

## **FOREIGN OBJECT INSERTION IN SEXUAL HOMICIDE: TOWARDS AN OFFENDER PROFILE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Insertion of an object into the vagina of a murder victim is a rare phenomenon. While this type of crime-scene behaviour is often mentioned as part of a range of crime-scene behaviours exhibited by offenders of sexual murders, to date no research has focused exclusively on this type of behaviour and its possible use in predicting offender characteristics. This study analysed seventeen such cases that were committed in South Africa between 1990 and 2004. Only six of the cases were solved, and therefore had offender details available for analysis. For these six incidents there were eight offenders. While small in number, there were certain common traits exhibited by these offenders, allowing a starting point for creating an offender profile of such offenders for the benefit of those investigating such cases.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Insertion of a foreign object into the vagina of a homicide victim is a relatively rare phenomenon. Most publications on this topic are based on case studies. The Homicide Investigation Tracking System (HITS) (Keppel, 1995) recorded only six incidents where sexual insertion occurred in homicide cases and the object was left in place. There were another 19 cases where an object had been inserted but was then removed by the offender. Keppel (1995) further reports that only 1% of 2000 murders (in other words 20 murders) over a 10 year period had any evidence of sexual insertion of a foreign object.

Labuschagne's (2007) study is the first of its kind to look at a relatively large number of cases where sexual insertion of a foreign object occurred in female homicides. In this study the author attempts to provide a research based means to predict certain offender characteristics when compiling an offender profile. While a total of 17 cases were analysed, only six cases were solved, and offender details therefore being available. In these six solved cases, eight offenders were involved. These eight offenders' details are reviewed here.

## **BACKGROUND**

Indications of a psychological motivation for committing a murder can be seen in various forms on a crime-scene. These include excessive violence to the body, as is often found in intimate partner murders (Last & Fritzson, 2005; McFarlane, Campbell & Watson, 2002; Shackelford, 2001; Shackelford & Mouzos, 2005), mutilation of the body (Rajs, Lundström, Broberg, Lidberg, & Lindquist, 1998; Watanabe & Tamura, 2001), removal of body parts (Labuschagne, 2004), and insertion of a foreign object into the genitals of the victim (Geberth, 2003; Holmes & Holmes, 2002; Labuschagne, 2007; Proulx, Blais, Beauregard, 2007; Rossmo, 2000).

International research into murders with foreign object insertion is limited. Studies (Keppel, 1995, 2000) that have focused specifically on foreign object insertion, as an expression of a psychological motivation, are often single case studies. Alternatively foreign object insertion is listed as one of many behaviours allowing investigators to classify a crime-scene as being organised or disorganised (Ressler, Burgess & Douglas, 1988), a classification that has come under criticism. Other behaviours related to the organised/disorganised typology include excessive violence, a blitz attack on the victim, and post-mortem mutilation. Such insertion is also described as a sexually sadistic behaviour (Fisher & Beech, 2007; Proulx, Blais, Beauregard, 2007). This lack of focused research hampers the possible creation of an offender profile for people who commit the crime-scene behaviour of inserting an object into the vagina of a victim. A profile of such offenders would assist investigators in focusing the investigation on a certain type of offender and prioritising those that are similar to the profile above those that do not fit the profile. Also, an investigator's perception of what such an offender 'must' be like may, in reality, be quite different from what is documented in research.

## **OFFENDER PROFILING**

Offender profiling as an investigative tool has been in use for a number of years throughout the world (Ainsworth, 2002; Labuschagne, 1998, 2001, 2007; Ressler et al., 1988) and in South Africa (Labuschagne, 2003).

In this research Labuschagne's (2003) definition of offender profiling, that reads as follows, is used:

Offender profiling is any activity specifically undertaken with the intent of assisting an investigator determine the most likely type of individual to have committed a specific crime. The process would usually involve an assessment of the crime-scene, attending the autopsy, examining all available docket material such as statements, photographs, forensic reports and investigative decisions. This information is compared to previous experience and research and then hypotheses are formulated regarding the type of suspect who committed the crime. These hypotheses might be verbally communicated to the investigator but would normally also be formulated in a structured written report. The aim is to assist the

investigator to focus his or her investigation on the most likely type of suspect (p. 67).

