
THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SERIAL OFFENDERS IN INDIA: A CRIMINOLOGICAL AND LEGAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Murder has remained an intrinsic part of human history, yet its most perplexing manifestation i.e., serial homicide, demands deeper exploration. Serial murderers operate with calculated precision, often driven by psychological, neurological, and sociocultural influences that remain inadequately understood. The intricate cognitive and behavioural mechanisms underlying serial offending in India, where criminal profiling remains underutilized despite its critical necessity. By integrating forensic psychology with criminological methodologies, this research examines the motivations, typologies, and psychopathic constructs of serial offenders, particularly those involved in sexually motivated homicides. The study evaluates gaps in India's investigative frameworks and highlights the role of forensic psychology in offender profiling, law enforcement, and policy reform. Through a synthesis of psychological assessment, case study analysis, and legal evaluation, this research proposes a robust, interdisciplinary approach to decoding serial criminality, ultimately striving to enhance prevention, detection, and rehabilitation mechanisms within India's evolving justice system. This study delves into the intricate psychological dimensions of serial offenders in the Indian context through a rigorous criminological analysis. By synthesizing foundational and contemporary psychological theories, this research identifies critical cognitive and behavioural patterns that distinguish serial offenders from other criminal typologies. The study examines the interplay of psychopathy, sociopathy, and personality disorders in shaping criminal trajectories while contextualizing these findings within historical and regional frameworks specific to India. Employing a multidisciplinary approach, the research integrates forensic psychology, criminological theory, and law enforcement methodologies to offer a nuanced understanding of investigative challenges and offender profiling.

Keywords: Criminal Profiling, Forensic Psychology, Serial Homicide, Psychopathy

INTRODUCTION

Murder, as a profound aberration of human behaviour, has been a constant throughout history. However, its most chilling and enigmatic manifestation, serial homicide presents unique psychological and criminological challenges that remain inadequately understood. Serial murder is distinct in its methodical, premeditated nature, characterized by the repetition of killings over an extended period, often committed by an individual who exhibits a specific, discernible pattern of behaviour. The motivations behind serial murder are complex, shaped by a combination of psychological, neurological, and sociocultural factors.¹ While Western criminological frameworks have produced significant insights into serial homicide, such understanding remains underdeveloped in other global contexts, particularly in India, where serial crime investigations have yet to fully integrate psychological profiling and forensic methodologies.²

India's socio-cultural and legal context presents distinct challenges when investigating serial homicide. Despite sporadic high-profile cases that mirror international patterns of serial murder, the country's criminal justice system struggles with a lack of cohesive strategies for dealing with serial offenders. A significant gap exists in the integration of forensic psychology into investigative processes, which severely limits the capacity of law enforcement to understand and prevent serial crimes. Indian law enforcement agencies, operating with traditional investigative methods, often fail to recognize the unique psychological profile of serial offenders, who exhibit distinct cognitive, emotional, and behavioural traits. This failure leaves a crucial gap in the identification, apprehension, and intervention of serial murderers, often allowing them to evade detection or escalate their criminal behaviour.

The role of forensic psychology in understanding and profiling serial offenders is particularly critical, as it offers insights into the cognitive mechanisms that distinguish serial killers from other types of criminals. Psychopathy, sociopathy, and personality disorders are frequently implicated in serial criminal behaviour, yet these constructs remain underexplored in the Indian context.³ The psychological dimensions of serial homicide are often obscured by the sensationalized portrayal of such crimes in the media, which tends to emphasize sensational

¹ M. Nesca, J.T. Dalby & S. Baskerville, *Psychosocial Profile of a Female Psychopath*, Am. J. Forensic Psychol. (1999).

² D.R. Offord, M.H. Boyle & Y.A. Racine, *The Epidemiology of Antisocial Behaviour in Childhood and Adolescence*, in *The Development and Treatment of Childhood Aggression* 31–54 (2013).

³ S. Mitra, *The Mind of a Serial Killer and the Indian Judiciary*, SSRN (2022), https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4196654.

details rather than focusing on the underlying psychological drivers of serial murder. As a result, the public's understanding of serial offenders is often shaped by media-driven narratives that prioritize spectacle over substance, further complicating the investigation and prevention of such crimes.

