South African Serial Homicide: Offender and Victim Demographics and Crime Scene Actions

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Abstract

There is an abundance of literature on serial homicide from a Western perspective that outlines operational definitions, types of offenders and how they prey upon their victims. However, currently, there is a lack of studies that compare serial homicide in different countries. The current study aims to give an overview of 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. The sample consisted of 33 out of the total 54 solved series in South Africa between 1936–2007, which includes a total of 33 offenders, 302 victims, and 254 crime scenes. Results of the sample as a whole showed that South African serial homicide offenders are similar to offenders in other countries in terms of their actions at the crime scene and victim choice, with some notable exceptions. Additional analysis looked at the offender's consistency of targeting certain types of victims across their homicide series in comparison with the patterns of serial homicide offenders in other countries. Copyright © 2014 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Key words: serial homicide; offender/victim demographics; crime scene behaviours

INTRODUCTION

Homicide and serial homicide rates in South Africa

South Africa has 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 SAPS: Crime

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Information Analysis Centre website (2002), as cited in Hodgskiss, 2004), and the recorded post-apartheid (1990–1996) serial homicide rates 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. Because of low clearance rates, some of these homicides develop into homicide series, and this has caused increasing problems for already under-resourced police investigators.

Salfati (2001) and Salfati and Haratsis (2001) highlighted the importance of extending our understanding of homicide within a comparative international arena. According to Swidler (1986), an image of culture can be seen as a 'tool kit' of symbols, stories, rituals and world-views, whereby people may use varying configurations to solve different kinds of problems. In homicide, patterns may be similar across nations, but crime scene behavioural actions may in part be guided 'strategies of action' that are specific to that nation (Salfati & Haratsis, 2001). Homicides within different national contexts will exhibit some trends specific to that country. The question that remains is *how* these differences can be seen, and *what* these differences are.

There is a lack in homicide research looking at the influences of national measures on the expression of homicide (Salfati, 2001). This shortcoming, Lafree (1999) suggested, has prevented any reliable conclusions to be made about these influences. Landau (2000) further stressed the necessity for a stronger emphasis in future research on cross-national comparisons that would be of value to increasing our knowledge of homicide studies in different countries. Numerous studies have started to test thematic classifications across different national samples (Salfati & Dupont, 2006; Salfati & Haratsis, 2001; Salfati & Park, 2007), and in serial homicide (Bateman & Salfati, 2007; Salfati & Bateman, 2005; Sorochinski & Salfati, 2010; Trojan & Salfati, 2010), but to date there are no studies that empirically compare serial homicide in different national contexts, using actual police files.

What constitutes serial homicide?

There is a lot of literature on serial homicide from a Western perspective that outlines operational definitions, types of offenders and how they prey upon their victim (i.e. typologies). These studies have contributed to the growing body of literature on serial homicide and have enhanced ideas about what constitutes serial homicide (e.g. Canter, 1995; Canter, 2000; Douglas & Munn, 1992; Egger, 2002; Hickey, 2006; Holmes & Holmes, 1998; Keppel & Walter, 1999; Kraemer, Lord, & Heilbrun, 2004; Kocsis & Irwin, 1998; Pakhomou, 2004; Ressler, Burgess, Douglas, Hartman, & D'Agostino, 1986; Schlesinger, 2002). In recent years, studies with a more empirical focus have been provided, testing some of these theoretical ideas (Bateman & Salfati, 2007; Canter, Alison, Alison, & Wentink, 2004; Canter & Wentink, 2004; DeFronzo, Ditta, Hannon, & Prochnow, 2007; Salfati & Bateman, 2005; Santtila *et al.*, 2008; Sorochinski & Salfati, 2010; Trojan & Salfati, 2010). These recent studies have enabled an improved research agenda with more effective methods to analyse serial homicide offenders and their victims. However, most of these studies have been based on US samples, and have not been compared with samples in other countries to test whether these offenders are comparable across countries, or whether a universal definition of serial homicide can be provided.

Serial homicide has been defined in a number of different ways by academicians, law enforcement, clinicians and other researchers. The construct of serial homicide has included different criteria, which has included both external (i.e. behavioural) and internal (i.e. motivational) aspects. The fact that definitions have included both objectively

measurable criterion such as number of victims, as well as more subjective and less readily testable criterion such as motivation, has caused much variation and disagreement in the literature. Most definitions have generally included one or more of these three elements: time interval between homicides, the number of victims and motivation.

The criterion of the time interval between homicides, or the cooling-off period, is a good example of the definition of serial homicide being debated. The word cooling off has been used not only to describe a temporal period but also to denote an emotional cooling-off period where the offender returns to a state of equilibrium (Gerberth, 1986; Greswell & Hollin, 1994 as cited in Kraemer *et al.*, 2004). The clinical/psychological definition is focused on the offender's motivation for moving from one homicide to the next. This definition has little use in empirical studies of serial homicide as it is highly subjective. There has been a lack of studies on the concept of cooling-off periods with the exception of two studies (see Lange, 1999; Osborne & Salfat, 2014). The dearth of studies on this concept has allowed for additional confusion about its use as a criterion for serial homicide. Osborne & Salfati (2014) explored the idea of cooling-off periods in serial homicide in the US and determined that at the first stages of analysis it be more aptly termed, *time interval* between homicides, and should not include the clinical/psychological component. By taking the subjective non-measurable motivational component out, and keeping the more objective measurable element of 'time,' aptly renamed time interval, a usable criterion was formed.

This lack of consensus about the criteria for serial homicide has contributed to a lack of comparability of serial homicide studies. In 2005, the FBI's Centre for the Analysis of Violent Crime (NCAVC), in an effort to collate the understanding of serial homicide in the field, and across practitioners and researchers, organised a meeting during which experts were invited to share their experience and research, and for the key definitional terms to be re-examined. As a result, criteria were redefined, based on the most up to date experience and knowledge (NCAVC, 2005). Of equal importance was the fact that key gaps in knowledge about this type of crime were also highlighted, notably in terms of definitional and differentiating aspects as well as cross-national differences.

One of the important changes made at the NCAVC meeting was regarding the criterion of three or more victims (e.g. Holmes & Holmes, 1998; Ressler *et al.*, 1986) to 'the unlawful killing of two or more victims by the same offender(s), in separate events' (Morton & Hilts, 2005, p. 9). Further, there was some confusion about how cooling-off periods may help to distinguish serial from spree homicides with no empirical evidence supporting a difference between the two types. At the 2005 NCAVC meeting, it was decided to include those classified as spree homicides to serial homicides, thereby eliminating these as separate categories of multiple homicide. This highlights the importance of creating consensus on the criteria for serial homicide, which allows for more consistency across studies and more meaningful cross-national comparisons.