## **INSTRUMENTAL VERSUS EXPRESSIVE AGGRESSION**

To gain an understanding of the role foreign object insertion may play in murder cases, it is necessary to give attention to the concepts of *expressive* and *instrumental* aggression. Salfati (2000) describes expressive aggression as occurring in response to anger-inducing experiences such as insults, physical attacks or personal failures. The goal is often to make the victim suffer. This may be evident in crimes such as domestic violence, and those committed by an offender with sadistic traits. Instrumental aggression, on the other hand, comes from the desire for objects or the status possessed by another person, such as jewellery, money or territory. Here the offender attempts to obtain these regardless of the cost. Therefore the aggression is only expressed when required, in the process of obtaining the objects or status. For example this type of aggression may occur in the process of a robbery, vehicle hijacking or house-breaking.

Hickey (2006) differentiates between *expressive crimes*, that primarily have intangible, emotional, and psychologically-laden characteristics such as hate crimes and domestic violence; and *instrumental crimes*, that primarily have tangible, extrinsic value such as theft and robberies. It is under the former category that mutilation, as witnessed in countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq, have recently been seen to occur, motivated by religious beliefs (Perlmutter, 2007). This type of behaviour includes beheadings, genital mutilation, removal of ears, eyes and tongues and dismembering. Perlmutter regards these acts as “sacred violence” and can be seen as relating to religious concepts such as sacrifice, blood ritual, iconoclasm and desecration.

Foreign object insertion would be seen as an example of expressive aggression (Salfati 2000), or part of an expressive crime (Hickey, 2006) serving the emotional needs of the offender.

## **DATA SOURCES**

Information for the research was obtained from police case-files, police databases, and public court records.

## **MEASURING INSTRUMENT: FOREIGN OBJECT INSERTION CHECKLIST**

A measuring instrument, in the form of a checklist called the Foreign Object Insertion Checklist, was compiled highlighting the necessary areas of importance to the research. The checklist<sup>1</sup> includes the following four sections:

### ***1. Victim's biographical details***

Questions in this section allow for the compilation of a basic victim profile in cases of sexual murder with foreign object insertion. This information is from sworn statements,

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<sup>1</sup> The checklist can be obtained on request from the first author.

post-mortem reports, identification of body forms, and in certain instances where information from these listed sources was not adequate, contact with family members by the first author.

## ***2. Nature of assault***

In this section information regarding the injuries inflicted upon the victim as well as the cause of death are recorded. The main source of information for this is from the post-mortem report. The post-mortems were conducted either by a District Surgeon or Forensic Pathologist. Other information includes the condition of the body on the crime-scene, focusing on the position of the body, presence of ligatures, state of dress, and whether the body was covered. This information is obtained from sworn statements and crime-scene photographs in the police case-file.

## ***3. Crime-scene details***

Details about the crime-scene itself are recorded in this section. Items recorded here include whether the crime-scene was inside a building or outside, who discovered the body, at what time and on what day was the body discovered, time and day of the murder, in which province the murder occurred, if the crime has been linked to any other murders, and if so, did foreign object insertion occur in any of those murders. This information comes from sworn statements and crime-scene photographs contained in the police case-file.

## ***4. Offender details***

In cases where an offender(s) was convicted for the murder, the biographical details are noted. These include:

- Age
- Population group
- Gender
- Home language
- Marital status
- Education level
- Occupation
- Sexual orientation
- Use of substances at time of murder
- Prior criminal record
- Mental illness
- Accompanying offences at the time of the insertion such as rape, burglary, robbery, hijacking or other
- Offender's relationship to the deceased

## **THE SAMPLE**

A non-random purposive sample was used due to the scarcity of such cases and the lack of any single database where such cases could be located. Cases were identified during the course of the first author's occupational duties. The cases occurred between 1990 and

2004. Three occurred between 1990 and 1995, and three between 1996 and 1999. A further 11 cases were between 2000 and 2004. Only six (35,29%) of the 17 cases in the sample were solved. Of those six, two incidents involved two offenders and the rest (4) involved a single offender. All offenders have been convicted of the crimes included in the study. Only cases in which female victims were murdered, and an object was found in the vagina when the body was discovered, were included.

