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# Sexual Murderers of Children

## Developmental, Precrime, Crime, and Postcrime Factors

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The amount of empirical research on men who commit sexual murders is scarce, and no distinction has been made between those who have victimized adults and those who have victimized children. Therefore, to better understand specifically sexual murderers of children ( $n = 11$ ), comparisons were performed with a group of sexual murderers of adult women ( $n = 66$ ) on developmental, precrime, crime, and postcrime factors. It appears that sexual murderers of children are more often victims of sexual abuse during childhood and present more often deviant sexual fantasies as compared to sexual murderers of women. The results show also that sexual murderers of children more often use pornography prior to crime, have contact with the victim prior to crime, and commit a crime more often characterized by premeditation, strangulation, the hiding of the body, and its dismemberment than the sexual murderers of women.

**Keywords:** *sexual homicide; offending patterns; child homicide; sexual offenders*

For a murder to be considered sexual, Ressler, Burgess, and Douglas (1988) suggest that the homicide has to include at least one of the following: (a) victim's attire or lack of attire; (b) exposure of the sexual parts of the victim's body; (c) sexual positioning of the victim's body; (d) insertion of foreign objects into the victim's body cavities; (e) evidence of sexual intercourse (oral, vaginal, anal); and (f) evidence of substitute sexual activity, interest, or sadistic fantasy such as mutilations of the genitals. Mainly because of the apparent low frequency of occurrence, empirical researches on sexual homicide and sexual murderers have been limited.

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Langevin (2003, 2006) conducted two interesting studies on the potential risk factors leading to sexual homicide. In the first study, Langevin (2003) suggested that sexual murderers start their criminal career at a young age, appear to be disturbed children (e.g., were in reform school, members of criminal gangs, cruel to animals, set fires), show early signs of learning problems and neuropsychological impairment, and present alcohol- and/or drug-abuse problems. In his second study, Langevin (2006) used two actuarial risk instruments—the Violence Risk Appraisal Guide (VRAG) and the Sex Offender Risk Appraisal Guide (SORAG)—to examine their utility in predicting sexual homicide. Although both instruments performed better than clinical judgment, in the best case scenario only 32% of sexual murderers would have been considered at high risk for future violent offending before committing the actual sexual homicide. Despite these apparently disappointing results, Langevin suggested factors that are characteristic of sexual murderers and that could improve prediction: (a) inclusion of drug abuse; (b) consideration of nonviolent offenses in a different light (e.g., sexual murderers show history of burglaries that are sexually motivated); and (c) inclusion of any psychosis and a shift in the scoring direction specifically for sexual murderers. These factors suggested in the studies by Langevin (2003, 2006) can be interpreted as “warning signs” to look for by clinicians involved in the treatment or assessment of sex offenders.

Some studies have identified typologies of sexual murderers based on motivation and offending patterns (Beauregard & Proulx, 2002; Beech, Fisher, & Ward, 2005; Beech, Robertson, & Clarke, 2001; Clarke & Carter, 1999; Folino, 2000; Keppel & Walter, 1999; Kocsis, 1999; Meloy, 2000; Ressler, Burgess, & Douglas, 1988; Revitch & Schlesinger, 1981). Despite the use of different labels, almost all types fall under three main categories of sexual murderers: (a) sadistic, (b) anger, and (c) detection avoidance (Beauregard, Proulx, Brien, & St-Yves, 2005; Beech, Oliver, Fisher, & Beckett, 2006). Thus, these different types demonstrate a heterogeneity existing among sexual homicide and sexual murderers.

Most of the research conducted on sexual homicide and sexual murderers has focused on those individuals who have killed an adult woman. Some other studies including different types of sexual murderers have also been conducted, but with no separate analyses for each type of murderer (e.g., sexual murderers of children). Because of the difficulties related to collecting information on these offenders, very few empirical studies have looked specifically at sexual homicide and sexual murderers of children.