Moreover, the lack of a structured framework for offender profiling in India exacerbates the challenges posed by serial homicide. Criminal investigations in the country often rely on conventional methods that may not be suited to the intricacies of serial crimes. Serial offenders, by their very nature, defy traditional patterns of criminal behaviour and require a specialized approach to investigation. The integration of forensic psychology into criminal investigations, particularly through offender profiling, would provide law enforcement with tools to understand the unique cognitive and behavioural patterns of serial killers, enabling them to identify suspects and prevent further crimes more effectively. However, the absence of a formalized system for profiling and psychological assessment within India's investigative framework means that many serial murderers continue to operate with impunity.

In addition to these investigative challenges, the Indian criminal justice system must grapple with societal and legal issues that influence the perception of serial homicide. The portrayal of serial killings in the media, for example, often distorts public perceptions, emphasizing sensational elements of the crime rather than exploring the psychological profiles of offenders.⁴ Such sensationalism contributes to a superficial understanding of serial murder, reducing it to mere spectacle rather than an opportunity for deeper criminological analysis. The widespread misrepresentation of serial crime has implications for the public's trust in the justice system, as well as the legal and investigative strategies employed to address it.

As India's criminal justice system undergoes significant reforms, particularly with the introduction of new laws to address modern crime trends, the need to address serial homicide through an interdisciplinary approach becomes increasingly evident. The intersection of forensic psychology, criminology, and law enforcement methodologies offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the psychological and behavioural dimensions of serial crime. By incorporating these perspectives into criminal investigations, Indian law enforcement could develop more effective strategies for preventing, detecting, and prosecuting serial offenders, ultimately contributing to a more efficient and informed criminal justice system.

⁴ *ibid.*

Serial homicide presents unique challenges to law enforcement and criminological inquiry, particularly in countries like India, where the integration of psychological profiling and forensic assessment remains underdeveloped. The complexity of serial offenders, driven by deep-seated psychological forces, necessitates an interdisciplinary approach to investigation and policy formulation that goes beyond traditional methods. A deeper understanding of the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural patterns of serial offenders will be crucial in developing effective strategies for addressing serial crime in India, thereby advancing both criminological theory and criminal justice practice in the country.

Psychological Foundations of Serial Offending

The motivations and behaviours of serial offenders have long been a subject of intense scrutiny within the fields of psychology, criminology, and forensic science. Serial homicide, as a distinct category of criminal behaviour, is characterized by repetitive, premeditated acts of violence, often driven by complex psychological mechanisms that distinguish it from other forms of homicide. Understanding the psychological foundations of serial offending requires a multidisciplinary approach, drawing on psychoanalytic, behavioural, cognitive, and neurobiological theories, as well as an examination of personality disorders such as psychopathy and sociopathy. This section delves into these theoretical frameworks, contextualizing them within the Indian sociocultural and legal landscape to provide a comprehensive understanding of the psychological underpinnings of serial criminality.

Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Serial Offending

Psychoanalytic theory, rooted in the work of Sigmund Freud, posits that human behaviour is influenced by unconscious drives and unresolved conflicts, often stemming from early childhood experiences.⁵ From this perspective, serial offenders may exhibit criminal behaviour as a manifestation of deep-seated psychological disturbances. For instance, unresolved trauma, such as abuse or neglect during formative years, may lead to the development of maladaptive coping mechanisms, including aggression and violence.⁶ The psychoanalytic lens also highlights the role of the id, ego, and superego in shaping behaviour. Serial offenders, in this framework, may possess a weakened superego, which fails to regulate the primal urges of the id, resulting in a lack of moral restraint and an increased propensity for violence.

⁵ Freud's *Psychodynamic Theory*, IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY PRESSBOOKS, <https://iastate.pressbooks.pub/individualfamilydevelopment/chapter/freuds-psychodynamic-theory/>.

⁶ R.M. Holmes, J. De Burger & S.T. Holmes, *Inside the Mind of the Serial Murderer*, 13 Am. J. Crim. Just. 1, 9 (1988), <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02890847>.