In terms of motivational criterion, serial homicide offenders have often been characterised as being sexually motivated (Egger, 2002; Meloy, 2000). More clinically oriented researchers have posited that serial homicide is by definition sexually motivated (Grubin, 1994; Revitch & Schlesinger, 1981). Much of the research has looked at the role of sexual desire, paraphilias and the offender's fulfilment of these underlying sexual needs via serial homicide offending (Arrigo & Purcell, 2001; Keppel & Walter, 1999; Ressler *et al.*, 1986). According to Meloy (2000) and Grubin (1994), the sexual acts that characterise a sexual homicide may occur before, during or after the homicide (as cited in Salfati & Bateman, 2005). In addition, the sexual aspect of serial homicide has been deemed as

covert where its presence may manifest in wounding method or post-mortem behaviours such as posing the victim (Schlesinger, 2004). These assertions rendered the measurement of sexual motivation in serial homicide subjective and difficult to determine without offender interviews. Harbort and Mokros (2001) conducted a study of all solved serial homicides that occurred in Germany between 1945 and 1995. It was found that considerable differences exist between those offenders who commit homicides with a strong sexual component and those whose homicides have no sexual element in them. Offenders who committed sexual homicides were significantly younger and preferred manual ways of killing their victims. Hickey (2006) reviewed serial homicide in the US from 1800 to 2004 and determined that the notion that all serial homicides are sexually motivated to be unfounded. Bateman and Salfati (2007) also looked at the role of sexual activity during a homicide series and found no empirical support for sexual activity being the key consistent part of series. Although sexual motivation certainly may govern some types of serial homicide offenders, the idea that serial homicide is an inherently 'sexual' crime does not seem to be founded and is a typical example of a characteristic becoming a criterion, and thus adding a limiting feature into the definition of these types of crimes. Based on this factor being largely unsubstantiated, the NCAVC (2005) report further removed sexual activity as part of the key definition criteria of serial homicide.

Demographics: serial homicide offenders and their victims

Establishing patterns particular to serial homicide offenders is needed in order to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon and to validate or reject some of the preconceived ideas and theories regarding serial homicide offenders. Several studies were conducted for this purpose in the US. One of the largest studies was that by Hickey (2006) who reviewed the demographic information of 431 (367 males and 64 females) serial murder offenders from the US between 1800 and 2004 and who collectively murdered between 2760 and 4340 victims (data were gathered through newspaper articles, biographies, interviews, case studies and journal articles). Pakhomou (2004) examined the demographic variables in a sample of 21 serial homicide offenders and 97 victims (data were gathered from various sources, including police reports, transcripts of interviews with witnesses and live victims, psychological evaluation reports and criminal records). Kraemer *et al*. (2004) explored the demographic characteristics of 157 serial homicide offenders and 608 victims through examination of FBI files and media accounts. Salfati and Bateman (2005) reported detailed demographic information on 22 serial homicide offenders and 69 victims. In the only two European studies to date on serial homicide offender and victim demographics, Harbort and Mokros (2001) analysed a sample of 61 serial murderers in Germany spanning from 1945 to 1995. Santtilla *et al*. (2008) reported demographic information on a sample of 23 serial homicide offenders who committed 116 homicides from 1970–2001 in Italy (the authors obtained information from prosecution files, court verdicts, news reports, psychiatric and psychological reports, and police files).

Gender

In his study, Hickey (2006) found that 17% of serial homicide offenders were female and 83% were male. The majority of offenders (66%) targeted mainly female victims, but nearly half (47%) of the offenders had at least one male victim. Offenders in Pakhomou's (2004) sample were all (100%) male, whereas 88% of their victims were female. Kraemer

et al. (2004) reported that the vast majority (95%) of their offender sample was male and 67% of victims were female. In Salfati and Bateman (2005), 100% of serial homicide of-fenders were male. Interestingly, their victims' gender was almost equally distributed, with 52% female and 48% male. Harbort and Mokros (2001) reported that 90% of offenders in their sample were male and 10% were female. In 66% of their cases, the victim was a female and in 34% the victim was male.

Race

Of those cases, where race could be determined, Hickey's (2006) sample ($N = 249$) consisted of 72% White offenders, 23% African American, 3% Hispanic, 1% Asian and 1% of other ethnic or racial origin. Hickey (2006) also found that White females were more likely to be the victims of serial homicide. Pakhomou (2004) reported that 76% of his of-fender sample and 53% of the victim sample were White. In Kraemer *et. al*.'s (2004) study, 68% of offenders and 71% of victims were White. Salfati and Bateman (2005) found that 61% of offenders in their sample were White and 35% were Black. Of the victims in their study, 71% were White, 17% were Black, 7% Hispanic, 1% Asian and 1% American In-dian. The racial distribution in the US in general is White 73.9%, African American 12.4%, Hispanic 14.3% and Asian 4.4%. Thus, the race of victims and offenders in these studies is roughly proportionate to the general population in the US. Harbort and Mokros (2001) did not report on the racial demographics of their sample.

Age

The average age of offenders at the start of their series was reported by Hickey (2006) to be 28 years. Similarly, Harbort and Mokros (2001) found that offenders in their sample were on average 27.5 years old (with a range of 14 to 53 years) at the time of their first homicide in series. Offenders' age at the time of arrest in Pakhomou's (2004) study was 32.6 years and in Kraemer *et al*.'s (2004) study, 31 years. In Salfati and Bateman's (2005) study, the age of offenders ranged from 17 to 53 years with an average age of 32 at the start of the series and 33 at the time of arrest.

Hickey (2006) reported that young and middle-aged adults[1] were the most likely targets of offenders in his sample with 36% of offenders killing victims only from this group and 78% of offenders having at least one adult victim. Hickey (2006) also reported that 11% of offenders targeted only children and teens and 5% targeted elderly persons. Pakhomou (2004) reported victim's average age to be 23.3 years, and Kraemer *et al*. (2004) found their victims to be on average 33 years old. In Salfati and Bateman's (2005) study, victims' age ranged from 4 to 82 years with a mean of 28.

Offenders' education and occupation

The majority of offenders in Hickey's (2006) study attained a high school education or less and held mostly blue-collar/unskilled jobs. Both Kraemer *et al*. (2004) and Pakhomou (2004) estimated the average number of years of education in their offenders' sample to be 11.5 years. Pakhomou (2004) also reported that 50% of his sample did not obtain a high

[1]Hickey (2006) provides a general 'young and middle aged', 'child', 'teen' 'elderly' description. No specific age ranges.

school diploma, 50% finished high school, 20% had some tertiary education (that is education post high school but before university) and one offender (5%) had completed 4 years of university. Sixty-one percent of offenders in Kraemar *et al.*'s (2004) sample and 65% of offenders in Salfati and Bateman's (2005) sample were employed at the time of offense. In Harbort and Mokros (2001) study, 63.8% of offenders had a poor school record and 43.1% did not complete high school, 53.1 % were employed (with 34.4% being manual labourers) and 39.3% were unemployed.