## Sexual Homicide of Children

Gilles de Rais, a 15th-century French nobleman who raped, tortured, and murdered hundreds of children, appears to be the first recorded case of sadistic sexual homicide of children (Hickey, 2002). Boudreaux, Lord, and Jarvis (2001) report that as

children enter school and spend more time outside of the home, the risk of victimization by a caretaker decreases and the risk of abduction and homicide by strangers increases. A study by Hanfland, Keppel, and Weis (1997) revealed that 69% of their abduction–homicide cases involved sexual motivation. Sexual homicides of children occur most often in school-age females and in elementary and middle school male children (Boudreaux, Lord, & Dutra, 1999). In Canada, children constitute approximately 8% of the victims of sexual homicide (Firestone, Bradford, Greenberg, Larose, & Curry, 1998).

The use of lethal violence in sexual murderers of children is hypothesized to be related to the poor social and interpersonal skills of the offender (Lanning, 1994). The selection of a child victim could be related to the fact that he or she represents an easy, weak, vulnerable, or available target. In some instances, it may also be that some individuals present a deviant sexual preference and are sexually aroused and gratified by the suffering and the killing of a child victim (Lanning, 1994). This type of pedophile molests children with the express desire to physically harm the victims. Typically the victim is a stranger and may be stalked and/or abducted from places where children tend to gather (e.g., playgrounds, schools, shopping centers). The crime is often premeditated, ritualized, and the victim's body may be mutilated (R. M. Holmes, 1991). Moreover, these offenders report few contacts with children outside of their offense, rank low on social competences, are less frequently married than other child molesters, and are more likely to be classified as sadists (S. T. Holmes & Holmes, 2002).

## Comparative Studies of Sexual Murderers of Children

To our knowledge, only three comparative studies involving sexual murderers of children have been conducted (Firestone, Bradford, Greenberg, & Larose, 1998; Firestone, Bradford, Greenberg, Larose, & Curry, 1998; Firestone, Bradford, Greenberg, & Nunes, 2000). The first study compared 48 sexual murderers to 50 incest offenders. Results revealed that sexual murderers were rated significantly higher on the Psychopathy Checklist–Revised (PCL-R), had a greater incidence of psychosis, personality disorders, paraphilias, and addictions, and showed more deviant phallometric responses to depictions of sexual assaults of children. This study included both sexual murderers of children and adult women but no separate analyses for each type were carried out (Firestone, Bradford, Greenberg, Larose, & Curry, 1998). The second study compared 17 sexual murderers of children to a group of 35 nonhomicidal extrafamilial child molesters. Results suggested that the homicidal group significantly more often victimized strangers, scored higher on Factor 1 and Factor 2 of the PCL-R, and exhibited more antisocial personality disorders and paraphilias, especially sexual sadism. Furthermore, a greater proportion of sexual murderers of children received three or more *DSM III-R* diagnoses, demonstrated

higher levels of deviant arousal to pedophilic and adult assault stimuli, and had been charged or convicted in the past of violent nonsexual and sexual offenses. No significant differences were observed as to the demographics (e.g., age, IQ, marital status) and the self-report psychological inventories (Derogatis Sexual Functioning Inventory and Buss–Durkee Hostility Inventory). It must be noted that the group of homicidal child molesters in this study included seven individuals who had attempted to kill the victim, but were unsuccessful (Firestone, Bradford, Greenberg, & Larose, 1998). The third study compared, on phallometric measures, 27 sexual murderers of children (also including homicidal attempts) to 189 nonhomicidal child molesters and 47 nonoffenders. Although no difference was found in their age and IQ, significantly more sexual murderers of children and nonhomicidal child molesters than nonoffenders had pedophile index scores equal to or greater than 1.0 (i.e., a sexual preference for children). However, homicidal and nonhomicidal child molesters did not differ from each other. Finally, more homicidal child molesters than either nonhomicidal child molesters or nonoffenders had pedophile assault index scores equal to or greater than 1.0 (Firestone et al., 2000).