In the Indian context, where familial and societal structures play a significant role in shaping individual behaviour, psychoanalytic interpretations offer valuable insights. For example, the prevalence of patriarchal norms and rigid gender roles may contribute to the suppression of emotional expression, particularly among men, potentially exacerbating psychological conflicts. Case studies of Indian serial offenders, such as Raman Raghav and Auto Shankar, reveal patterns of childhood trauma and social alienation, aligning with psychoanalytic explanations of criminal behaviour. However, while psychoanalytic theory provides a compelling narrative, its reliance on subjective interpretations and lack of empirical rigor limits its applicability in contemporary forensic psychology.

Behavioural and Cognitive Theories: Learned Behaviour and Environmental Influences

Behavioural theories, pioneered by figures such as B.F. Skinner and Albert Bandura⁷, emphasize the role of learned behaviour and environmental reinforcement in shaping criminal conduct. According to these theories, serial offenders may develop violent tendencies through a process of conditioning, wherein aggressive behaviour is reinforced by positive outcomes, such as a sense of power or control. Bandura's social learning theory further posits that individuals learn behaviour through observation and imitation, suggesting that exposure to violence, whether in the home or through media, can increase the likelihood of criminal behaviour.

Cognitive theories, on the other hand, focus on the thought processes that underlie criminal actions. Serial offenders may exhibit cognitive distortions, such as a tendency to dehumanize victims or justify their actions through rationalization. These distortions are often reinforced by a lack of empathy and an inflated sense of self-worth, traits commonly associated with psychopathy. In India, where socioeconomic disparities and exposure to violence are prevalent, behavioural, and cognitive theories provide a useful framework for understanding the environmental and psychological factors that contribute to serial offending. For instance, the case of Surinder Koli, convicted of multiple murders in Noida, highlights the interplay of environmental deprivation and cognitive distortions in shaping criminal behaviour.

Psychopathy and Sociopathy: The Role of Personality Disorders

Psychopathy and sociopathy, often used interchangeably but distinct in their ethology and manifestations, are central to the study of serial offending. Psychopathy is typically

⁷ John B. Watson (1878–1958), STATEUNIVERSITY, <https://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/2543/Watson-John-B-1878-1958.html>.

characterized by a lack of empathy, superficial charm, manipulateness, and a propensity for antisocial behaviour. Neuroscientific research has identified abnormalities in the prefrontal cortex and amygdala of psychopathic individuals, which may impair their ability to experience fear, remorse, or emotional attachment. Sociopathy, while sharing some traits with psychopathy, is often attributed to environmental factors, such as childhood trauma or social deprivation, rather than inherent neurological differences.

In the context of Indian serial offending, the role of psychopathy and sociopathy is particularly significant. Many Indian serial offenders exhibit traits consistent with these personality disorders, such as a lack of remorse, manipulative behaviour, and a history of antisocial conduct. For example, the case of Cyanide Mohan, who lured and murdered multiple women, demonstrates the calculated and emotionless nature of psychopathic behaviour. Similarly, the crimes of Thug Behram, a 19th-century serial killer, reflect the sociopathic tendencies of individuals who exploit societal vulnerabilities for personal gain.⁸

The influence of personality disorders on an offender's capacity for empathy, impulse control, and decision-making cannot be overstated. Psychopathic individuals, in particular, are often adept at masking their true nature, making them difficult to identify and apprehend. This poses significant challenges for law enforcement and underscores the importance of integrating psychological assessments into criminal profiling and investigative processes.

The Indian Context: Sociocultural and Legal Implications

India's unique sociocultural landscape presents both challenges and opportunities for the study of serial offending. The country's diverse cultural norms, religious practices, and social hierarchies influence the manifestation and perception of criminal behaviour. For instance, the stigma associated with mental illness and the lack of accessible mental health services may contribute to the underdiagnosis and mismanagement of personality disorders, potentially exacerbating the risk of violent behaviour. Additionally, the portrayal of crime in Indian media often sensationalizes serial offenders, perpetuating stereotypes and hindering objective analysis.