Offenders' marital status

Offenders' marital status varied from study to study because of differences in definition. In Kraemer *et al.* (2004) study, 31% of offenders were married at the time of offense and 16% had been married in the past. Pakhomou (2004) reported that 61.9% of his sample of offenders were married, divorced, separated, or had a live-in girlfriend at the time of arrest, and 38.1% were single (i.e. never married). Salfati and Bateman (2005) found that 70% of offenders in their sample were single and 17.4% were married. Harbort and Mokros (2001) found 74% of their sample to be either single or divorced.

Offenders' criminal background

Almost two thirds (63%) of offenders in Hickey (2006) were incarcerated in prisons or mental institutions prior to the start of their series, although it is unclear if all of these were post-conviction. Forty-five percent were convicted of property crimes, 38% had a history of sex-related crimes, 17% committed drug-related offenses, 12% had prior homicide offenses and 8% committed assaults. Sixty-eight percent of offenders had some combination of offense categories. Pakhomou (2004) reported that 81% of his offender sample had prior criminal charges, with 69.1% having charges for sexual offenses and 38% with charges for burglary and trespassing. In Salfati and Bateman (2005), 48% of offenders were known to have been engaged in criminal activities while 22% had a 'non-offender' status at the time of arrest. Finally, Harbort and Mokros (2001) found that 79.3% of offenders in their sample had a prior criminal record.

Offender-victim relationship

Hickey (2006) reported that 76% of offenders killed at least one stranger victim with 61% killing strangers only. Family members were solely targeted by 8% of offenders (with 15% having killed at least one family-related victim), and acquaintances were the only targets of 10% of offenders (while 25% of offenders had at least one acquaintance victim). Hickey (2006) also reported that victims, who were strangers, were more likely to be young females who were alone (e.g. transients, prostitutes and drug addicts). In Kraemer *et al*. (2004), 71% of offenders targeted strangers only and 7% had a close relationship with their victim (i.e. family or partner). Pakhomou (2004) found 70.1% of victims in his sample to be strangers to the offenders, 25% acquaintances and 1% 'correlatives' (i.e. victim and offender had known each other or had a lengthy relationship; p.224). None of the offenders in Pakhomou's (2004) study murdered family members. Harbort and Mokros (2001) found that 80% of offenders in their sample had no prior relationship to the victim.

Summary

In sum, from the reviewed literature in this section, it appears that the majority of serial homicide offenders in the US and Germany were males in their late 20's or early 30's, and most had a maximum of high school education and blue-collar occupation. They were likely to have had a relationship, that is, boyfriend/girlfriend, live-in partner or spouse. Whereas the majority of offenders were White, the proportions of White and Black offenders varied from study to study. Offenders often had a criminal history and were most likely to target strangers. Victims' age was somewhat varied; however, the majority were young or middle-aged adults. Victims were more likely to be females (although one study reported an almost even split between gender). The victim's race was more often found to be White, which was by and large comparable with the racial distribution of the country of the study.

AIMS

The current study aims to give an overview of the demographics of serial homicide offenders and victims in South Africa as well as crime scene actions and compare these with other empirical studies of serial offenders and offending from other countries.

METHOD

The Sample

The data was obtained from serial homicide police files from the archives of the Investigative Psychology Section (IPS) of the Forensic Services Division of the South African Police Service (SAPS), which was set up in 1994 due to the increase in murder series that were detected around that time. The IPS is involved in all identified murder series in South Africa and is the only unit in the SAPS that can classify a murder series as such.

From 1953 until 2007, there were 53 identified series in total in South Africa, involving 77 offenders with approximately 557+ victims. Of these, nine series' case files had been lost or destroyed and could not be recovered. Four series were unobtainable during the timescale of the study. Five of the series involve team killers and two were awaiting trial, and these series were not included in the current study. The total number or remaining series available for analysis were 33 solved serial homicide cases from 1953 to 2007 with a total of 254 known crime scenes[2] and 302 victims. This constitutes approximately 62% of the known, solved and prosecuted series in South Africa.

This study does not deal with unsolved cases, and so does not pertain to include these in the establishment of demographic baselines of serial homicide. Unsolved cases do not contain important information on offender characteristics, which was key in this paper. In addition, serial homicide studies reporting on general demographics should as a first step use solved cases to establish baselines for later comparisons to unsolved cases, as long as it can be reliably established that the unsolved case is indeed part of a series (e.g. through DNA linkage). These are all important issues, but ultimately not part of the current remit

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[2]In eight crime scenes, it was unknown if there was a single victim or multiple victims, for example, there may have been two bodies found at the same time and place, but it was not verified that they were both killed at the same time to avoid any methodological inconsistencies, these cases were eliminated from the calculation.

of this paper (for some discussions of the issues between solved and unsolved series, see Woodhams & Labuschagne, 2012).

In terms of the distribution of the 302 victims across the 254 crimes scenes, for the crime scenes where the number of victims was known, 87% (221/254) had only one victim at the crime scene. In 13% (33/254) of the crime scenes, there were multiple victims. There were two victims in 10.6% (27/254), three victims in 1.6% (4/254) and four victims in 0.8% (2/254) of the crime scenes.

Of the 302 victims, almost three-quarters of the victims (74.5%; 225/302) died at the scene and 6.6% (20/302) of victims died after the incident, that is, on the way to the hospital or later in the hospital. In 18.9% (57/302) of the offenses, the victim did not die as a result of the incident. Thus, live victims comprise nearly a fifth of the cases.

Data collection

Files contain witness statements, post-mortem autopsy reports, identification of the body reports, statements by victim's family (if identified) and confessions and forensic reports, for example, DNA/ballistics, crime scene and autopsy photographs and the investigation diary. Files are primarily archived at SAPS headquarters in Pretoria, South Africa, but some are also located in the relevant police station's archive in certain other areas of South Africa.

