

## **Serial Homicide in South Africa Introduction to the Special Issue**

In 2005, the Federal Bureau of Investigation's National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime invited international experts in serial homicide to a dedicated symposium on the topic. Those invited included law enforcement personnel who had been involved in investigating cases of serial homicide, legal professionals including prosecutors and defence attorneys who had been part of the court process in serial homicide cases, members of the media and investigative journalists who had reported on these cases, clinicians who had been involved in the assessment of serial offenders, and academics who had conducted research on the topic. The objective of the symposium was to create a reference manual for investigators of serial homicide covering issues such as how serial homicide should be defined, the offenders' characteristics and the linking of homicide series. One of the major conclusions from this meeting was that there was a real lack of valid empirical research in the field that could be relied upon to inform serial homicide investigations (NCAVC, 2005). Most of what was known up to that point either came from investigative experience or was based on case studies. In addition, much of this work had until that date been focused primarily on the USA, and during this meeting, representatives from numerous countries highlighted the very real need for an understanding of trends and patterns from different cultural and national viewpoints, as input from a US perspective may not provide a valid perspective on investigations in different countries.

Homicide and serial homicide rates in South Africa have been one of the highest homicide rates in Sub-Saharan Africa and in the world (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2003). The homicide rate has been reported as nine times the international average, with 27 murders occurring every day (South African Police Service: Crime Information Analysis Centre website, 2002, as cited by Hodgskiss, 2004), and the recorded post-apartheid (1990–1996) serial homicide rates has had an increase of almost 900% in the average annual incidence of serial homicide (Hodgskiss, 2004). As a result of South Africa having one of the highest homicide rates in the world, its investigative resources are stretched beyond capacity, which hinders solvability rates. There is therefore a very real need for methods that may help identify and link series to aid investigators.

The research outlined in this special issue on serial homicide in South Africa in the *Journal of Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling* was initiated in order to deal with some of these concerns, and in the first paper in this issue, Labuschagne and Salfati (2015) highlight that although some features are similar to serial homicide cases occurring outside of South Africa, other features may be unique to South Africa, and yet, other behaviours may take on a different meaning or interpretation in the South African context than they may have in Western contexts, thus highlighting the need for caution about generalising statements about serial homicide, especially in the context of offender profiling and linkage analysis.

Using actual case studies of serial homicide, Labuschagne and Salfati outline some of the unique features of series in South Africa. Through these, they illustrate the very real challenges of investigating crime without having a resource of basic crime scene demographics against which to compare individual cases and use for investigative decision making. Understanding the baselines such as what features of serial homicides in the South African context may be the most common or rare, as well as understanding what combinations of features may be expected at any crime scene, may help understand the type of crime at hand and ultimately help inform investigations, and may be helpful in challenging non-evidence-based assumptions held by investigators. Through this discussion, important questions are brought to the front, as is the importance of actively using these questions to form the basis for informing key research questions, so that research may ultimately have practical applicability. Research in turn should then provide the much needed empirically based studies for evidence-led policing.

Following on from the issues highlighted by Labuschagne and Salfati in the first paper in this special issue, four empirically based studies that were performed as a response to specific theory and practice-led questions are included and, in turn, have provided a first generation of studies in South Africa that have aimed to answer some of these questions, to support or refute assumptions, and to provide a basis for a more evidence-led investigation.

The research is based on the information from 54 solved series in South Africa between 1936 and 2007, collected using a stringent and empirically validated data collection tool (The Homicide Profiling Index, HPI<sup>®</sup> Salfati, 2007). This consisted of the full sample of offences that were identified and solved, and as such represents the most complete dataset based on information from police files of serial homicides collected from one country over a substantial period. The studies themselves were based on a subsample of the cases that contained the most detailed information, which consisted of 33 offenders, 302 victims, and 254 crime scenes.

Based on the studies presented, this special issue presents an international comparative perspective not only on national differences in crime scene behaviours, as well as victim and offender characteristics in serial homicide, but also on patterns of behavioural consistency across series in different national and situational contexts, which can help refine the understanding of linking serial homicide.