From a legal perspective, India's criminal justice system has historically struggled to address the complexities of serial homicide. The absence of specialized training in forensic psychology and criminal profiling among law enforcement personnel has resulted in investigative

⁸ Shreya Modi & Krupa Nishar, *Unlocking the Enigma of Indian Serial Killers: An Insight into their Biopsychosocial Construction*, 5 IJFMR 1, 5 (Sept.-Oct. 2023), <https://ijfmr.com/papers/2023/5/7769.pdf>.

inefficiencies and delayed justice. However, recent developments, such as the introduction of new criminal laws and the establishment of forensic psychology programs, signal a growing recognition of the need for interdisciplinary approaches to crime prevention and detection.

Case Studies and Comparative Analysis of Indian Serial Offenders

Understanding the psychology of serial offenders is crucial to comprehending the underlying motives, behavioural patterns, and societal implications of their crimes. This section delves into some of India's most notorious serial killers, examining their criminal actions, judicial outcomes, and psychological profiles. By analysing these cases, we gain insight into the factors that drive such individuals to commit heinous acts, the legal frameworks that address their offenses, and the broader implications for law enforcement and mental health studies.

Case Study I: M. Jaishankar a.k.a. Psycho Shankar⁹

M. Jaishankar, commonly known as "Psycho Shankar," was responsible for a series of brutal rapes and murders between 2008 and 2011 across Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu. He was reportedly involved in over 30 crimes, primarily targeting sex workers and women in remote areas. Using a machete as his weapon of choice, Jaishankar displayed an exceptionally violent modus operandi. His victims often included women he befriended or encountered in isolated locations such as highways, farmlands, and roadside eateries.

Upon his arrest, Jaishankar faced multiple charges, including rape and murder. The courts sentenced him to life imprisonment for his crimes. However, in 2018, he was found dead in his prison cell, having reportedly committed suicide.

Psychological Analysis

Jaishankar exhibited characteristics of a sadistic psychopath with deep-seated violent tendencies. His calculated selection of victims, preference for isolated locations, and lack of remorse indicated a predatory mindset. The thrill of power, dominance, and control over his victims likely fuelled his repeated offenses. His actions align with theories of compulsive criminal behaviour, where an offender experiences an overwhelming urge to commit violent acts, reinforced by previous successful attempts.

⁹ *A life in crime: Rapist-killer who terrorised women on highways*, The Indian Express (Mar.2, 2018), <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/a-life-in-crime-rapist-killer-who-terrorised-women-on-highways-m-jaishankar-5083411/>.

Case Study II: Surinder Koli a.k.a. Nithari Killer¹⁰

Surinder Koli, infamously known as the "Nithari Killer," was involved in one of India's most gruesome serial killing sprees. Between 2005 and 2006, a series of disappearances of children from the Nithari village near Noida led to the discovery of a horrifying truth—Koli and his employer, Mohinder Singh Pandher, had engaged in kidnapping, sexual exploitation, necrophilia, and cannibalism. Human remains, including skulls and bones, were found in drains near Pandher's residence.

Following a high-profile trial, Koli was convicted of kidnapping, rape, murder, and acts of necrophilia and cannibalism. He was sentenced to death for his crimes, reflecting the extreme severity of his actions.

Psychological Analysis

Koli's psychological profile suggests a deeply disturbed individual with necrophiliac and cannibalistic tendencies. His crimes were driven by a mix of deviant sexual urges and a profound lack of empathy. Many forensic psychologists believe that individuals like Koli suffer from paraphilic disorders, where their gratification is tied to extreme and socially unacceptable acts. His ability to function in a routine job while secretly indulging in these acts' points to an antisocial personality disorder with psychopathic traits.

Case Study III: Mohan Kumar a.k.a. Cyanide Mohan¹¹

Mohan Kumar, also known as "Cyanide Mohan," targeted young women from economically weaker backgrounds, luring them with promises of marriage. He convinced his victims to consume cyanide, falsely presenting it as a contraceptive pill, before robbing them of their belongings. His crimes spanned from 2005 to 2009, with over 20 known victims.

Mohan Kumar was arrested and later sentenced to death for his string of murders. The court recognized the premeditated and manipulative nature of his offenses, emphasizing the brutality of his crimes.

Psychological Analysis

Mohan Kumar's criminal behaviour aligns with that of a manipulative sociopath. He carefully selected his victims based on their vulnerability, displaying a calculated approach to deception

¹⁰ Koli v. State of Uttar Pradesh & Others (2014) 16 SCC 494 (Ind.)

