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# Making A Serial Murderer: Trauma, Aggression, And Mental Illness

Making a murderer involves many psychological factors that affect everybody differently. The psychological makeup of the human mind controls the thoughts, decisions, and actions. It affects everyone from infants to criminals and Trauma, aggression, and mental illnesses are factors that cause a person to become a serial killer.

A serial killer is someone who kills at least three people with each killing being a separate event (Crime Museum). However, if the kills were done at once and were not separate events, then the person would then be classified as a mass murderer. Serial killers often “lack empathy and guilt” and are self-centered (Crime Museum). Psychological factors are the factors that “limit or enhance” the human mind (Quist). These factors set the difficulty of daily tasks, guiding a person throughout their life (Quist). There is a big social misconception that people who are mentally ill will become a murderer. However, people who have mental illnesses and serial killers are two different types of people. People with mental illnesses are just as capable of violence as we are and for the most part nonviolent. In fact, only “3%-5% violent acts” are connected to individuals with severe mental illness (MentalHealth.gov).

One factor that can lead to a series of killings is trauma. Childhood abuse “affects their sense of self” during an important time of emotional development (Guy). Murderers who were abused as kids felt powerless, which caused them to have low-self esteem as they aged. This is why children are sometimes the victims of serial murderers: the killer wants their victims to “feel what they felt as children” (Knight 1201). The killers use the victim’s body as a coping mechanism for the “pain of early childhood trauma” (Knight 1201). However, this usually never works, it just becomes a never-ending cycle until they are caught. Negative childhood experiences and abuse cause a normal killer to become a serial killer.

In fact, the percentage of any type of abuse in the serial murderer population is more than two times higher than the percentage of abuse in the general population from 30% to 68% (Mitchell and Aamodt). The most staggering differences are the percentage of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse whereas both populations experience 18% of neglect (Mitchell and Aamodt 44). In the general population, it had proportions of 6% that experienced physical abuse, 3% that encountered sexual abuse, and 2% that endured psychological abuse (Mitchell and Aamodt 44). Their serial killer counterparts suffered through 36%, 26%, and 50%, respectively (Mitchell and Aamodt 44). Each matched percentage is at least six times greater in the serial killer population. These percentages reveal that there is a positive correlation between a traumatic childhood and becoming a cold-blooded criminal.

John Wayne Gacy is a prime example of a serial killer who faced physical and psychological abuse as a child. Gacy’s alcoholic father would beat Gacy and his other children “with a razor strap if they were perceived to have misbehaved” (Biography.com). Every time Gacy was beaten, the more he felt feeble and defenseless. In addition, his father and his classmates attributed to his psychological abuse. Because Gacy suffered from a congenital heart condition, he could not “play with other children,” and his father viewed the condition as “another failing” (Biography.com). Prior to being known as the “Killer Clown”, Gacy was known as “Pogo the

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Clown” (Biography.com). Gacy would use the family-friendly image of his job to his advantage by luring “33 young males” to his home where he would rape, strangle, and murder his victims and hide the remains under his house (Biography.com). Asserting his dominance over adolescent males was an attempt to fix Gacy’s broken childhood, but instead solidified himself as one of the worst serial killers in America’s history.

Another cognitive factor that leads people to murder numerous people is aggression. At “extreme levels of emotional upset,” a person has an increased impulse to react in a hostile way (Salfati and Canter 392). Initially, an individual’s learned behavior is calm, cool, and collected. However, when that individual is “insult[ed], physically attack[ed], or fail[ed] in a personal goal,” their vexation is spiked (Salfanti and Canter 393). These annoyances unleash the person’s innate savage behavior, which then makes their primary goal to “make the victim suffer” (Salfati and Canter 393). Build up of rage and stress in a human puts them in a mindless mindset and increases the chance of acts of homicide.

