multiple domains—such as neuropsychological functioning, family and social environment, and educational and behavioural development during childhood and adolescence—were examined from birth to adulthood. A sample of 55 male individuals was included for this study (10 SSMs, 45 NSMs). The results indicate that the principal distinction between the two groups is the age at which risk factors appear and the accumulation of these factors—with risk factors appearing earlier, and accumulating to a greater extent, in SSMs—rather than the nature of developmental antecedents. Consequently, it appears that serial and nonserial homicide are associated with developmental pathways that are distinct in several ways. Forensic and theoretical implication will be discussed.

Keyword:

sexual homicide; serial and non-serial offenders; developmental antecedents; early onset; cumulative risk factors; developmental stages; coping strategy