¹¹ Hemakshi Mittal, *Professor Mohan Kumar, A Serial Killer*, MEDIUM, (Dec. 2, 2023), <https://medium.com/@hemakshimittal/professor-mohan-kumar-a-serial-killer-43d946101792>.

and murder. His ability to feign sincerity and establish trust before executing his crimes indicates a lack of conscience and an exploitative mindset. Unlike impulsive offenders, Kumar's systematic planning reflects a cognitive detachment from his actions, a characteristic often seen in organized serial killers.

Case Study IV: Umesh Reddy a.k.a. The Bangalore Serial Killer

Umesh Reddy, a former police constable, committed a series of rapes and murders between 1996 and 2002. His modus operandi involved targeting women who lived alone, binding them, and sexually assaulting them before killing them. He would often enter homes under false pretences, such as posing as a delivery person.¹² His fetishist tendencies were evident from his collection of women's clothing, particularly lingerie.

Reddy was eventually apprehended and sentenced to life imprisonment. His criminal past and the sheer brutality of his actions led to a stringent legal response, ensuring that he remained behind bars.

Psychological Analysis

Reddy's crimes reflect a combination of paraphilic disorders and power-driven aggression. His fetishist obsession with women's clothing suggests underlying psychosexual fixations. Additionally, his compulsion to dominate and brutalize his victims indicates a sadistic personality disorder. His ability to evade capture for years speaks to his manipulative and adaptive tendencies, traits commonly associated with highly intelligent but morally depraved criminals.

Criminological and Law Enforcement Strategies in India: Addressing the Psychology of Serial Offenders

The phenomenon of serial offending presents a complex challenge to criminological theory and law enforcement practices worldwide. In India, where the criminal justice system grapples with a myriad of socio-economic, cultural, and legal intricacies, addressing the psychology of serial offenders demands a multifaceted approach. Serial offenders, characterized by their repetitive engagement in criminal behaviour, often exhibit distinct psychological patterns that set them apart from other criminals. Understanding these patterns is crucial for developing effective criminological and law enforcement strategies. This section delves into the existing

¹² Divyadeep Singh, *Cop-Turned-Serial-Killer: Story of Umesh Reddy, Who Terrorised Karnataka & Beyond*, ABP, (June 23, 2024) <https://news.abplive.com/crime/most-shocking-crimes-cop-turned-serial-killer-umesh-reddy-who-terrorised-karnataka-1697660>.

frameworks, challenges, and potential reforms in India's approach to serial offenders, emphasizing the need for a psychological and legal synergy.

Criminological Frameworks for Understanding Serial Offenders

Criminological theories provide a foundational understanding of the motivations, behaviours, and psychological profiles of serial offenders. In the Indian context, the application of these theories must account for the unique socio-cultural dynamics that influence criminal behaviour. Theories such as *routine activity theory*, *rational choice theory*, and *psychological profiling* offer valuable insights into the patterns and decision-making processes of serial offenders.

1. **Psychological Profiling and Behavioural Analysis:** Psychological profiling, a technique widely used in Western criminology, is gradually gaining traction in India. This approach involves analysing the behavioural patterns, motives, and psychological traits of serial offenders to predict their next moves or identify potential suspects.¹³ For instance, the case of Raman Raghav, a notorious serial killer in the 1960s, highlighted the importance of understanding the offender's psyche.¹⁴ Raghav's random and brutal killings were driven by a distorted sense of reality, underscoring the need for psychological insights in criminal investigations.
2. **Sociological and Environmental Factors:** Serial offending in India is often influenced by socio-economic disparities, urbanization, and cultural norms. Criminological strategies must, therefore, incorporate a sociological lens to address root causes such as poverty, lack of education, and social alienation. For example, the rise in serial sexual offenses in urban areas can be linked to the anonymity provided by densely populated cities, where offenders can evade detection more easily.
3. **Rational Choice and Routine Activity Theories¹⁵:** These theories posit that offenders make calculated decisions based on perceived rewards and risks. In India, the lack of efficient policing and low conviction rates often embolden serial offenders, who perceive a lower risk of apprehension. Strengthening law enforcement capabilities and improving the criminal justice system's efficiency are critical to altering this calculus.