The variables used in this study were coded using the Homicide Profiling Index version 4$^{©}$ (HPIv4$^{©}$), which was specifically designed to be used with police case files (Salfati, 2006; Salfati, 2007). The HPI coding dictionary consists of 217 variables, 147 of which are in a dichotomous or categorical form, 38 of which are measurements (e.g. age, distance, number of arrests) and 32 which are qualitative. The variables found in the HPI account for behavioural indicators of crime scene actions, motivational factors and detailed demographics of the offender and the victim. Variables are subdivided into sections (e.g., location, weapons, wounding type and wounding location, postmortem behaviours, victim background and offender background). Each variable has a detailed description and guidelines that coders follow in order to reliably code the presence of the variable. Most variables are constructed such that they must be measured according to a strict category of either present, absent, or unknown. Such dichotomous coding allows for a more objective analysis (Salfati & Canter, 1999). At the end of each section, there is a descriptor variable where qualitative information pertaining to the section is recorded in order capture the peculiar details of the crime.

In order to establish the inter-rater reliability for the present study, the four coders responsible for the data collection independently coded two serial homicide cases (which included a total of 12 victims). Analyses were conducted to determine how often raters agreed on the coding of each variable. The overall agreement was 79% prior to discussion of the coding structure. Most common errors occurred when raters disagreed on whether the variable was not present (0) or missing (999) in the file. These categories, however, are most commonly merged for the purposes of further analyses. When the 'not present' and 'missing' categories were collapsed, rater agreement increased to 89.5%. Errors were extensively reviewed and discussed to resolve questionable issues and several variable definitions were clarified as the result, and all of the subsequent questions raised during the coding of the rest of the cases were fully discussed as part of the coding process.

RESULTS

The demographics of the sample in terms of offender characteristics, victim characteristics, offender-victim relationship and a brief overview of crime scene characteristics will first be discussed for the sample as a whole. These will then be discussed across series. Results will be discussed as general trends rather than definitive patterns throughout because of issues of using real world data for analysis.

Victim demographics

The first aim was to explore the demographic trends for South African victims of serial homicide. There were a total of 302 victims. In the majority of cases, information about the victims was in part limited. The frequency distribution of victim information is summarised in Table 1.

Gender

There were 106 (35.1%) male and 195 (64.9%) female victims. The percentage of male victims in this study is consistent with what was generally found to be the case in the majority of studies in the US (Hickey, 2006; Kraemer *et al*., 2004; Pakhomou, 2004).

Age

The victim age in the present study ranged from 7 months to 85 years ($M = 31.3$, $SD = 15.88$; median = 28). The ages of 52 victims were unknown. These findings are consistent with the literature on both US and German serial homicide victims where most victims are reported to be young adults, although the range is somewhat greater in the South African sample.

Race

Victims' race was known for 298 victims. Of those, 231 (77.5%) victims were Black, 23 (7.7%) White, 35 (11.7%) Coloured,[3] seven (2.3%) Indian, and two (0.7%) Asian. These numbers are generally proportionate to the overall racial composition in South Africa (Black 79.6%, White 9.1%, Coloured 8.9%, Indian/Asian 2.5%[4]). These findings are contrary to the victims' racial trends in the US, where 50–70% of victims are found to be White. However, this is most likely because of the differences of overall population race in the two countries.

Marital status

Of the 162 victims whose marital status was known, 59 (36.4%) were single, 49 (30.2%) had a boyfriend or girlfriend, 43 (26.5%) were married, six (3.7%) were divorced and four (2.5%) were widowed. Victims' marital status in the US has not been reported in the literature.

[3]In the South African context, the term 'coloured' refers to an ethnic group of people who possess some degree of sub-Saharan ancestry, but not enough to be considered Black under South African law. They are technically mixed race and often possess substantial ancestry from Europe, Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal, Madagascar, Mozambique, Mauritius, St. Helena and Southern Africa.
[4]Mid-year population estimate 2007. Official Statistics South Africa

Table 1. Victim Information

Variable		Present *N*		(% total)	(% known)
Gender					
	Male	106		35.1	
	Female	195		64.9	
Race					
	Black	231		76.5	77.5
	Coloured	35		11.6	11.7
	White	23		7.6	7.7
	Indian	7		2.3	2.3
	Asian	2		0.7	0.7
	Unknown	4		1.3	
Marital status					
	Single	59		19.5	36.4
	Black		43 (72.9%)		
	Coloured		8 (13.6%)		
	White		6 (10.2%)		
	Asian/Indian		1 (1.7%)		
	Has boyfriend/girlfriend	49		16.2	30.2
	Black		34 (69.4%)		
	Coloured		11 (22.4%)		
	White		3 (6.1%)		
	Married	43		14.2	26.5
	Black		30 (69.8%)		
	Asian/Indian		6 (14.0%)		
	Coloured		4 (8.2%)		
	White		3 (7.0%)		
	Divorced	6		2.0	3.7
	White		4 (66.67%)		
	Black		2 (33.3%)		
	Widowed	4		1.5	2.5
	Black		1 (25.0%)		
	White		3 (75.0%)		
	Unknown	140		46.4	
	Black		116 (82.9%)		
	Coloured		11 (7.9%)		
	White		4 (2.9%)		
	Asian/Indian		2 (1.4%)		
Occupation					
	Unemployed	71		23.5	40.3
	Black		61 (85.9%)		
	Coloured		5 (7.1%)		
	White		4 (5.6%)		
	Student	26		8.6	14.8
	Black		18 (69.2%)		
	Coloured		4 (15.4%)		
	White		4 (15.4%)		
	Labourer/blue collar	39		12.9	22.2
	Black		29 (74.4%)		
	Coloured		7 (17.9%)		
	White		3 (7.7%)		
	Prostitute	8		2.6	4.5

(Continues)

Table 1.   (Continued)

Variable		Present *N*		(% total)	(% known)
	Black		4 (50.0%)		
	Coloured		4 (50.0%)		
Professional/white collar		4		1.3	2.3
	White		2 (50.0%)		
	Black		1 (25.0%)		
	Asian/Indian		1 (25.0%)		
Unknown		126		41.7	
	Black		103 (81.7%)		
	Coloured		15 (11.9%)		
	Asian/Indian		1 (0.8%)		
	White		4 (3.2%)		

Employment

Of the victims whose occupation was known, there were 71 (40.3%) unemployed, 26 (14.8%) were students, 39 (22.2%) were labourers, eight (4.5%) were prostitutes and four (2.3%) were professionals. The occupation of almost half (126) of the victims was unknown. The unemployment rate in South Africa is extremely high (26–27%[5]), and among some Black South Africans, it would not be uncommon to be offered legitimate employment by a stranger, which could involve following them a distance to get to the job. This plays an important role in the specificity of how offenders procure their victims within the South African context. In many cases, the offender would approach the victim offering a prospect for a job, and the victims go willingly with the offender (even if it means walking alone with him through a sugarcane field or other deserted area).