Not only can aggression-induced crimes be explained by natural instincts, but they can also be explained from the turmoil with themselves. The feelings of humans who were sexually abused as children “later surface as aggressive” in adulthood (Knight 1199). Anger from these experiences in serial killers usually come in a stronger form of “rage and envy,” which is enough to fuel the killer’s desire for revenge (Knight 1199). To get revenge, the murderer engages in a “series of brutal and sexualized murders,” which are the “measures of serial killers’ inner conflict” (Knight 1199). Self-loathing criminals attempt to achieve peace with themselves by spreading fear and shedding blood in the same manner they had experienced as a child.

Henry Lee Lucas was an American serial killer who killed at least three people and confessed to hundreds of more killings (Biography.com). Growing up, Lucas’s mother, Viola, “ruled the household with an iron fist” (Biography.com). Viola’s excessive control over Henry led to his hatred and despise for her. In one instance, when a neighbor bought socks and shoes for Henry since Viola outside without them, Viola beat Henry and his brother for not asking for money instead (Corder and Pregnall). In another account, situation, Viola beat Henry so aggressively that he was put into a coma (Corder and Pregnall). Later in life, Henry would argue with Viola about not wanting to return home. This argument quickly escalated as Viola “slapped her son across the face” and Henry angrily responded to this by slitting her throat (Corder Pregnall). After all the years of bottling up his emotions of animosity towards his mother, Henry released his anger as his mother beat him for the last time.

Mental health plays an important role in distinguishing right from wrong; however, when a person has “a long-term pattern of manipulating, exploiting or violating the rights of others without any remorse,” it is likely that they have a mental condition called antisocial personality disorder (Kimmel, Zieve, and Conaway). Because they have no guilt for any of their immoral actions, people with this disorder are able to terrorize others and “violate the law,” (Mayo Clinic). Consequently, antisocial personality disorder can cause a person to have a “homicidal or suicidal behavior,” meaning that person can go on a killing spree and never feel contrition (Mayo Clinic). Because antisocial personality disorder is considered a lifelong condition, someone who has it can snap at any second and become a serial murderer.

Another mental illness that can cause someone to slaughter is schizophrenia, a chronic condition that causes people to “interpret reality abnormally” (Mayo Clinic). The abnormalities

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that people with schizophrenia have included “hallucinations, delusions, and distorted perceptions” (American Psychiatric Association). Depending on the severity of the condition, these aberrations can cause the schizophrenic person to question what is real and what is not. As a result, for example, a voice the person hears could be telling the person to hunt people down. The schizophrenic person will continue to have an episode until they feel like they have done what they were told to do. Although schizophrenia may have these severe symptoms, it can be treated by prescribed medication. Schizophrenia can cause a person to go on a series of murders by deforming its victim’s perception of reality.

Ted Bundy was a notorious American serial killer who “killed at least 36 women” and showed symptoms of antisocial personality disorder (Biography.com). As a child, Bundy “did well in school but not with his peers” (Biography.com). During Bundy’s teenage years, he developed an iniquity behavior; he “thought nothing of stealing things he wanted from other people” (Biography.com). The darkness inside him rapidly grew as he became an adult. When Bundy attended college, he would use his campus girls’ kindnesses by faking an injury, calling for help, and kidnapping them (Biography.com). After kidnapping them, Bundy would usually “rape his victims before beating them to death” (Biography.com). Bundy was charged with many kidnapping and murdering crimes, but he never felt an ounce of guilt. Bundy even stated, “I don’t feel guilty for anything. I feel sorry for the people who feel guilt,” which is a symptom of antisocial personality disorder (Biography.com). Ted Bundy was an intelligent man, as shown by his college degree, and was known to be a stand-up man. Bundy knew the crimes he did were immoral but still persisted with them because he does not feel any wrong. If Bundy did not have antisocial personality disorder, he would not have committed any serial killing.

To make a serial killer, trauma, aggression, and mental illness is the perfect recipe. Disturbing childhood experiences taint the emotional development that is essential to ensuring that the child is mentally capable of handling inner problems. Aggression decreases mental clarity and increases careless homicidal actions. Mental illness fogs a person’s mentality from right and wrong. Some serial killers like John Wayne Gacy and Ted Bundy were not suspects for a large amount of time because of their picture perfect image. However, if we knew what they had experienced as a child and how they thought, it begs the question: could we have prevented them from committing these heinous crimes?