¹³ Mullai Malar, Kavitha & Krushna Sharad Sonawane, *Mind Over Matter: Psychological Profiling in Criminal Investigations*, 9 IJNRD 900, 909 (2024).

¹⁴ Poonam Saxena, *Inside the mind of Raman Raghav, Mumbai's serial killer of the 60s.*, HINDUSTAN TIMES (June 11, 2016), <https://www.hindustantimes.com/bollywood/inside-the-mind-of-raman-raghav-mumbai-s-serial-killer-of-the-60s/story-LaA01MtT0wrAM0ZprCoLYJ.html>.

¹⁵ Shah Mohammad Omer Faruq Jubaer, *The Routine activities and Rational Choice Theory: A Criminologist Reflection*, 2 ESJ 19, 28 (2021).

Law Enforcement Strategies: Challenges and Innovations

India's law enforcement agencies face significant challenges in addressing serial offending, ranging from resource constraints to systemic inefficiencies. However, recent advancements in technology and forensic science offer promising avenues for improvement.

1. **Investigation and Detection:** The detection of serial offenders often requires a high degree of coordination among various law enforcement agencies. In India, the absence of a centralized database for criminal records hampers the ability to connect seemingly unrelated crimes. The establishment of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) has been a step in the right direction, but its potential remains underutilized. Enhanced data sharing and the integration of advanced analytics can significantly improve the identification and tracking of serial offenders.
2. **Forensic Science and Technology:** The use of forensic science, including DNA profiling and digital forensics, has revolutionized criminal investigations worldwide. In India, the adoption of these technologies has been slow but steady. For instance, the use of DNA evidence in the 2012 Nirbhaya case marked a turning point in forensic investigations.¹⁶ However, the lack of adequate infrastructure and trained personnel remains a significant barrier. Investing in forensic capabilities and training law enforcement personnel in advanced investigative techniques is essential for combating serial offending.
3. **Community Policing and Public Awareness:** Community policing initiatives, which involve collaboration between law enforcement agencies and local communities, can play a pivotal role in preventing serial offenses. By fostering trust and encouraging the reporting of suspicious activities, these initiatives can enhance the flow of information to law enforcement agencies. Additionally, public awareness campaigns can educate citizens about the modus operandi of serial offenders, enabling them to take preventive measures.

Legal Reforms and Judicial Responses

The legal framework in India must evolve to address the unique challenges posed by serial offenders. While the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) provide the foundation for prosecuting criminal behaviour, certain gaps and inefficiencies

¹⁶ Mukesh & Anr vs State for Nct Of Delhi & Ors, AIR 2017 SC 2161.

hinder their effectiveness.

1. **Specialized Legislation:** Unlike countries such as the United States, which have specific laws targeting serial offenders (e.g., the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act), India lacks specialized legislation in this area. Enacting laws that specifically address serial offending, including provisions for enhanced penalties and mandatory psychological evaluations, can serve as a deterrent and facilitate more effective prosecution.
2. **Judicial Training and Sensitization:** The judiciary plays a critical role in adjudicating cases involving serial offenders. However, the lack of awareness and understanding of the psychological aspects of serial offending can lead to inconsistent sentencing and inadequate rehabilitation measures. Training judges and legal professionals in criminology and forensic psychology can ensure a more informed and nuanced approach to such cases.
3. **Rehabilitation and Reintegration:** While punishment is a crucial aspect of the criminal justice system, rehabilitation and reintegration are equally important, particularly for offenders with psychological disorders. Establishing specialized correctional facilities equipped with mental health professionals can address the underlying issues that drive serial offending. Additionally, post-release monitoring and support programs can reduce the risk of recidivism.

Addressing the psychology of serial offenders in India requires a holistic approach that integrates criminological insights, law enforcement innovations, and legal reforms. Collaboration among various stakeholders, including law enforcement agencies, the judiciary, mental health professionals, and civil society, is essential for developing a comprehensive strategy. Moreover, leveraging technology and data-driven approaches can enhance the effectiveness of these efforts.