The low number of prostitute victims in the South African sample is inconsistent with findings in the US Salfati and Bateman (2005) reported that 22% of victims in their sample were prostitutes, and Hickey (2006) stated that prostitutes were far more likely to be victims of serial homicide than any other group. The reasons for prostitutes being the likely victims in the US is explained by the ease with which these victims may be procured, their vulnerability, and the low likelihood that these victims' disappearance will be promptly noted. As explained earlier, however, in South Africa, victims that are unemployed may be viewed as similarly vulnerable. It is common for people in South Africa to travel far from home in search of employment, and the whereabouts of these people are often unknown to their families, thus a long time may pass until someone realises that they are missing. In both scenarios, an offer of employment is the ruse.

Unidentified

It is important to note that in 55 cases (18.2%), the victim's body was never identified. Fifty of these were Black, three were White, one Coloured, and the race of one was unknown. Only in five of these cases, the inability to identify the victims may be attributed to the bodies being found in advanced stages of decomposition or burnt.

[5]Mid-year population estimate 2007. Official Statistics South Africa

   In South Africa, most parents take their teenage children to be fingerprinted, and this is how citizens obtain an identification document. Without an ID document, it is not possible to obtain legal employment, open a bank account, or obtain a driver's licence, and therefore the majority of South African citizens are fingerprinted by the Department of Home Affairs. When an unidentified body is discovered, the SAPS automatically compare the deceased's fingerprints with the Department of Home Affairs fingerprint database to quickly try and determine the deceased's identity. In the case where the fingerprints have successfully been obtained from the deceased and there is not a fingerprint match in the Home Affairs database, it may be that the individual came from a rural and often poorer area or from another country and they are possibly illegal immigrants. The victims who are unidentified may be undocumented immigrants who are more marginalised because of their limited legal status and difficulty in gaining legitimate access to South African society (i.e., school, employment and services).

Offender demographics

This study aimed to determine the demographic patterns of the South African serial homicide offenders. Information about the offenders is summarised in Table 2. All offenders were convicted of the crimes included in this study.

Gender

All 33 offenders in the present study were males. At present, there are no known female serial homicide offenders operating alone reported in South Africa (Hodgskiss, 2004). Thus, the present sample is representative of the South African serial homicide. This is inconsistent with the findings in the US where several studies reported at least a small percentage of serial homicide offenders to be females.

Age

The age of the offender was known in 30 of the 33 cases and ranged from 18 to 42 years ($M = 29.0$, $SD = 5.87$; median = 30) at the start of their series. South African serial homicide offenders seem to be comparable with those in the US as well as Germany in their average age. Thus, a cross-national pattern seems to emerge where most serial homicide offenders commit their offenses when they are in their late 20s or early 30s.

Race

There were 22 (66.7%) Black offenders, eight (24.2%) White and three (9.0%) Coloured. As with victims' race described previously, these findings are contrary to the racial demographics in the US. However, again, this is probably due to the fact that Blacks constitute the majority of the overall population in South Africa, whereas most people in the US are White. The fact that racial distribution among serial offenders follows closely that of the general population may suggest that race does not play a major role in the propensity to become a serial offender. Based on the racial distribution in the South African population, Whites are however somewhat overrepresented (24.2% of the sample here but 7.7% of the overall population).

Marital status

Of the 25 offenders whose marital status was known, nine (36%) were single and 15 (60%) were in a current romantic relationship at the time of arrest (10 had a girlfriend, three were

Table 2. Offender information

Variable		Present *N*		(% total)	(% known)
Gender					
	Male	33		100	
	Female	0		0	
Race					
	Black	22		66.7	
	White	8		24.2	
	Coloured	3		9.0	
Marital status					
	Single	9		27.3	36.0
		Black	6 (66.7%)		
		White	3 (33.3%)		
	Has boyfriend/ girlfriend	10		30.3	40.0
		Black	6 (60.0%)		
		White	3 (30.0%)		
		Coloured	1 (10.0%)		
	Married	3		9.1	12.0
		Black	2 (66.7%)		
		White	1 (33.3%)		
	Multiple categories	2(Black)		6.1	8.0
	Divorced	1 (Coloured)		3.0	4.0
	Unknown	8		33.0	
		Black	6 (75.0%)		
		White	1 (12.5%)		
		Coloured	1 (12.5%)		
Occupation					
	Unemployed	10		30.3	34.5
		Black	8 (80.0%)		
		White	2 (20.0%)		
	Labourer/blue collar	16		48.5	55.2
		Black	12 (73.3%)		
		White	4 (26.7%)		
	Other	2		6.1	6.9
		Black	1 (50.0%)		
		Coloured	1 (50.0%)		
	Unknown	4		12.1	
		Black	1 (25.0%)		
		Coloured	2 (50.0%)		
		White	1 (25.0%)		
Education level					
	None	3		9.1	9.7
		Black	3 (100%)		
	Primary/elementary school	15		45.5	48.4
		Black	11 (84.6%)		
		Coloured	2 (14.4%)		
	Secondary/high school	11		33.3	39.3
		White	6 (54.5%)		
		Black	4 (36.4%)		

(Continues)

Table 2. (Continued)

Variable		Present *N*		(% total)	(% known)
	Coloured		1 (9.0%)		
Unknown		5		15.2	
	Black		3 (60.0%)		
	White		2 (40.0%)		
Criminal history					
Present		25		75.8	89.3
	Black		16 (64.0%)		
	White		7 (28.0%)		
	Coloured		2 (8.0%)		
Absent		3		9.1	10.7
	Black		2 (66.7%)		
	White		1 (33.3%)		
Unknown		5		9.1	
	Black		4 (80.0%)		
	Coloured		1 (20.0%)		

married and two were married and also had a girlfriend). One offender was divorced. These findings are comparable with those of the US where the majority of offenders were also in a relationship at the time of committing their crimes.

Occupation and education

Offender's occupation was known in 29 cases. Of those, 10 offenders (34.5%) were unemployed at the time of their arrest, 16 (55.2%) were labourers, one was a DJ in a night-club and one was a traditional healer.[6] Three offenders (9.7%) had no formal education, 15 (48.4%) had primary school level of education (up to and including grade 7) and 11 (39.3%) had high school education (grades 8 to 12).[7] The education level was unknown for two of the offenders. Thus, South African offenders seem to be somewhat less educated than those found in the US where most offenders had at least some high school level education.

Offenders' criminal history

Information about prior criminal history was missing for five offenders. Three offenders (10.7%) had no criminal history. Twenty five offenders (89.3%) had previous criminal history. The number of arrests for these offenders ranged from one to 17 (*M* = 4.8, *SD* = 4.17; median = 3). A detailed breakdown of arrest information is shown in Table 3. Numbers and percentages represent offenders who had at least one arrest for each particular crime (e.g. there were six offenders who had at least one previous arrest for homicide). Of those offenders for whom criminal history was known, 16 (57.1%) had at least one arrest for violent crimes against person, 10 (35.7%) had at least one arrest for sexual crimes against another person, 18 (64.3%) had at least one arrest for property crimes and 10 (35.7%) had at least one arrest for other crimes. Table 4 presents the categorization of offenders' arrests by type. Two of those who had arrests for

[6]Traditional healers (in South Africa known as Sangomas and Inyangas) have been administering health for centuries. They use plants, roots and animals to make their medicine.
[7]Grade levels are based upon the educational system used in South Africa and the US.

Table 3. Prior arrests

Variable	Present N	(% total)	(% known)
Prior arrests			
Violent crimes against person	16*	48.5	57.1
Assault/violence	10	30.3	35.7
Homicide	7	21.2	25.0**
Domestic violence	1	3.0	3.5
Armed robbery	2	6.1	7.1
Robbery	5	15.2	17.9
Sexual crimes against person	10*	30.3	35.7
Sexual assault/rape	10	30.3	35.7
Indecent exposure	2	6.1	7.1
Property crimes	18*	54.5	64.3
Theft	14	42.4	50.0
Burglary	9	27.3	32.1
Fraud	2	6.1	7.1
Theft auto	1	3.0	3.5
Other crimes	10*	30.3	35.7
Vandalism/damage	4	12.1	14.3
Weapons	2	6.1	7.1
Drugs	3	9.1	10.7
Traffic	3	9.1	10.7
**Unknown	6	18.2	

*The N for the overall categories of crimes represents the number of offenders who had *at least one* arrest for any crime in this category. Because the majority of offenders had arrests for multiple crimes within a category, the Ns for each specific crime add up to a greater number than the N of the category.

**For one offender, only information regarding his arrest for homicide was known, and it was unknown if he had any other arrests. Therefore, the % known for homicide was calculated out of 15 and for the rest of the categories out of 14.

violent crimes also had arrests for sexual crimes, and six had arrests for property crimes or other crimes. Seven offenders had previous arrests for property crimes only and six had at least one previous arrest in each category. It seems that the majority of offenders in the South African sample are criminally versatile, as most of them have committed offenses from more than one offense category. Overall, the criminal history patterns of South African serial homicide offenders seem to be comparable to those reported in the US with the majority having a prior criminal record.

Table 4. Criminal history

Type of arrest	Number of offenders
Prior arrests for violent crimes against person *only*	2*
Prior arrests for sexual crimes *only*	1
Prior arrests for property and/or other crimes *only*	7
Violent + sexual	2
Violent + property/other	6
Sexual + property/other	1
Violent + sexual + property/other	6

*There was no information about other arrests for one of these offenders; therefore, it is possible that he too had other crimes.

Table 5. Offender-victim relationship

Variable	Present *N*	% total	%known
Stranger	140	46.4	73.3
Acquaintance/friend	30	9.9	15.7
Family	13	4.3	6.8
Other	5	1.7	2.6
Significant other (present)	5	1.7	2.6
Significant other (past)	1	0.3	0.5
Unknown	111	36.8	

Offender-victim relationship

Information about victim-offender relationship was present in 191 (63.3%) of the cases. Of those, in 140 (73.3%) cases, the offender was a stranger to the victim, 30 (15.7%) were acquaintances[8] or friends, 13 (6.8%) were family, five (2.6%) had a present relationship with the victim, and one (0.5%) had a past relationship with the victim. Information about victim-offender relationship is summarised in Table 5. Overall, these trends are consistent with what is known about victim-offender relationship in the US serial homicide cases.

Crime scene actions

Another aim of the present study was to determine the patterns in crime scene behaviours in the South African serial homicide offenses. Frequencies for these behaviours are summarised in Table 6.

Location

The majority (236 cases, 78.1%) of the crimes occurred outside, 51 (16.9%) occurred inside and 13 (4.3%) occurred inside a car (usually victim's). Salfati and Bateman (2005) reported that the victim's body was found outside in 65% of cases in their sample. Thus, it seems that in South Africa, serial homicide offenses are somewhat more likely to occur outside than in the US. The majority of the outside locations were in fields or plantations —a unique characteristic of South African crimes, in contrast with the US where most serial crimes occurred in the urban areas (Hickey, 2006).

Weapons and wounding methods

The most frequent type of wounding was due to gunshots (in 81 cases, 30.2%), followed by blunt instrument (in at least 74 cases, 27.6%). Victims were strangled in 69 (25.7%) cases and stabbed in 29 (10.8%) cases. These findings are mostly consistent with what is known about wounding pattern in the US serial homicides with the exception of bludgeoning, which was the fourth most common method (after shooting, strangulation and stabbing) in the US unlike being the second in South Africa. In the majority of cases (76.1%), the offenders brought their weapon to the crime scene. South African offenders used a weapon from the scene in at least 33 (21.2%) of the cases[9] (one third of those who

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[8]This category in the HPI includes classmates, neighbours, casual acquaintances or relationships formed through business transactions

Table 6. Crime Scene Actions

Variable			Present *N*	(% total)	(% known)
Sexual (total)					
	Yes				
		Evidence	174	57.6	65.7
		Motivation	97	32.1	36.6
	No		77	25.5	29.1
	Unknown		91	30.1	37.9
			37	*12.3*	
Sexual (evidence)					
	Penetration (any)		95	31.5	35.8
		Vaginal	86	28.5	40.8
		Anal	13	4.3	4.9
		Oral	5	1.7	1.8
		Necrophilia	3	1.0	1.1
		Foreign object	2	0.7	0.8
	Other evidence				
		Semen—body	19	6.0	7.7
		Semen—crime scene	3	1.0	1.1
Location body found*					
	Outside		236	78.1	
		Field/plantation	41	13.6	
		Bushes/wooded area	44	14.6	
	Sugarcane field		28	9.3	
		Outside victim's res.	17	5.6	
		Park	9	3.0	
		Other	87	29.5	
	Inside		51	16.9	
		Victim's residence	37	12.3	
		Victim's own shop	7	2.3	
		Other	6	2.0	

		n	%	%
	In a car	13	4.3	
Wounding				
	Shooting	81	26.8	30.2
	Blunt Instrument			
	Yes	74	24.5	27.6
	Possible**	11	3.6	4.1
	Strangulation	69	22.9	25.7
	Stabbing	29	9.6	10.8
	Manual			
	Yes	18	6.0	6.7
	Possible**	10	3.3	3.7
	Arson	10	3.3	3.7
	Asphyxiation	5	1.7	1.9
	Drowning	5	1.7	1.9
	Burns	2	0.7	0.8
	Unknown	*34*	*11.3*	
Weapon				
	From scene	33	10.9	21.2
	Unknown	*146*	*48.3*	
	Brought to scene	137	45.4	76.1
	Unknown	*122*	*40.1*	
	Both from and to	11	3.6	5.8

*Bodies of two victims were never recovered.
**Blunt instrument and manual wounding were coded as 'possibly present' if, based on ME report, there was evidence of trauma consistent with these types of wounding methods (e.g. haematoma to the head; abrasions and haemorrhages on the face), but the ME did not specify the cause of these wounds.

used a weapon from the scene also brought one with them). These findings are contrary to Salfati and Bateman (2005) findings of a weapon being brought to scene in only 43% of their cases.