Salfati *et al.* (2015b), in the second study in this special issue, aim to give an overview of the baselines of crime scene behaviours as well as the demographics of serial homicide offenders and victims in South Africa and compare these to the demographics of offenders and victims from other currently available empirical studies of other countries.

Horning, Salfati, and Labuschagne (2015), in the second study in this special issue, aimed to assess the value of using a model of interpersonal behaviour in differentiating serial homicide offences in South Africa, notably in terms of how the offender may display behavioural patterns that are indicative of them in dealing with the victim as a person, an object, or a vehicle.

Sorochinski, Salfati, and Labuschagne (2015), in the third study in this special issue, took the analysis one step further by comparing patterns of crime scene behaviours in South Africa with patterns in US-based serial homicide. Specifically, this study compared the thematic differentiation of planning and violent behaviours that the offenders engage in and how this differentiation compares with that in the USA.

Salfati *et al.* (2015a), in the fourth and final study in this special issue, looked at the key issue relating to serial homicide, notably the examination of actual patterns of behavioural consistency within series. Key to understanding the significance of behavioural evidence

for linkage purposes is in establishing how consistently an offender displays the same or similar behaviours across their series, and whether there are overall and distinct patterns of consistency within serial homicide. This study took the results from the previous studies on victim type (victims as persons, objects, and vehicles) and crime scene themes (violence and planning) and aimed to assess if offenders displayed similar crime scene patterns on these factors at each of their individual crime scenes throughout their series.

Serial homicide is a crime that knows no national boundaries. In some countries, there has been a great deal of research about the phenomenon; in others, there has been very little. South Africa has had more than its fair share of such offence; yet to date, the body of research focusing on South African serial murder has been limited and consisted primarily of small-scale studies with limited practical application. Furthermore, no research has focused on issues of linkage and consistency. To provide a first step in understanding serial homicide in South Africa and any differences there may be to patterns in other countries such as the USA, the work outlined in this special issue has aimed to provide a baseline of understanding patterns of behaviours in serial homicides in South Africa, and based on the results found, has highlighted important future avenues of exploration for establishing empirically based strategies for linking that takes into account similarities and variations in different national contexts.

## REFERENCES

- Hodgskiss, B. (2004). Lessons from serial murder in South Africa. *Journal of Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling*, 1, 67–94.
- Horning, A. M., Salfati, C. G., & Labuschagne, G. N. (2015). South African serial homicide: A victim-focused behavioural typology. *Journal of Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling*. DOI: 10.1002/jip.1426
- Labuschagne, G. N., & Salfati, C. G. (2015) An examination of serial homicide in South Africa: The practice to research link. *Journal of Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling*. DOI: 10.1002/jip.1415
- NCAVC (2005). Serial murder: Multi-disciplinary perspectives for investigators. In R. J. Morton, & M. A. Hilts (Eds.), *Symposium presented by the national center for the analysis of violent crime (NCAVC)*, San Antonio, TX.
- Salfati, C. G. (2007). Homicide profiling index, version 4 (HPIv4): Crime scene and background variables coding dictionary. Available at <http://web.jjay.cuny.edu/~gsalfati/> [Accessed on September 2007].
- Salfati, C. G., Horning, A., Sorochinski, M., & Labuschagne, G. N. (2015a). South African serial homicide: Consistency in victim types and crime scene actions across series. *Journal of Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling*. DOI: 10.1002/jip.1428.
- Salfati, G. C., Labuschagne, G. N., Horning, A. M., Sorockinski, M., & De Wet, J. (2015b). South African serial homicide: Offender and victim demographics and crime scene actions. *Journal of Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling*. DOI: 10.1002/jip.1425
- Sorochinski, M., Salfati C. G., & Labuschagne, G. N. (2015). Classification of planning and violent behaviours in serial homicide: A cross-national comparison between South Africa and the US. *Journal of Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling*. DOI: 10.1002/jip.1427
- United Nations, Office on Drugs and Crime. (2003). In G. Newman (Ed.), *Global Report on Crime and Justice*. New York: Oxford University Press.

**C. Gabrielle Salfati**

John Jay College of Criminal Justice, USA

**Gérard N. Labuschagne**

South African Police Service & Division of Forensic Medicine and Pathology,  
University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa