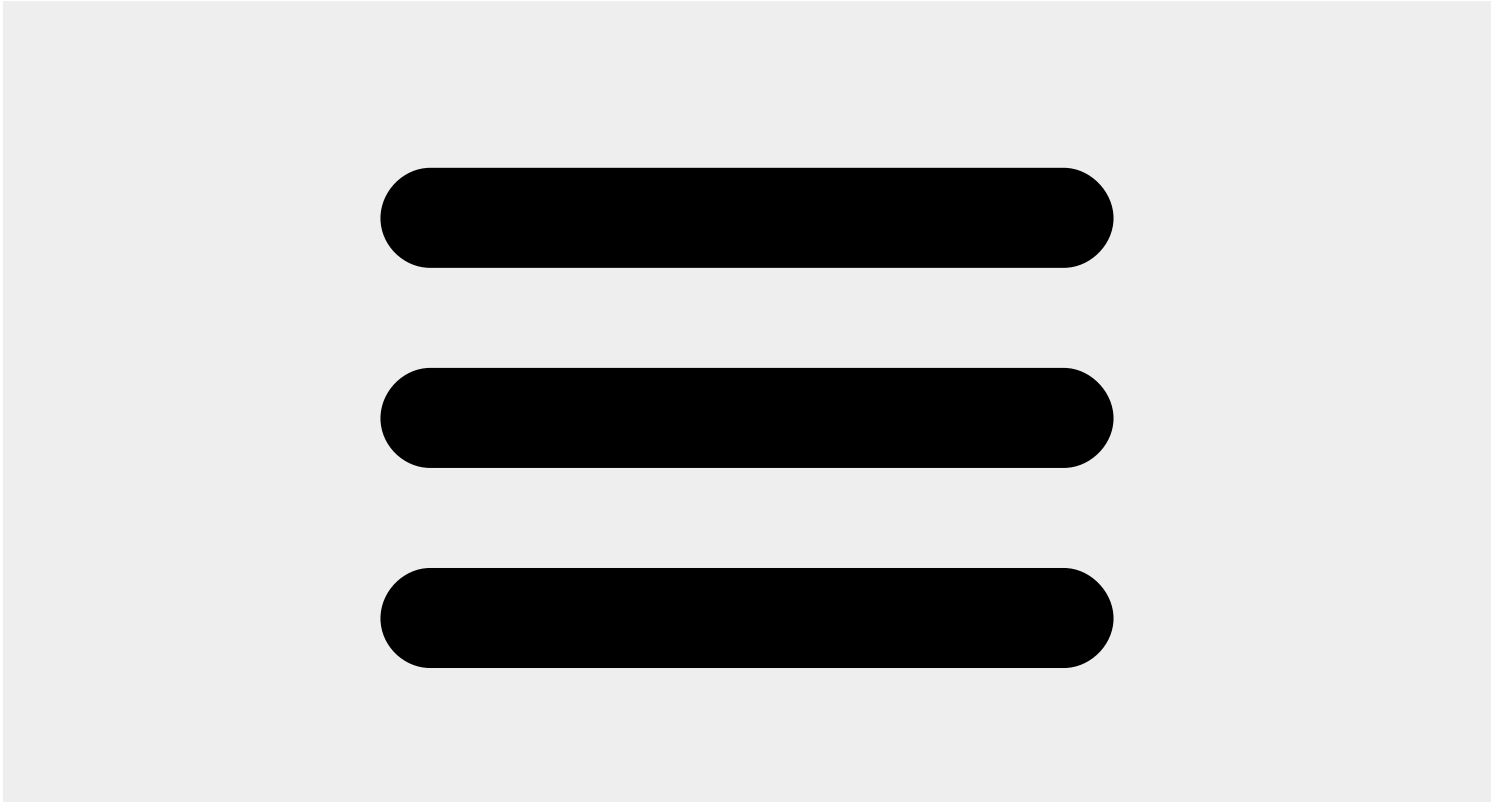
# CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENT KILLERS