## METHOD

Use was made of a non-survey data collection method known as a document study (Bailey, 1982; Hagan, 2005; Strydom & Delport, 2002; Thomas, 2003; Welman & Kruger, 2002). The case information was coded onto the Foreign Object Insertion Checklist. Once this was done, descriptive statistical techniques such as frequencies and cross-tabulations were employed to analyse the data.

## RESULTS

### *Description of the cases where offenders were arrested and convicted*

In terms of the six solved murders, indoor murders seem to have a higher solving rate. Offenders were arrested for two of the three murders that occurred indoors, and four of the 14 that occurred outdoors. It is possible that indoor murders offered more possibilities whereby offenders could be identified, such as fingerprints on hard surfaces, or eye witnesses. In the two solved indoor cases the offenders were known to the victim (one was the brother of the deceased, and in the other incident the offenders were neighbours to the deceased). This is discussed further later in this section and reflected graphically in Figure 4.

Table 1 shows the frequency of solved versus unsolved cases for the different victim occupation categories.

**Table 1: Solved vs. unsolved cases across different occupation groups of victims**

Variable	Victim Occupation				Total
	Student	Unemployed	Sex-worker	Unknown	
Solved	1	3	1	1	6
Unsolved	0	4	6	1	11
Total	1	7	7	2	17

An offender was arrested and convicted in only one of the seven sex-worker cases. Perhaps due to the illegal nature of sex-workers' occupation people might be less likely to come forward as witnesses in an attempt to avoid association with a sex-worker, or that the witnesses themselves could be sex-workers and therefore wish to avoid contact with the law. It could, however, indicate a lack of effort on behalf of investigators due to the victim's status in society. Alternatively, due to the possibility that sex-workers are more likely to be murdered by strangers because of the nature of their work, their murders are more difficult to solve. Most murders in South Africa (81,5%) are committed by

perpetrators known to the victim (South African Police Service, 2006), and thus have an increased chance of being solved. The highest success rate occurred in the unemployed group (43% solved) and the only student victim case was solved.

In Table 2 the split of offenders across the different victim population groups is given.

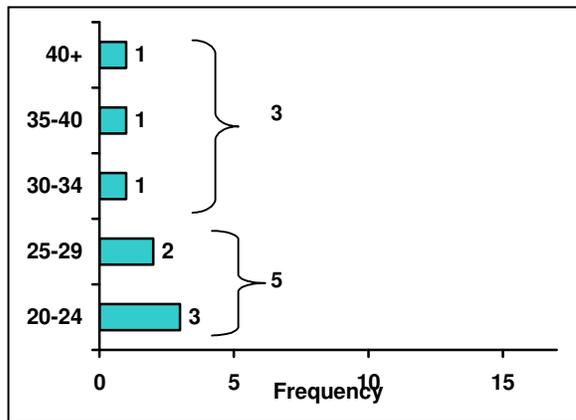
**Table 2: Split of offenders across different population groups of victims**

Variable	Population group of victim			Total
	Black	Coloured	White	
Offender	2	3	1	6
No offender	7	2	2	11
Total	9	5	3	17

Table 2 shows that offenders were convicted for three (60,00%) of the five Coloured murders, one (33,33%) of the three white murders, but only for two (28,57%) of the nine black murders.

***Demographic description of offenders arrested***

In two of the cases the details for two offenders who committed the crime in partnership, are available and this brings the total number of offenders reported on to eight. All offenders were male, and their ages are given in Figure 1.



**Figure 1. Age of offenders (N = 8)**

Three (37,50%) of the eight offenders were aged between 20-24 years and two (25,00%) in the 25-29 age category. The remaining three were older than 30. When viewed by population group the age ranges were as follows: white offenders 20-24 (1), 25-29 (1); black offenders 20-24 (1), 25-29 (1), 40+ (1); Coloured offenders 20-24 (1), 30-34 (2). White and black offenders tended to be in the age range of 20 to 29, while Coloured offenders tended to be older, in the age range or 30 to 34. As can be seen, three offenders were black, three were Coloured and two were white.