Impact of Media, Society, and Indian Legal Reforms

The Role of Media in Shaping Public Perception and Criminal Profiling

The media plays a crucial role in shaping public discourse on serial offenses, often influencing how society perceives criminals and crime itself. In India, sensationalist reporting of serial offenders often leads to the creation of myths, misinformation, and, at times, moral panic. News channels, digital media, and crime documentaries tend to focus on the most gruesome and

sensational aspects of serial homicides, frequently depicting offenders as either "monstrous psychopaths" or "tragic by-products of society."¹⁷ While this narrative may attract public attention, it risks oversimplifying the complex psychological and criminological factors driving serial offenders.

Moreover, excessive media coverage can impact ongoing investigations. The premature revelation of case details, forensic evidence, or suspect profiles can hinder law enforcement efforts by alerting offenders or misguiding public sentiment. Additionally, the glorification of serial killers through media sensationalism such as giving them notorious monikers or narrating their crimes with a sense of intrigue can sometimes lead to unintended consequences, including inspiring copycat crimes. The psychological phenomenon of the "copycat effect" has been observed globally, wherein individuals with criminal tendencies imitate high-profile offenders due to extensive media exposure. In India, where crime reporting often lacks ethical oversight, this risk is particularly pronounced.

On the positive side, media awareness campaigns, investigative journalism, and crime analysis programs have contributed to greater public vigilance and reporting of suspicious behaviour. Documentaries and true crime analyses, when conducted responsibly, can enhance societal understanding of forensic psychology and criminal profiling, indirectly aiding law enforcement in early identification of potential threats.¹⁸ Thus, striking a balance between journalistic freedom and ethical responsibility remains a key challenge in media's role in tackling serial offenses in India.

Societal Attitudes Towards Serial Offenders and Criminal Behaviour

Indian society's perception of crime and justice is deeply influenced by cultural, religious, and socio-economic factors. Unlike in Western nations, where serial murder has been extensively studied and integrated into criminological discourse,¹⁹ India lacks widespread public awareness and systematic academic research on serial offenders. As a result, the understanding of serial criminality remains largely limited to popular culture, folklore, and sporadic high-profile cases.

In many instances, serial offenders in India have exploited societal structures to commit crimes

¹⁷ Aditi Anand & Ms. Mohini Taneja, *The Influence of Media on Public Perception of Crime*, 6 IJFMR 1, 4 (2024), <https://www.ijfmr.com/papers/2024/2/15227.pdf>.

¹⁸ Brent E. Turvey, *Criminal Profiling an Introduction to Behavioural Evidence Analysis* 3-101, (Academic Press 2011).

¹⁹ Kevin Haggerty & Ariane Ellerbrok, *The Social Study of Serial Killers*, Centre for Crime and Justice (27 July 2016), <https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/publications/cjm/article/social-study-serial-killers>.

undetected for prolonged periods. For example, offenders operating in rural areas or targeting marginalized communities often evade suspicion due to prevailing caste-based, economic, and social hierarchies. Additionally, deeply ingrained beliefs in supernatural or superstitious explanations for violent crimes can sometimes hinder rational investigation. Cases where serial offenders have been mistaken for supernatural entities, such as ghosts or demonic figures, illustrate how cultural narratives shape public responses to crime.

Furthermore, the stigma associated with mental health disorders in India complicates efforts to address psychological risk factors in offenders. Unlike in Western forensic psychology, where mental health evaluations are integral to offender profiling, Indian criminal investigations rarely prioritize psychological assessments. Serial offenders who exhibit symptoms of psychopathy, sociopathy, or severe personality disorders are often classified under generic legal definitions of "habitual offenders" rather than being subjected to rigorous psychological evaluation.²⁰ This gap in understanding mental health and its correlation with criminal behaviour reflects the urgent need for interdisciplinary reforms in India's criminological framework.

Another critical aspect is the victim profile and societal reaction to crimes based on victim demographics. Cases involving marginalized victims, such as sex workers, homeless individuals, or lower-caste individuals, often receive less media coverage and police attention than cases involving upper-class or politically connected victims. This disparity in legal and societal response further underscores the role of social biases in shaping how serial offenses are investigated and prosecuted in India.

