

UNDERSTANDING MUTILATION MURDER

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According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, "mutilation is a situation or act of obliterating, eliminating, or seriously harming a limb or other body part of a person or animal" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). In criminal law, mutilation is generally defined as violently and maliciously inflicting a serious wound upon another person. Research and data on homicide offenders liable for mutilation is limited. Many researchers explain that this act is rare for incidents of homicide overall (Di Nunno et al., 2006; Häkkänen-Nyholm et al., 2009; Holmes, 2017; Konopka et al., 2007; Wilke-Schalhorst et al., 2019). As it specifically relates to Sexual Homicide (SH), analyses in a number of nations have revealed that the rate of criminal dismemberment ranges between 5% to 20% of homicide cases, respectively.

Since the 1970s, analytical profilers at the FBI's Behavioral Science Unit (BSU) have continued to examine crime scenes in an attempt to create profiles of violent offenders. Moreover, this unit tries to discover specific characteristics relevant to the offender at a crime scene (Ressler, Burgess, Hartman, Douglas & McCormack, 1986). These profiles are intended

to help local police investigators to identify, locate and apprehend violent offenders, including serial killers. Researchers attempt to understand how to interpret offending patterns as a means to predict future related incidents based on the evaluation of criminal behavior. At this time, the background of mutilation-related crime needs to be investigated further because this act exhibits the highest level of violence.

There are four identified reasons for explaining criminal acts involving mutilation: 1) defensive (disposing of the victims, concealing the body, and erasing proof of murder), 2) aggressive (motivated by anger), 3) offensive (necro-sadistic), and 4) necromantic (expression of sexual deviance) (Polat, Berna & Altintop, 2018). As an example, between 1991 and 2017, there were a total of 43 instances of criminal mutilation identified in Sweden (Guggenheimer, Caman, Sturup, Thiblin & Zilg, 2021). Approximately 70% of these cases were classified as 'defensive' mutilations, where the fundamental rationale for the extreme violence was the disposal of the body, while 30% were named 'hostile,' that is, because of a statement of strong aggression, necro/sexual sadism, or mental illness (Sea & Beauregard, 2019). It is obvious that specialists and analysts need to understand the social setting in which these acts are committed, as crimes involving mutilation might fill various definitions or classifications across different nations. If the victim has a large build, the use of an accomplice is very common (Sea & Beauregard, 2019). At the same time, using a co-conspirator or accomplice entails the risk of being reported to the police. This would clarify why in Finland, offenders there prefer to dismember the body into a few pieces to remove the body parts without involving another party in order to best cover up the evidence (Ressler et al., 1986).

Although defensive mutilation is observed to be the most common type of mutilation homicide, some studies likewise demonstrate that offensive mutilation is equally common. Two further investigations, one in Finland and one in South Korea, investigated 13 cases between 1995 and 2004 and 65 cases between 1995 and 2011, respectively (Häkkinen-Nyholm, Weizmann-Henelius, Salenius, Lindberg & RepoTiihonen, 2009). These studies present the differences in case characteristics between the Korean mutilation homicides and the ones from Finland. The general examination concluded that the two samples are practically the same with the exception of two factors: the presence of an abettor and the diagnosis of schizophrenia (Häkkinen-Nyholm et al., 2009). Just as interesting, Ressler et al. (1986) concluded that in another small sample of sexual killings, the act of engaging in criminal mutilation was routinely correlated with adolescent and childhood sexual victimization.

Sometimes, some actions during the commission of the crime become considerably more surprising and unexplainable when compared to the actual homicide. Quite possibly the most unique among these acts is the intentional dismemberment of the victim's body, which is considered to be one of the ultimate acts of aggression (Holmes, 2017). Understanding the motivation behind these acts is a critical aspect in attempting to solve related crimes. It is clear that further research is needed to analyze a larger number of cases in a coordinated effort to better understand the relationship between acts involving mutilation and the motivation behind homicide and other violent crimes.

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