*Posted on October 13, 2021 by Burcak Unal*



Murder is by nature complicated and multifaceted. As such, understanding the causes of this complex event requires a combination of disciplines (Botelho & Gonçalves, 2016). Recent academic studies suggest that most understanding of the underlying nature of murder lies in childhood (Drury, Heinrichs, Elbert, Tahja, his lunatic, & Caropreso, 2017). Research suggests that the emotional despair of children in severe depression poses a high risk for future murder or suicide (Sorrells, 1980). Ashley Michelle Kirby (2009) reported that one young serial murder criminal started her career at the age of 14.  Kirby also noted that adult serial killers often suffer from childhood disorders (C.D.). This article will attempt to take a thorough look at the phenomenon of juvenile perperated homicide.

When one looks at the results of Hickey's work on serial killers in 2013, it was concluded that the serial killers who were analyzed committed several murders in early adolescence as a result of physical, emotional and sexual abuse, as well as abandonment in childhood. Hemenway and Solnick (2017) have researched 154 cases and identified five categories

that indicate that about 90% of serial killers are male and that 79% started their killing between the ages of 13 and 14 and 13% commenced between the ages of 11 and 12. The five categories (Hemenway & Solnick, 2017) include: (1) a family relative, who is usually a child, and often an older brother, who had been given the responsibility of taking care of a baby sibling; these murders usually took place in a residence and involved blunt force trauma; (2) a family member, usually a child, who had killed an adult family member, typically a parent or grandparent; these cases often took place in a residential house with the perpetrator using either a gun or a knife as a weapon; (3) while playing with a firearm, a juvenile accidently or recklessly shoots and kills another sibling or friend; (4) during the commission of a crime, such as robbery, a group of young people, often trying to steal money from an adult end up killing the victim; and (5) involves a group or gang attack, where a group of young people fight with individuals or other other groups. In summary, the perpetrators of murders perpetrated by children typically involve male adolescents using weapons. This classification of events is therefore useful in understanding the problem and identifying potential solutions to prevent juvenile violence from taking place.

The clearest finding from the work is in relation to family history. A high percentage of young murder offenders come from homes characterized by abuse, domestic violence, lack of parental supervision, lack of adequate parenting, or general domestic instability (Shumaker & Prinz, 2000). Easy access to a weapon has been shown to be a correlated factor. However, not all young people who have been exposed to any or all of these factors have committed murder. It should thus be obvious that all of these negative conditions can facilitate the development of murder behavior, but they may not give us a definitive answer as to why a child committed murder. As Gorby (2000) pointed out, 21.7% of serial murder criminals begin their homicidal activities between the ages of 13 and 20. At the minimum, Gorby's research provides support for more thorough evaluation and investigation of the causes of childhood and adolescent murders. The intensification of research in this area is essential to create a better understanding of this phenomonen and hopefully a means at deterrence. The first condition of effective prevention is that the conditions of the incident are well understood. It should be emphasized that preventing a child from committing violence, and more specifically a murder, can not only save the victim, but also rescue the life of the juvenile perpetrator (Hemenway & Solnick, 2017).

**References**

Botelho, M., & Gonçalves, R. A. (2016). Why do people kill? A critical review of the literature on factors associated with homicide. *Aggression and violent behavior*, *26*, 9-15.

Drury, A., Heinrichs, T., Elbert, M., Tahja, K., DeLisi, M., & Caropreso, D. (2017). Adverse childhood experiences, paraphilias, and serious criminal violence among federal sex offenders. *Journal of criminal psychology*.

Hemenway, D., & Solnick, S. J. (2017). The epidemiology of homicide perpetration by children. *Injury epidemiology*, *4*(1), 1-6.

Shumaker, D. M., & Prinz, R. J. (2000). Children who murder: a review. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, *3*(2), 97-115.

Sorrells Jr, J. (1980). What can be done about juvenile homicide? *Crime & Delinquency*, *26*(2), 152-161.

***Feature picture credit:*** *Matt Brown*

***About the Author:*** *Burcak Unal is an intern with the IACS. She is a Criminal Justice and Law Enforcement Administration student with the Colorado State University, USA. Currently, she is based in Ankara, Turkey.*