### Objective of the Study

Firestone and colleagues (Firestone, Bradford, Greenberg, Larose, & Curry, 1998) reported that “there is a limited amount of psychological research available on men who commit sexual murders, and no distinction has been made between those who have victimized adults and those who victimized children” (p. 306). Moreover, the majority of studies have neglected to differentiate between sexual murderers of adult women, adult men, and children. A recent study suggested that differences exist between sexual murderers of adult women and sexual murderers of adult men (Beauregard & Proulx, in press). Moreover, Langevin (2006) found interesting differences between sexual murderers of adults and sexual murderers of children regarding individual items of the VRAG and SORAG (e.g., school maladjustment, personality disorder, criminal history for violent offense). To our knowledge, no other studies have looked at potential differences among sexual murderers. Thus, to better understand differences between sexual murderers of children and sexual murderers of adult women, comparisons on developmental, precrime, crime, and post-crime factors were performed. Based on previous findings, it may be hypothesized that sexual murderers who target specifically children will be characterized by more deviant sexual fantasies, sadistic behaviors, and share similar characteristics found in pedophilia (e.g., deviant sexual preferences for children). Furthermore, for these offenders, children may represent easy and vulnerable targets, congruent with a routine-activity approach to crime.

Most of the variables selected have been linked to the research on sexual homicide. In addition, this investigation is an attempt to clarify if homicidal child molesters

represent a distinct group or if they can be mixed together with sexual murderers of adult women, as has been done in the majority of previous studies on sexual homicide.

## Method

To qualify for this study, participants had to meet at least one criterion of the definition of sexual homicide used by Ressler et al. (1988). All sexual murderers incarcerated in the province of Quebec between 1998 and 2005 were identified and contacted. Of these, 85 signed a consent form before participating in the research project, whereas 15 refused to do so. For the purposes of this study, participants who had male victims aged 14 years or over were excluded. Only murderers who had killed children (under 14 years old)<sup>1</sup> or adult females (14 years or over) were retained for this study. A total of 11 sexual murderers of children and 66 sexual murderers of adult women were compared using chi-square statistics (Phi coefficients were reported in the tables to indicate the strength of the association). Because of the exploratory nature of our study, no corrections were made for the number of comparisons.

Information about offenders was gathered using the Computerized Questionnaire for Sexual Aggressors (CQSA; Proulx, St-Yves, & McKibben, 1994) by a criminologist and a psychologist following a semistructured interview.<sup>2</sup> The CQSA includes information on different aspects of the offender's life and criminal activity such as correctional information, precrime, crime, and postcrime factors, attitudes regarding the offense, apprehension, victimology, developmental factors, and diagnostics. Police records, the victim statements, and the institution case file were consulted to determine details about their criminal activities. Different police agencies were visited to gather as much information as possible to reconstruct the offense. When available, the autopsy reports and the crime-scene photographs were also consulted. In case of disagreement between self-reported data gathered using the CQSA and the official data (police record, victim statement, and institutional files), the official data were used. Participants included in this study signed a consent form indicating that the information gathered would be used for research purposes only.

We restricted our investigation to four broad categories of variables. Developmental factors have permitted us to distinguish sexual murderers and nonhomicidal sex offenders (Nicole & Proulx, 2005a, 2005b). The present study includes developmental variables of daydreaming (i.e., fantasy or train of thought that an individual has when awake, often about spontaneous thoughts not connected to the person's immediate situation and leading him or her away from his or her immediate surroundings), social isolation, enuresis, cruelty against animals, headaches, frequent use and dependence on alcohol and/or drugs, victim of psychological, physical, and sexual abuse, and deviant sexual fantasies. Moreover, the consumption of pornography, frequentation of strip joints and prostitutes, and criminal career variables (prior convictions for nonsexual violent and nonviolent crimes, prior convictions for sexual with and without contacts) are tested.

Precrime factors have also permitted us to distinguish different types of sexual murderers (Beauregard & Proulx, 2002, in press). Precrime factors occurring in the year prior to the crime are designated as predisposing factors (Proulx, St-Yves, Guay, & Ouimet, 1999). The present study includes five of them: conjugal and familial difficulties, perceived rejection, generalized conflict (e.g., conflicts with adults, prostitutes, the system in general), and compulsive work (i.e., cumulating more than one job at once—the number of hours devoted to work prevent the individual from maintaining satisfying familial and social relationships). Precrime factors observed in the hours prior to the crime are known as precipitating factors. Seven precipitating factors are included in the present study: use of alcohol, drugs, pornography, and deviant sexual fantasies involving the victim prior to the crime; prior contacts with the victim; victim under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs; and unemployment prior to crime.

