



2025-26 SPRING

PSYCHOLOGY OF CRIME

WEEK 12

CRIME LINKAGE & OFFENDER PROFILING

INTRODUCTION

- It is true in criminology that a **minority** of offenders **commit the majority of crime**.
- Therefore, **offenders are a priority for law enforcement** agencies around the world due to the considerable **costs** they impose on our **society**, both in **human and financial terms**.
- ***In the absence of physical trace evidence***, what other evidence from the **crime scene** exists that could be used to **assist in detecting the offender** and **determining** the extent of his/her **offending**?

INTRODUCTION

- ***Offender profiling*** and ***crime linkage*** are two **psychological procedures** that have the potential to assist.
- **Crime linkage** is “a form of **behavioural analysis** used to identify crimes **committed by the same offender**, through their **behavioural similarity**”
- It is also called ***case linkage, linkage analysis,*** and ***comparative case analysis.***

INTRODUCTION

- **Offender profiling** is also known by many names, including *psychological profiling*, *criminal profiling*, *behavioural investigative advice (BIA)*, *investigative profiling*, *crime scene analysis* and *criminal investigative advice*.
- The term “**offender profiling**” refers to the practice of **inferring an offender’s characteristics from crime scene behaviour**.

CRIME LINKAGE

CRIME LINKAGE

- It is practiced by **police** employees, such as **crime analysts, behavioural investigative advisors** and **police officers**, as well as by **consultants**, such as academic **psychologists**.
- ***the offender consistency hypothesis:*** offenders must behave in a **relatively similar way each time** they commit a crime of that type.

CRIME LINKAGE

- Identifying crimes that have been committed by the **same serial offender** has several **advantages**:
 - the efficient **deployment of limited police resources**
 - the **pooling of witness descriptions** and **physical evidence** from different crime scenes
- **Some crime types**, such as sex offences, are **difficult to prosecute**. Crime linkage can **help to increase** victim credibility because it allows an **offender to be charged** with multiple offences. Because there are generally **several victims**.

The Newcastle murder series (LABUSCHAGNE, 2006)

Crime 1	Crime 2	Crime 3	Crime 4
Murder and rape	Murder and rape	Murder	Murder
Occurred at night	Occurred at night	Occurred at night	Occurred at night
Female rape victim threatened with knife	Female rape victim threatened with knife		
Male victim killed with rock (from scene)	Male victim killed with rock (from scene)	Male victim killed with rock (from scene)	Male victim killed with rock (from scene)
Blitz (sudden) attack	Blitz (sudden) attack	Blitz (sudden) attack	Blitz (sudden) attack
Rape of female	Rape of female	Male victim found undressed (potential female rape victim?)	
No property stolen	Property stolen (telephones, purse)		No property stolen

different crime linkage scenarios

- There are **several different scenarios** in which crime linkage might be conducted.
- Where the crime linkage **practitioner suspects** they have identified two or more crimes, they **conduct a detailed analysis** of the behaviour displayed at **each crime scene**.
- They **identify behaviours** that are **common** to the crimes and they consider **how** the behaviour displayed **might differ**.

CRIME LINKAGE

- The practitioner might also consider the *geographical proximity of the offences*.
- It is thought to be a **good indicator** of whether crimes are committed by the **same offender** because offenders **tend to commit** their offences within **well-defined areas** with which they **are familiar**.

Evidence-based Practice

- It is important that the **principles** underpinning crime linkage are demonstrated to be **empirically supported**.
- Crime linkage rests on two assumptions:
 - **behavioural consistency** and
 - **distinctiveness**.
- The use of crime linkage analysis is to **support decision-making**
 - in **police investigations** and
 - in **legal proceedings**.

Empirical Evidence

- Research has demonstrated, for example, that the ***geographical distance*** and ***number of days between offences*** is **shorter** for crimes committed by the **same person** than crimes committed by different people.
- This means that the so-called ***inter-crime distance*** and ***temporal proximity*** might be used to **facilitate crime linkage**.

Limitations of the Research on Crime Linkage

- 1. Much** of the crime linkage literature has relied on **samples of solved crime**. This is **problematic** because the crimes may have been committed in a **highly consistent** and/or **distinctive manner**.
- 2. Much** research has focused on examining crime linkage within **specific crime types**. **Many offenders** (particularly the most prolific) do **not restrict** themselves to committing **just one type** of offence.
- 3. More** research is **needed** to test crime linkage in practice:
 - how analysts identify behavioural consistency and distinctiveness,
 - what factors they use to link crimes and
 - whether their decision-making can be improved using statistically-based decision support tools.