Sexual motive

In 174 cases (65.7%), there was some evidence of a sexual motive. In 97 (36.6%) of these cases, physical evidence of sexual activity, such as semen or evidence of penetration, was found. Crimes were deemed sexual even without explicit physical evidence under certain conditions: (1) if the medical examiner indicated that sexual assault was highly likely, but there was no clear evidence of sexual penetration or semen. (2) if live victims indicated that the offender attempted to rape them or said that he was about to rape them, but the victim escaped; (3) in cases where there were two victims (male and female) that the offender watched having sex prior to raping the female and killing the male, the murder of the male victim was also coded as sexual due to the overall sexual undertone of the crime; (4) if there was evidence of non-penetrating sexual activity (e.g. offender shot the victim in the leg and then fondled her); (5) if victim's body was found in explicitly sexual poses (e.g. spread legs, underwear pulled down, etc.). No evidence of sexual motivation was found in 91 (37.9%) cases, and in 37 (12.3%) cases this was impossible to determine due to decomposition and so on. Hickey (2006) reported that 47% of serial homicide offenders in his sample had an underlying sexual motive in at least some of their crimes. Salfati and Bateman (2005) reported that evidence of sexual assault was present in 60% of their cases.

Summary

In sum, it was found that South African serial homicide offenders and victims are comparable with those found in the US on many aspects (e.g. age, offender's marital status, offender's criminal history and victim-offender relationship). There were, however, some notable differences in that, unlike the US, when sole offenders were looked at, there were only male serial homicide offenders found in South Africa and they tended to be somewhat less educated than those in the US. The race of both offenders and victims was predominantly Black (in contrast with the US where both offenders and victims are most often White). This may be explained by the general racial distribution in the two populations. Three quarters of the crimes in the South African sample occurred outside, with the majority of those happening in fields, bushes and plantations, unlike the US where most serial homicides occur in urban areas.

In terms of sexual activity, some caution must be mentioned about interpreting the results. Sexual motivation may be difficult to validly measure due to its inherent subjectivity, and further if variables are operationalized differently across studies, then comparisons should be interpreted with caution. The current study shows that South African offenders had higher rates of a sexual motive as compared with Hickey's US sample, but Salfati and Bateman's (2005) US sample, in contrast with the South African offenders, showed higher frequencies of sexual assault or sexual activity with physical evidence. Measurement and definition thus becomes a key element (Salfati, 2006). Finally,

[9]Information about whether a weapon from the scene was used was undetermined in 146 (48.3%) of cases, however.

substantially more of the South African offenders brought their weapon to the crime scene than their counterparts in the US and blunt instrument was used more often in South Africa than the US.

Victim composition throughout the series

This section will deal with looking at aetiology in terms of the key issues that the previous literature has highlighted is key to understanding serial homicide, notably in terms of whether or not offenders repeatedly select certain victims with similar characteristics across their series. The focus on consistency in crime scene actions will be focused on in other papers in this issue. For this current study, the focus will be on; (1) gender; (2) race; (3) age; (4) offender-victim relationship; (5) single/multiple victims; and (6) deceased/live victims.

Information about the victim composition across the series is summarised in Table 7.

Gender

Across the 33 series, 17 (51.5%) offenders were consistent in victim type based upon gender, that is, they had victims who were either only male or solely female. Fifteen of the 17 (45.5%) offenders targeted females and two (6%) had male victims. Sixteen (48.5%) offenders targeted a mixture of males and females within their series. According to Hickey (2006), 57% of offenders consistently targeted victims of a specific gender in the US. This is slightly higher as compared with South Africa. US offenders targeted females only at 35% and males only at 22%. South African serial homicide offenders repeatedly selected females at a higher rate.

Race

Of the known cases, over two thirds of offenders targeted victims of one racial/ethnic group. Seventeen offenders (53.1%) had only Black victims, three (9.4%) had only White victims and two (6.2%) had only Coloured victims. Ten (31.2%) offenders targeted victims of different racial groups within their series. In one series (3%), there was not enough information to ascertain consistency by racial/ethnic group. South African serial homicide offenders were relatively consistent in terms of targeting people of the same race across their series.

In analysing inter-racial and intra-racial homicide series, 62.5% (20/32) of offenders targeted only victims of the same race as the offender. In 37.5% (12/32) of series, the offender targeted all least one victim of another race. In three of these 12 series, the offender solely selected victims of another race; however, there was no direct evidence of a racist motivation. Intra-racial offending was the dominant pattern; however, there were a notable number of offenders who targeted at least one victim of another race in their series. This is important for case linkage.

Age

Five (17.2%) offenders consistently chose only victims from one age group. Of these five one offender (3.4%) targeted children (12 years and younger), one (3.4%) targeted adolescents (13–17 years) and three (10.3%) chose victims who were young adults (18–29 years). There were no other age groups who were repeatedly selected. Nineteen (65.5%) offenders chose victims from multiple age groups within their series. In four of the cases (12.1%), there was not enough information to assess offender consistency in victim type by age. In the US, one third of offenders murdered adults only, 6% targeted children only and

Table 7. Victim composition by series

Variable	Present *N*	(% total)	(% known)
Gender			
Only targeted one gender	17	51.5	
Female	15	45.5	
Male	2	6.0	
Both	16	48.5	
Race			
Only targeted one race	22	66.7	68.8
Black	17	51.5	53.1
White	3	9.1	9.4
Coloured	2	6.1	6.2
Multiple racial groups	10	30.3	31.2
Not enough information	1	3.0	
Intra-racial	20	60.6	62.5
Inter-racial	12	36.4	37.5
Only targeted victims of other race	3	9.0	9.4
Not enough information	1	3.0	
Age			
Only targeted one age group 5	5	15.1	17.2
Children (12 years and younger)	1	3.0	3.4
Adolescents (13–17 years)	1	3.0	3.4
Young adults (18–29 years)	3	9.1	10.3
Middle adulthood (30–59 years)	0		
Seniors (60+ years) 0	0		
Multiple age groups	19	57.6	65.5
Not enough information	4	12.1	
Offender-victim relationship			
Only targeted one group	7	22.1	31.8
Stranger	6	18.2	27.3
Girlfriend (prior)	1	3.0	4.5
Mixture of o-v relationships	15	45.5	68.2
Not enough information	11	33.3	
Knew at least one victim	16	48.9	72.7
Single/multiple victims			
Single (only)	19	57.6	59.4
Multiple (only)	0		
Both	13	39.4	40.6
Not enough information	1	3.0	
Deceased/live victims			
Deceased (only)	16	48.5	
At least on live victim	17	51.5	

5% chose teens (Hickey, 2006). Overall, US and South African serial homicide offenders did not tend to consistently select victims of one age group.