Crime factors are also investigated in this study as they have been found to be important in the understanding of the offending process of sex offenders and sexual murderers (Beauregard & Proulx, 2002; Proulx, Blais, & Beauregard, 2006). Nine crime-phase variables (i.e., premeditation, crime committed at night, victim selection, weapon used, victim forced to perform sexual acts, humiliation of victim, crime lasts more than an hour, torture, and mutilation) and five crime-scene characteristics (i.e., victim left naked, cause of death is strangulation, presence of semen in any cavity of the victim, victim's body is hidden, and dismemberment) are used to differentiate sexual murderers of women and sexual murderers of children.

Finally, eight postcrime factors are investigated: offender arrested because of police investigation, admit crime when arrested, positive affect after the crime (e.g., calm, joy, well-being, sexual arousal), admit all acts committed during crime, admit negative consequences for victim, admit responsibility, admit sexual problem, and admit having other personal problems (e.g., anger, low self-control). We selected these variables because previous studies comparing sexual murderers to rapists showed interesting findings regarding the same variables (Proulx, Cusson, Beauregard, & Nicole, 2005). Moreover, these variables are particularly important as to the offending process of sexual murderers but, as mentioned earlier, they have been ignored by previous comparative studies of sexual murderers of children. Responses to these variables were collected during the semistructured interview with the offender.<sup>3</sup>

## Results

Table 1 presents percentages for developmental variables as to the two types of sexual murderers. As can be seen, sexual murderers of women report significantly more daydreaming and enuresis as compared to sexual murderers of children. However, headaches were significantly more prevalent in sexual murderers of children than in sexual murderers of women. As to the life and sexual history variables, a higher proportion of sexual murderers of women present frequent alcohol- and/or drug-abuse

**Table 1**  
**Developmental Factors: Life and Sexual History, and Criminal Career Factors Related to Sexual Murderers of Children and Sexual Murderers of Adult Women**

Developmental Factor	Sexual Murderers of Children, % (n)	Sexual Murderers of Adult Women, % (n)	Total, % (n)	Chi-Square	Phi
Life and sexual history					
Daydreaming	27.3 (3)	60.6 (40)	55.8 (43)	4.249	-.235*
Social isolation	72.7 (8)	72.7 (48)	72.7 (56)	.000	.000
Chronic lying	45.5 (5)	59.1 (39)	57.1 (44)	.716	-.096
Enuresis	9.1 (1)	39.4 (26)	35.1 (27)	3.802	-.222*
Cruelty against animal	18.2 (2)	25.8 (17)	24.7 (19)	.291	-.069
Headaches	63.6 (7)	33.3 (22)	37.7 (29)	3.688	.219*
Frequent alcohol and/or drug abuse	27.3 (3)	61.5 (40)	56.6 (43)	4.496	-.243*
Dependence on alcohol and/or drugs	18.2 (2)	49.2 (32)	44.7 (34)	3.668	-.220*
Homosexual or bisexual orientation	54.5 (6)	16.7 (11)	22.1 (17)	7.864	.320**
Consumption of pornography	63.6 (7)	71.2 (47)	70.1 (54)	.258	-.058
Frequentation of strip joints	72.7 (8)	80.3 (53)	79.2 (61)	.329	-.065
Frequentation of prostitutes	18.2 (2)	42.4 (28)	39.0 (30)	2.330	-.174
Victim of psychological violence in childhood	45.5 (5)	61.5 (40)	59.2 (45)	1.008	-.115
Victim of physical violence in childhood	81.8 (9)	67.7 (44)	69.7 (53)	.890	.108
Victim of sexual abuse during childhood	45.5 (5)	13.8 (9)	18.4 (14)	6.255	.287**
Deviant sexual fantasies	72.7 (8)	40.9 (27)	45.5 (35)	3.850	.224*
Criminal career					
Prior convictions for nonsexual nonviolent crimes	50.0 (5)	71.0 (44)	68.1 (49)	1.741	-.156
Prior convictions for nonsexual violent crimes	40.0 (4)	50.8 (32)	49.3 (36)	.402	-.074
Prior convictions for sexual crimes with contacts	30.0 (3)	22.2 (14)	23.3 (17)	.292	.063
Prior convictions for sexual crimes without contacts	20.0 (2)	3.2 (2)	5.5 (4)	4.717	.254*

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .



problems as compared to sexual murderers of children. Sexual murderers of children are, however, significantly more inclined to report a homosexual or bisexual orientation, experience of sexual abuse in childhood, and deviant sexual fantasies than sexual murderers of women. Regarding the criminal career, sexual murderers of children present significantly more prior convictions for sexual crimes without contacts (e.g., indecent exposure, voyeurism, obscene phone calls) as compared to sexual murderers of women.