Conclusions on Crime Linkage

- **Identifying crime series** has several **advantages** to the **police** and can benefit **society**.
- If a **crime linkage practitioner** gives the police or the courts **inaccurate advice**, the consequences are significant.
- **Crime linkage** is assessed and shown to be a **valid practice**.

OFFENDER PROFILING

The Case Study

- Dec 24, 1990 - the perpetrator drugs Tammy Homolka, age 15, with Halcion and Halothane and rapes her. The perpetrator, with a willing partner, photographs and videotapes the sex acts with the victim. Tammy vomits as a reaction to the drugs and suffocates.
- Mid-June 1991, Leslie Mahaffy (15) disappears after phoning a friend from a 7-11. She is raped and tortured over two days, the proceedings are again videotaped. She is discovered piece by piece June 29.
- Nov. 1991 Terry Anderson (14) vanishes.
- April, 1992 Kristen French (16) abducted, raped and tortured over Easter Weekend. She is strangled, her nude body shorn of all hair and left in a ditch.

Which one is the serial killer?



Karla Homolka

- With the aid of her husband, rapes and kills first her sister, then three other girls.
- Attempts to blame her sexual predation on “battered wife syndrome”
- However: it is subsequently revealed that she is an equal partner in the murders.
- Most people believe that almost all violent offenders are male, when in fact women make up a sizable percentage (based on type of crime--15% overall, about 50% of intimates)

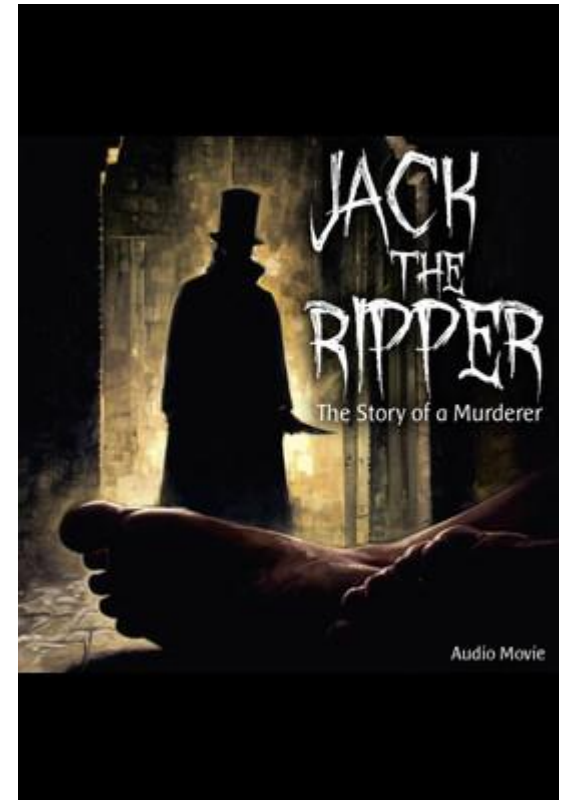


OFFENDER PROFILING

- While it is an **exciting area** to research and study, it is also **challenging**. Quite a lot of the debate within this field relates to whether **offender profiling** is, or should be, **an art or a science**.
- As psychologists, their practice should be **evidence-based** and therefore **empirical** research into the underpinnings of **offender profiling is crucial**.

OFFENDER PROFILING

- The **roots of offender profiling** have been traced back to **Dr. Thomas Bond** who provided the UK police with an **opinion regarding Jack the Ripper's physical appearance, likely dress, state of mind and motivation for a series of murders** in London in 1880.
- It was through the activities of the **Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)** in the United States that **offender profiling gained its fame.**



OFFENDER PROFILERS

- In researching it, we often have to **use data** that are **held and collated by police forces**, which presents its own **difficulties** in terms of **data quality**.
- **Offender profilers** come from a **variety** of professional backgrounds:
 - a. forensic, clinical and academic psychologists,
 - b. forensic and clinical psychiatrists,
 - c. police officers and police scientists,
 - d. criminologists, psychiatrists, psychologists and
 - e. FBI special agents

OFFENDER PROFILERS

- The **three main areas** on which they had testified were
 1. **motivation** for the crime,
 2. whether **the behaviour** of an offender corresponded with particular **personal characteristics**, and
 3. **evidence of linkage** between crimes.
- **Empirical research is needed** for offender profiling to be seen as a “*legitimate field of study within the behavioral sciences*”.