Table 3 presents a cross-tabulation between the population group of the victims and the population group of the offenders.

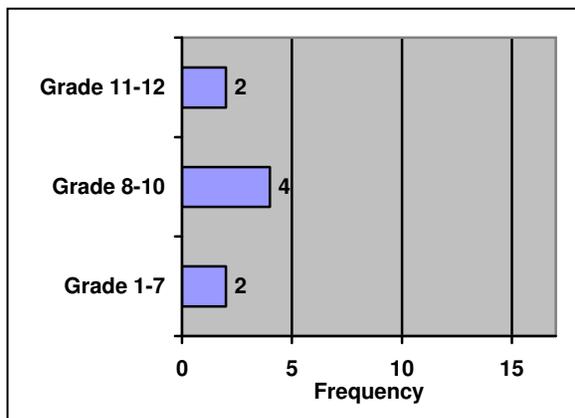
**Table 3: Cross-tabulation between victim and offender population groups**

Population group of victim	Population group of offender			Total
	Black	Coloured	White	
Black	3	0	0	3
Coloured	0	3	1	4
White	0	0	1	1
Total	3	3	2	8

From Table 3 it is evident that offenders and victims generally are from the same population group. The exception to the rule occurred in the case of a Coloured sex-worker who had been murdered by a white offender. This was part of a four-victim-series that involved males and females, black, Coloured and white victims (Labuschagne, 2007).

Seven (87,50%) of the offenders were single, while one (12,50%) was married at the time of the murder.

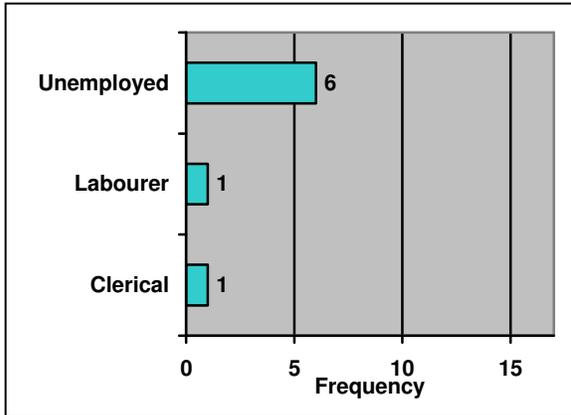
Educational level achieved by the offenders is shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 2. Highest educational qualification of offenders (N = 8)**

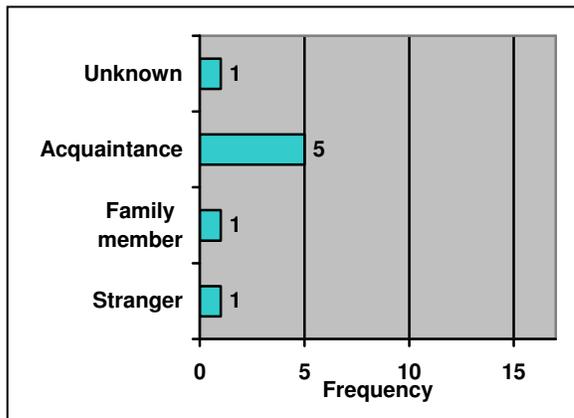
As is evident from the above figure most of the offenders have a relatively low level of education: two (25%) have a Grade 11-12 level education; four (50%) a Grade 8-10 level; and two (25%) a grade 1-7 level education. Thus 75% did not attain a qualification above the Grade 10 level.

In Figure 3 the occupational category of the offenders is shown.



**Figure 3. Occupational category of offenders (N = 8)**

All eight the offenders are heterosexuals whose employment position was as follows at the time of committing the crime: six (75%) were unemployed, one (12,5%) was employed as a labourer, while one (12,5%) was employed in a clerical position. The latter person was arrested for the murder of a sex-worker, which was part of the four-victim murder series referred to earlier. The relationship of the offenders to their victims is illustrated in figure 4.