Table 2 gives the distribution of participants in the two groups of sexual murderers for the precrime predisposing and precipitating factors. Precipitating factors (48 hours prior to crime) are disinhibitors that are conceived as factors that favor sexual crimes (Proulx, McKibben, & Lusignan, 1996). Predisposing factors (1 year prior to crime) represent an obstacle repetitively met by the individual in his life or a zone of vulnerability that has triggered the development of one or many ineffective coping strategies (e.g., avoidance, denial of emotions, sexual deviance). Sexual murderers of children report significantly more problems of compulsive work than sexual murderers of women. Compulsive work is defined as the participant having more than one full-time job at the same time; the number of hours devoted to his work prevents him from establishing and/or maintaining satisfactory familial and/or social relationships. Sexual murderers of children also reported more perception of rejection and a generalized conflict in the year prior to the homicide as opposed to the sexual murderers of women. Here, a generalized conflict refers to opposition or avoidance conduct toward a real or symbolic group of individuals. This type of conflict generally involves a group sharing similar characteristics (e.g., the offender reports a conflict against prostitutes or adults). In the 48 hours prior to the crime though, sexual murderers of women are significantly more prone to use alcohol and target a victim who is under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol. Almost all sexual murderers of children (90.0%) report prior contacts with the victim as compared to 56.1% of the sexual murderers of women. Furthermore, a significantly larger proportion of sexual murderers of children uses pornography and is unemployed prior to committing the crime as compared to sexual murderers of women.

Table 3 gives the percentages of participants for the two groups of sexual murderers as to the crime-phase variables and the crime-scene characteristics. As one can see, premeditation of the crime is significantly more frequent for sexual murderers of children as opposed to sexual murderers of women. In addition, adult women are more often killed at night as compared to children. Regarding crime-scene characteristics, sexual murderers of children use strangulation to kill their victim, as well as dismember and conceal the victim's body more often as compared to sexual murderers of women.

As to the postcrime variables reported in Table 4, admitting a sexual problem is the only variable distinguishing the two groups of sexual murderers. Thus, sexual murderers of children more often admit a sexual problem than sexual murderers of women.

*(text continues on page 264)*

**Table 2**  
**Precrime Factors: Predisposing and Precipitating Factors Related to Sexual Murderers of Children and Sexual Murderers of Adult Women**

Precrime Factor	Sexual Murderers of Children, % (n)	Sexual Murderers of Adult Women, % (n)	Total, % (n)	Chi-Square	Phi
Predisposing factors (1 year prior)					
Compulsive work	36.4 (4)	8.1 (5)	12.3 (9)	6.922	.308**
Conjugal difficulties	18.2 (2)	14.5 (9)	15.1 (11)	.098	.037
Familial difficulties	36.4 (4)	24.2 (15)	26.0 (19)	.719	.099
Perceived rejection	87.5 (7)	50.9 (28)	55.6 (35)	3.787	.245*
Generalized conflict	18.2 (2)	3.2 (2)	5.5 (4)	4.035	.235*
Precipitating factors (48 hours prior)					
Use of alcohol prior to crime	27.3 (3)	81.3 (52)	73.3 (55)	13.985	-.432**
Use of drugs prior to crime	27.3 (3)	48.4 (31)	45.3 (34)	1.697	-.150
Use of pornography prior to crime	18.2 (2)	3.1 (2)	5.3 (4)	4.215	.237*
Deviant sexual fantasies involving victim prior to crime	40.0 (4)	15.4 (10)	18.7 (14)	3.459	.215
Prior contacts with victim	90.9 (10)	56.1 (37)	61.0 (47)	4.815	.250*
Victim under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs	0.0 (0)	39.0 (23)	33.8 (23)	5.302	-.279**
Unemployment prior to crime	81.8 (9)	47.6 (30)	52.7 (39)	4.394	.244*