Schools of Thought in Offender Profiling

- When talking about the history of **offender profiling**, it is often **categorised into three different schools of thought**:
 1. The **criminal investigative approach** (also called *the FBI approach, criminal investigative analysis* or *crime scene analysis*)
 2. The **clinical-practitioner approach** (also known as *diagnostic evaluation*)
 3. The **statistical approach** (sometimes *investigative psychology*).

The criminal investigative approach

Data assimilation	At this stage the profiler must collate all available information about the crime. This can include written materials (e.g. victim or witness statements, autopsy reports) or visual materials (e.g. CCTV- (Closed-Circuit Television) or photographs).
Crime classification	The crime is classified into a type using the collated information.
Crime reconstruction	Hypotheses about how the crime unfolded are developed in terms of the sequence of events and the behaviours of the different parties (e.g. victim, offender/s).
Profile generation	The profile is generated including hypotheses about the offender's socio-demographic characteristics, his/her habits and personality. According to Jackson and Bekerian (1997) the profiles produced tend to be written in a standardised manner.

The criminal investigative approach to profiling is informed by the ***investigator's extensive knowledge developed from exposure to a large number of cases*** and their ***experience of criminal investigations***. In addition, ***the FBI conducted interviews*** with incarcerated rapists and murderers from which typologies of offenders were developed.

The clinical approach

- Some **clinical profilers** (Copson, Badcock, Boon, & Britton, 1997) have **likened their approach** to that of the **original FBI profilers**.
- Boon (1997) has stressed that the **aim of clinical profiling** is *not to solve a case*, but to *provide “insight into the nature of both the case and the offender(s)”*.
- The **psychological literature** is drawn upon to understand the *offender’s motive* and suggest *offender characteristics*.

The statistical approach

- The statistical approach to profiling is ***attributed to David Canter and his colleagues***, which “is primarily based on the **multivariate analysis of behavioural** and other **information found at the crime scene** to infer an ***offender’s characteristics*** and ***psychological processes***” .
- The statistical approach to profiling is a **research-oriented approach**.

Schools of Thought in Offender Profiling

- The dominant **schools of thought in offender profiling** that have evolved **differ** from one another **in terms of**
- their ***incorporation of research findings*** to justify the predictions being made in the offender profile, and
- the ***emphasis*** they place on ***psychological theory and/or practitioner experience***.

The Assumptions of Offender Profiling

- Offender profiling shares two assumptions with crime linkage:
 1. offender **behavioural consistency** and **distinctiveness**
 2. the **empirical research**.
- Offender profiling assumes a **relationship between** the way someone **behaves** at a crime scene and their **characteristics**. This has been called the **A(ctions) → C(haracteristics) relationship** or alternatively the **homology assumption**.

SUMMARY

- Both **offender profiling** and **crime linkage** can be of **great benefit in detecting offenders**, but equally both can **divert police investigations** down the “wrong track” **if the advice** given is **incorrect** (Goodwill et al., 2009; Grubin et al., 2001).
- The **linking of crimes** together to form a series based on **behavioural similarity** is called **crime linkage analysis**. It is **widely practiced** but rarely discussed in the popular media.

SUMMARY

- The **prediction of offender characteristics** from crime scene behaviour is referred to as **offender profiling** but its **practice is not as uniform** as this definition would suggest.
- **Several schools of thought** regarding how a person's **characteristics** should be **profiled from crime scene behaviour** have developed; however, these are making way for a more **integrated approach to profiling**.
- A broader range of **behavioural investigative advice** is now **offered to the police**, which incorporates **offender profiling and crime linkage analysis**.

SUMMARY

- Both **crime linkage and offender profiling** have been evaluated against the principle of **evidence-based practice**.
- While the **behavioural consistency** and **distinctiveness** assumptions of offender profiling (in its narrowest sense) and crime linkage have received some **support from psychological research**.
- These studies have their **limitations** and do **not yet reflect the reality of the task faced by practitioners**.
- Investigations of the **homology assumption** have been less successful.

SUMMARY

- The importance of the **situation in producing behaviour through its interaction** with the person has long been recognised in **psychological research of non-criminal behaviour**.
- This suggests that a **more complex view of the relationship between criminal actions and offender characteristics** is needed.