**Figure 4. Offender relationship to victims (N = 8)**

Of the eight offenders, five were acquaintances of their victims (such as a neighbour), one was a family member (a brother), one was a stranger (a serial murderer) and one's relationship was unknown. From the small sample of solved cases it is apparent that people murdered in this fashion are more likely to have been done so by someone known to them. This sentiment is echoed somewhat by Fisher and Beech (2007) in their research on convicted sexual murderers' 'implicit theories'. In their results it was the 'violently motivated' group, that possessed a 'dangerous world' implicit theory, that engaged in such behaviour. This group is driven by a grievance towards women, and were most likely to have known their victim prior to the offence. This is consistent with the overall statistic that people in South Africa (81,5%) are usually murdered by people known to

them. Interestingly, foreign object insertion did not occur in Fisher and Beech's 'sadistic' group, that did engage in genital mutilation.

None of the known offenders had a mental disorder, while only one of the eight offenders was diagnosed as having a neurological problem, namely epilepsy. This is contrary to the controversial Organised/Disorganised Typology developed by the FBI for sexual murders. In their typology the FBI states that the insertion of objects into the genitals of a murder victim is indicative of a disorganised offender and such offenders are typically experiencing a mental disorder (Douglas et al., 1992; Ressler et al., 1988), and also DiMaio and DiMaio's (2001) similar statement that such individuals are often psychotic, are therefore not supported by this research. This is further supported by the fact that all offenders in this study were found competent to stand trial. Seven (87,5%) of the eight offenders were positively identified as having been under the influence of a substance, namely alcohol, at the time of the offence.

Five (62,5%) of the offenders had previous criminal records according to the SAPS criminal records database. The crimes they had committed in the past are relatively violent, ranging from theft and assault to murder.

Table 4 categorises the different crimes committed previously by the offenders. However, a formal criminal record does not necessarily encompass a person's full criminal history as there may have been crimes for which the offender was never arrested.

**Table 4: Types of crimes committed prior to being arrested for these murders**

Type of crime	N
Violent contact crimes (murder, rape, assault)	4
Property related (robbery, theft, housebreaking)	5
Other (driving under the influence, escaping custody)	2

## **DISCUSSION OF RESULTS**

In summary the characteristics of the offenders are represented in Table 5:

Most of the offenders were single males, with an education level below Grade 11 in the age range of 20-29. Regarding language, half spoke a black language and the other half Afrikaans. The majority were unemployed and often had a criminal record history that included violence and property related offences. All were heterosexual and many were known to their victims. The majority had used alcohol prior to the offence. None had a mental disorder and only one had a diagnosed history of epilepsy. Since few of the offenders were married, further research could explore whether or not the lack of a relationship or attitude towards women in general, plays a role in motivating the person to commit this crime.

**Table 5: Summary of offender characteristics**

Characteristic	Highest Incidence	N=8	%
Marital status	Single	7	87,50
Education level	Below grade 11 (std 9)	6	75,00
Age	20-29	5	62,50
Language	Black language	4	50,00
	Afrikaans	4	50,00
Occupation	Unemployed	6	75,00
Sexual orientation	Heterosexual	8	100,00
Relationship to victim	Known to victim	6	75,00
Mental illness	None	0	0,00
Neurological disorder	Epilepsy	1	12,50
Under influence of substance	Alcohol	7	87,50
Previous criminal record	Violent offence	4	50,00
	Property related offence	5	62,50

## CONCLUSION

Offender profiling, despite criticism, has continued to be used in the investigation of psychologically motivated crimes. However, to make offender profiles more accurate and scientific, a body of knowledge about such crimes needs to be developed. This research aims to determine if offenders who commit this kind of crime have certain similar characteristics, which could then be of use to offender profilers and investigators who come into contact with such a crime in the future. While the results stem from a small sample, this crime is still a fairly rare one. Future research should be undertaken to expand the knowledge of such offenders, and help establish whether the patterns seen in this small sample are consistent, or need to be reviewed, towards developing a profile of such offenders. Such future research should also explore personality characteristics, patterns of motivations, and possible interview techniques of these types of offenders. This would however require in-depth interviews with the offenders themselves and stretches beyond the scope of the current document study.

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