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

**Table 3**  
**Crime-Phase and Crime-Scene Characteristics Related to Sexual Murderers of Children and Sexual Murderers of Adult Women**

Characteristic	Sexual Murderers of Children, % (n)	Sexual Murderers of Adult Women, % (n)	Total, % (n)	Chi-Square	Phi
Crime phase					
Premeditation of crime	60.0 (6)	27.3 (18)	31.6 (24)	4.305	.238*
Crime committed at night	45.5 (5)	78.8 (52)	74.0 (57)	5.449	-.266*
Victim selected	45.5 (5)	39.1 (25)	40.0 (30)	.160	.046
Weapon used	63.6 (7)	65.2 (43)	64.9 (50)	.010	-.011
Victim forced to perform sexual acts	20.0 (2)	11.5 (7)	12.7 (9)	.564	.089
Humiliation of victim	27.3 (3)	36.4 (24)	35.1 (27)	.342	-.067
Crime last more than an hour	63.6 (7)	47.0 (31)	49.4 (38)	1.048	.117
Torture	27.3 (3)	19.7 (13)	20.8 (16)	.329	.065
Mutilation	18.2 (2)	21.2 (14)	20.8 (16)	.053	-.026
Crime scene					
Victim left completely naked	45.5 (5)	48.5 (32)	48.1 (37)	.035	-.021
Cause of death is strangulation	72.7 (8)	39.4 (26)	44.2 (34)	4.249	.235*
Presence of semen in any cavity of the victim	27.3 (3)	31.8 (21)	31.2 (24)	.091	-.034
Victim's body is hidden	90.0 (9)	35.4 (23)	42.7 (32)	10.568	.375**
Victim's body dismembered	18.2 (2)	3.1 (2)	5.3 (4)	4.305	.238*

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

**Table 4**  
**Postcrime Factors Related to Sexual Murderers of Children and Sexual Murderers of Adult Women**

Postcrime Factor	Sexual Murderers of Children, % (n)	Sexual Murderers of Adult Women, % (n)	Total, % (n)	Chi-Square	Phi
Offender arrested because of police investigation	63.6 (7)	43.9 (29)	46.8 (36)	1.469	.138
Admit crime when arrested	54.5 (6)	37.9 (25)	40.3 (31)	1.089	.119
Positive affect after the crime	18.2 (2)	15.2 (10)	15.6 (12)	.066	.029
Admit all acts committed during crime	63.6 (7)	60.6 (40)	61.0 (47)	.036	.022
Admit negative consequences for victim	72.7 (8)	59.1 (39)	61.0 (47)	.737	.098
Admit responsibility	27.3 (3)	40.0 (26)	38.2 (29)	.646	-.092
Admit sexual problem	72.7 (8)	34.9 (22)	40.5 (30)	5.553	.274*
Admit having other personal problem	63.6 (7)	77.4 (48)	75.3 (55)	.955	-.114

\* $p < .05$ .

## Discussion

Our results have shown that a larger proportion of sexual murderers of children reported problems of perceived rejection compared to sexual murderers of women. This result is congruent with Lanning's (1994) explanation of sexual homicide of children in which it is stated that, in many cases, the use of lethal violence may be because of poor social and interpersonal skills of the offender. Because of this difficulty of interacting with others, especially with adults, those offenders may target children possibly because they are weak, vulnerable, and available (emotional congruence). This result also concurs with the finding that sexual murderers of children reported more generalized conflict as opposed to sexual murderers of women. According to Ward and Beech (2006), perceived rejection and generalized conflict "can be viewed in terms of attachment insecurity leading to problems establishing intimate relationships with adults" (p. 55). Some sexual offenders with a "disorganized" attachment style "are likely to use sexual offending as one of several possible strategies of externally based control in response to the intense negative emotional states which are the sequelae of such an attachment style" (p. 55).