Offender-victim relationship

Of the cases where the offender-victim relationship was known, seven offenders (31.8%) repeatedly targeted victims with whom they had similar types of interpersonal relationships, for example, all acquaintances or strangers. Six offenders (27.3%) targeted

strangers only and one offender (4.5%) targeted his previous girlfriends. South African serial homicide offenders did not overwhelmingly target people with whom they had a similar type of interaction. Fifteen (68.2%) offenders targeted people who they knew in different capacities. Over two thirds of South African serial offenders had some prior interpersonal contact[10] with at least one of their victims. Eleven (33.3%) of the cases did not have enough information to assess offender-victim relationship targeting across the series. Hickey (2006) reported that 70% of male serial homicide offenders targeted strangers only, 10% targeted acquaintances only and 3% targeted family only in the US. Across series, US offenders consistently targeted strangers at a much higher rate. Further, acquaintances and family were not consistently targeted in South Africa. Thirty-five percent of US offender knew at least one of their victims, that is, they were acquaintances or family. In contrast, over two thirds of South African offenders knew at least one of their victims. US serial homicide offenders were much more consistent in their relationships with victims across their series. South African offenders were more varied, but often knew at least one their victims.

Multiple victims

There were not any offenders who always targeted more than one victim. However, 13 (40.6%) offenders had a combination of single and multiple victims within their series. One case did not contain enough information to comment thereupon.

Deceased/live victims

Sixteen (48.5%) offenders consistently completed the homicides with their series and 17 (51.5%) offenders had at least one surviving victim (i.e., attempted homicide or rapes) within their series.

Summary of victim composition across the series

In terms of victim composition across the series, South African and US serial homicide offenders could be compared using a few variables. For both countries, a little over half of serial offenders' repeatedly targeted the same gender. Gender may be a somewhat useful characteristic in the identification of victimology patterns and case linage. Serial offenders in both the US and South Africa appear to have low rates of consistently targeting those of a particular age group. Age may thus not be useful as a sole focus in determining similarity of patterns when looking at the entire series. In terms of offender-victim relationships, both the US and South African offenders were most consistent in targeting strangers. Although there are high overall rates of strangers being targeted by South African offenders, over two thirds chose at least one person who they knew in some capacity within their series. Consistency by race was only available for South African offenders and they were quite consistent in the selection of victims based upon race/ethnicity. However, this may be reflective of who is more available based upon country demographics. Also, similar to single homicide patterns, intra-racial homicide was more prevalent (Fox & Levin, 2001). South African offenders do not repeatedly target multiple victims, and over half have a surviving victim with their series. Overall, the victim composition variables analysed were

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[10]Acquaintances, friends, employee and family.

not repeatedly used by offenders across their entire series at a level to reliably establish standard victimology patterns.

DISCUSSION

The current study aimed to give an overview of 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 and crime scene actions.

Based on the analysis of all solved serial homicide cases in South Africa available for analysis, it was found that South African serial homicide offenders and victims are overall comparable with studies discussing samples of serial homicide offenders in the US on many aspects (e.g. age, offender's marital status, offender's criminal history and victim-offender relationship), with some smaller differences relating to weapon, where the crime occurred, and the race of the offender and the victim, which reflected the geographical and sociological landscape of South Africa. These differences highlight Swidler's idea that across nations, some differences may exist because of actions and sometimes problem-solving that is location specific, even within the realm of decision making in violent serial crime.

Similarities across national samples may indicate characteristics of serial homicide offending that do not hinge upon national contexts. There were similar patterns for South Africa and the US serial offender samples where a little over half repeatedly targeted victims of one gender; offender samples showed low rates of repeatedly targeting those of a particular age group across the series; and where both samples were most consistent in their targeting of strangers. Although South African offenders showed overall lower frequencies of repeated targeting the same types of victims, over two thirds chose at least one person who they knew in some capacity within their series. South African offenders were also consistent in the selection of victims based upon race/ethnicity, there was a pattern of intra-racial homicide, and offenders did not repeatedly target multiple victims. Over half had a surviving victim with their series, thus supporting Salfati's (2008) suggestion that series need to be looked at in their overall victim targeting, irrespective of legal crime classification (i.e. rape, or assault versus homicide) in order to more fully understand the aetiology of serial homicide. Results show that offenders also did not repeatedly target victims with the same characteristics at very high rates. Analysing victim composition across the entire series may be too broad in that there will be variation especially across a longer series. It may be that offenders repeatedly target victims in the beginning of their series and then change pattern or that through experimentation they learn their own preferences and are more consistent towards the end of the series. Victimology patterns should be further explored at the beginning and the end of the series to determine if there are more reliable patterns. Also, other victim characteristics should be explored in more depth. The results from this study suggest that there is a very real need to go beyond looking at victim characteristics on their own, to looking at them within the larger context of the offense, by looking at the actions of the offenders against specific victim groups (see Salfati, Horning, Sorochinski, & Labuschagne, 2015).

Although caution should be taken with generalising these findings to all cases of serial homicide at this stage, these findings are the closest we currently have in the empirical literature to understanding serial homicide offenders and offending characteristics across national contexts. This study illustrates the need for more studies on serial homicide

especially in non-Western contexts to establish ideas about what serial homicide demographics and behaviours are nation specific versus something that may generally occur in this type of repeat violent crime. There are characteristics as well as crime scene actions that may be shaped by location (i.e. they are country specific), and this type of information may provide insight into how landscapes do and do not influence this extreme form of violent crime. As previously noted, there are a lot of unfounded conceptions about serial homicide and cross-national comparisons allow for incorrect assumptions to be demystified and unknown characteristics and features of serial homicide offending to be discovered, and thereby expanding our knowledge of serial homicide.

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