Legal Reforms and the Evolving Criminal Justice Framework

The Indian legal system has undergone significant reforms in recent years, particularly with the introduction of new criminal laws aimed at improving the efficiency of the justice system. However, the legal framework surrounding serial offenses remains largely outdated, with no specific provisions that distinguish serial homicide from other forms of murder. Unlike jurisdictions such as the United States, where multiple homicide classifications exist (e.g., first-degree murder, second-degree murder, serial homicide), Indian law continues to prosecute

²⁰ Scott Bonn, *The Unlikely Function of Serial Killers in Society*, Psychology Today (February 8, 2021), <https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/wicked-deeds/202102/the-unlikely-function-serial-killers-in-society>.

serial offenders under generalized sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), such as Section 302²¹ (Punishment for Murder) and Section 376²² (Punishment for Rape, in cases of sexually motivated homicides).

While these provisions ensure that offenders receive stringent punishments, they fail to acknowledge the psychological and criminological nuances that differentiate serial offenders from one-time murderers. This lack of distinction hinders law enforcement's ability to develop specialized investigative protocols and offender profiling techniques tailored to serial crimes.²³

The need for dedicated laws on serial homicide has been debated in legal and criminological circles, with calls for the incorporation of forensic psychology into legal proceedings. Proposals include mandatory psychological evaluations for repeat offenders, establishment of behavioural analysis units within Indian law enforcement agencies, and legislative recognition of serial crime as a distinct category requiring specialized investigative and prosecutorial approaches.

Additionally, India's new criminal laws, such as the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) 2023,²⁴ which replaces the IPC, have introduced modernized provisions addressing sexual offenses, organized crime, and procedural reforms. However, whether these changes will lead to better handling of serial offenses remains uncertain. There is a growing need for integrating forensic psychology into criminal investigations, court proceedings, and correctional policies, ensuring that serial offenders are identified, assessed, and prosecuted with a deeper understanding of their psychological profiles.

Another aspect of legal reform involves rehabilitation and correctional measures. Unlike in Western nations, where psychological rehabilitation programs are available for offenders with personality disorders, India's prison system largely focuses on punitive measures rather than rehabilitation. For serial offenders exhibiting severe psychological disorders, long-term incarceration without psychiatric intervention may result in continued risk of recidivism upon release. Developing forensic psychiatric facilities within prisons, mandatory therapy for high-risk offenders, and post-release supervision strategies could play a vital role in mitigating future threats posed by serial offenders.

²¹ The Indian Penal Code, 1860, § 302, No. 45, Acts of Parliament, 1860 (India).

²² The Indian Penal Code, 1860, § 376, No. 45, Acts of Parliament, 1860 (India).

²³ Kaustubh Phalke, *All About Criminal Profiling*, iPleaders (February 13, 2024), <https://blog.ipleaders.in/all-about-criminal-profiling/>.

²⁴ The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, No. 45, Acts of Parliament, 2023 (India).

CONCLUSION

The exploration of serial offending in India represents a critical intersection of forensic psychology, criminology, and legal studies. This research illuminates the profound psychological complexities underlying serial criminal behaviour, transcending mere descriptive analysis to provide a nuanced understanding of the intricate mechanisms that drive such egregious acts.

Our comprehensive examination reveals that serial offenders are not monolithic entities, but complex psychological subjects shaped by intricate interactions between neurological predispositions, sociocultural influences, and individual psychological dynamics. The case studies of Jaishankar, Koli, Mohan Kumar, and Umesh Reddy serve as empirical windows into the multifaceted nature of serial criminality in the Indian context.

The study underscores a pivotal finding: India's criminal justice system remains structurally ill-equipped to comprehensively address serial offending. The absence of specialized psychological profiling, limited forensic capabilities, and inadequate legal frameworks significantly impede effective prevention, detection, and rehabilitation strategies.

Key recommendations emerge from this research:

- Integrate forensic psychology more robustly into investigative protocols
- Develop specialized legislative provisions for serial offenses
- Establish dedicated behavioural analysis units within law enforcement
- Enhance psychological assessment and rehabilitation mechanisms

Ultimately, addressing serial offending demands a paradigm shift from a purely punitive approach to a more holistic, interdisciplinary strategy that recognizes the complex psychological underpinnings of such criminal behaviour.

The path forward requires collaborative engagement among psychologists, criminologists, legal experts, and policymakers to develop a more sophisticated, empathetic, yet stringent approach to understanding and mitigating serial criminal tendencies in India.