Moreover, sexual murderers of children have reported more frequent childhood sexual abuse and more deviant sexual fantasies than sexual murderers of women. These two results are congruent with the attachment model of the development of sexual deviance (Marshall, 1993; Ward, Hudson, Marshall, & Siegert, 1995). According to this model, attachment reflects the bond between child and parent that provides the necessary security and confidence for the child to explore his or her world (Marshall, 1993). The presence of negative childhood experiences—such as sexual abuse—may prevent the development of a secure attachment (Cicchetti & Lynch, 1995). The failure to develop a secure attachment can lead to psychosocial deficits such as low self-esteem and lack of skills necessary to establish adequate relationship with peers (Marshall, Hudson, & Hodgkinson, 1993). The difficulty relating to peers can lead to seeking for alternative ways to fulfill emotional and sexual needs in ways that do not challenge these deficits. So, it may be argued that sexual scripts such as child molestation or even sexual homicide may be found appealing because they make no demands on self-confidence and social skills that are lacking and may be interpreted as a means that can provide the illusion of intimacy without fear of being rejected (Marshall & Eccles, 1993). These scripts may be learned through a social learning process by being exposed to or being a victim of sexual abuse (Laws & Marshall, 1990). Furthermore, these scripts may be used during masturbatory activities, thus pairing deviant sexual fantasies with orgasm and creating a conditioning process (Abel & Blanchard, 1974; McGuire, Carlisle, & Young, 1965). Negative childhood experiences, especially sexual abuse, may thus be seen as developmental risk factors leading to sexual preference for a child (Lussier, Beauregard, Proulx, & Nicole, 2005). It is noteworthy that experience of sexual abuse during childhood and deviant sexual fantasies are also characteristics of sadistic offenders (Gratzer & Bradford, 1995).

The higher prevalence of deviant sexual fantasies in sexual murderers of children may be related to the motivations underlying sexual homicide. Langevin, Ben-Aron, Wriqth, Marchese, and Handy (1988) found that 31% of sexual murderers reported sexual gratification as a motivation, whereas 69% identified a fusion of anger and sexuality. In Beauregard and Proulx's (2002) study, only 33.3% of sexual murderers of female victims reported deviant sexual fantasies before committing the crime. As we have previously suggested, it is possible that sexual murderers of children included in our study are mainly sadistic, accounting for the importance of deviant sexual fantasies (Gratzer & Bradford, 1995; Proulx et al., 2006). Sadists retreat from relationships with adults where they did not succeed and flee into a world of sexually coercive fantasies. Because of the amount of time they dedicate to their fantasies, they become elaborate and form an outlet for their unexpressed emotional states: rage, humiliation, and suffering (Proulx et al., 1996). However, the use of coercive sexual fantasies as a coping strategy may prove insufficient if the sadist experiences unusually intense stressful events. The nature of this stress could be a generalized conflict, low self-esteem, or a feeling of rejection, as in the case of sexual murderers of children in our sample. Actualizing their fantasies through a sadistic sexual offense constitutes another coping strategy, which the sadists resort to deal with their internal distress (Proulx et al., 2006).

Although the higher prevalence of deviant sexual fantasies is an important factor related to sadism in sexual murderers of children, other results seem to point in the same direction. Results showed that sexual homicides of children were more often characterized by premeditation, the use of strangulation to kill the victim, hiding the victim's body, and the dismemberment of the victim's body as compared to sexual homicide of women. These modus operandi characteristics are largely congruent with results from Dietz, Hazelwood, and Warren (1990), which is probably the most complete study on the issue of the crime phase of sadistic offenders. Thus, their results showed that crimes of sadists were planned (93.3%), and the victim was usually unknown (83%). The victim was tortured (100%), tied up and gagged (87%), and sexual acts were diverse, including sodomy (73%), fellatio (71%), and vaginal intercourse (57%). When the victim was killed, it was often by asphyxia (58%) and the victim's corpse was concealed (65%; Warren, Hazelwood, & Dietz, 1996). Hiding the victim's body is an associated feature of sadism (Proulx et al., 2006). The apparently salient feature of sadism in sexual homicide of children is an issue that will require further investigation.

Finally, some of the significant differences between sexual murderers of children and sexual murderers of women can be better understood by a routine-activity approach. The central hypothesis of routine-activity theory is that "the probability that a violation will occur at any specific time and place might be taken as a function of the convergence of likely offenders and suitable targets in the absence of capable guardians" (Cohen & Felson, 1979, p. 590). All three elements are necessary for the crime to occur. The routine-activity approach does not deny that offenders may vary in their inclination to commit crime, but takes such inclination as given (Felson, 1992).

For predatory crime, which usually depends on direct physical contact between the offender and the crime target, the routine-activity approach emphasizes the importance of the daily activities of offenders and targets.

Our findings are congruent with a routine-activity approach. Sexual murderers of women are more likely than sexual murderers of children to be characterized by drug and/or alcohol abuse and dependence, frequent consumption of alcohol prior to the crime, to target a victim under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol, and to commit the crime at night. Thus, as part of their routine activities, these offenders are more likely to encounter potential victims in places where consumption of drugs or alcohol is involved. Hence, it is possible that these offenders will meet the victim in a bar, a club, or at a party where a potential victim has been consuming alcohol or drugs too, increasing her risk and vulnerability (Felson, 2002). Sexual murderers of children present a different pattern. More often they were unemployed prior to the crime, had prior contact with the victim, and used pornography prior to the crime as compared to sexual murderers of women. It may be hypothesized that sexual murderers of children spend some of their leisure time at home watching pornography and then go to places where potential victims gather (e.g., playgrounds, schools, and convenience stores) to establish prior contacts with victims (e.g., grooming). They wait for an opportunity, such as the absence of parents or guardians, and then attract the child victim to an isolated location where they will commit the assault and homicide. A recent study demonstrated that the type of victim (e.g., child versus adult women) would influence the hunting field of offenders (i.e., the type of area where offenders hunt for victims), which in turn is influenced by the victim's routine activities (Beauregard, Rossmo, & Proulx, *in press*).

## Conclusion

Because of the difficulties related to the collection of data on sexual homicide and sexual murderers of children, very few empirical studies have been conducted. However, comparative studies have proven useful to better understand this particular type of sexual murderer, even with limited data available. Previous studies from Firestone and his colleagues showed that there were some differences between homicidal child molesters and other groups (e.g., nonhomicidal child molesters). Yet, no studies have looked at potential differences between sexual murderers of children and adult victims.

The present study's aim was to verify if there were differences between sexual homicide of children and sexual homicide of adult women. It appears that sexual murderers of children tend to form a homogeneous group, somewhat matching several characteristics of the sadistic offender. Hence, most of the significant differences that were observed between the two groups could be explained by a routine activity approach to crime and knowledge about sadistic offenders. Because of all these significant differences, sexual murderers of children form a distinct group that should be studied

apart and not be combined with a group of sexual murderers of adult women or men, as has been done in previous studies.

Despite interesting results, this study is not without limitations. First, we have no way of knowing if our sample is representative. The actual number of sexual murderers remains unknown and we had access only to incarcerated individuals. Also, and more important, is the small sample size of this study. Because of this, generalization of the results may be hampered (Grubin, 1994) and it is possible that it may have prevented some differences to be statistically significant. However, a comparative analysis seems to be a good alternative to better understand a specific group of offender, especially in cases where limited data are available. It should be noted that our sample represents 85% of sexual murderers convicted and incarcerated in penitentiaries from the Quebec region (Canada).

Future studies should be undertaken to replicate our findings. Because of the small sample size of most studies on sexual homicide, a collaborative effort across different research centers and across countries should be considered. A multisite data collection could permit us to increase the number of participants and thus allow for more sophisticated statistical analyses to be carried out. Moreover, as sadism is a recurrent theme among sexual murderers, future studies should be undertaken to validate a diagnostic instrument of sadism.

## Notes

1. Note that our sample includes nine victims of age 15 or 16.
2. The mean kappa is .87, which represents very strong agreement.
3. For instance, during the interview the offender was asked to describe himself as a child, an adolescent, and as an adult (prior to the crime). Depending on the answers provided and the verbosity of the offender, complementary questions aimed to verify if certain behaviors were present have also been asked—e.g., did you ever suffer from headaches? Have you ever been cruel to animals?

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