

A Conceptual Study on the Etiology of Criminality: Early Childhood Memory and Predisposition to Violence Criminal Behavior

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Abstract

This concept paper on the relationship between early childhood memories and violent criminal behaviour points out a severe gap in the present understanding of the development of such behaviour. It sets out to examine how far traumatic experiences in earlier life, in the form of serious instances of abuse, affect the possibilities of violent dispositions later in life by applying some of the key theories in psychology and sociology, such as Social Learning Theory and Neutralization Theory. In this mixed-method approach study, qualitative data shall be elicited by carrying out in-depth interviews with sentenced offenders and mental health professionals. Quantitative data shall be obtained from structured questionnaires and archival research. These findings will have the potential to contribute to crime reduction, enhance public safety, and support policymakers in crafting evidence-based approaches to foster a safer and more just society at a national and global level. The research is focused on exploring trends of childhood traumatic experiences and their influence on violent behaviour to develop proper prevention strategies, therapeutic interventions, and legislation aimed at mitigating the perpetration of heinous violent crimes, thereby promoting social well-being.

1. Introduction

Violent crimes and murder are major public health problems that undermine a nation's and society's well-being. It, in a psychological context, is described as "the act that causes death is done with the intention of causing death." by, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. What results at the intersection of psychological development

and early life experiences are instrumental in motivations for extreme behaviours like murder. Prolonged and severe physical abuse is probably a factor in violent behaviour because it interacts with neurological brain dysfunction, demonstrated by Blake (1995).

The theorists of the past, studied by Sebranek (2020) would have come to develop conceptions of the etiology of criminality, such as Bandura's Social Learning Theory, Sykes and Matza's neutralization theory, Hirschi's Social Control Theory and Lemert's theories of labelling do go far in explaining the broader reasons, more general reasons for criminal conduct. These are not standalone and are, to extreme incidences, framed by the sociological context that entails things like the economic standing, the family setup, and the community surrounding that further define the behavioural outcomes of an individual.

Despite the bulging literature on criminal behaviour, the specifics of the role of the childhood experience in the inculcation of homicidal tendencies are left relatively untouched. This research attempts to bridge this gap through a sociological perspective on analyzing these early influences.

The question this research tries to answer is how early life experiences and memories shape an individual's tendency toward violence during adulthood because early childhood is the period in which personality, behaviour, and emotional regulation are founded. The above-mentioned psychological and sociological theories are called into play in examining the problem, based upon the relevant literature that identifies how events at an early age tend to affect the behavioural pattern of individuals when they enter adulthood. The relationship existing between early childhood memory and predisposition to violent criminal behaviour, the process of early memories, and their influence on long-term behavioural outcomes shall be investigated to establish some characteristics of memories related to this kind of violent tendency.

The study will examine the relation of traumatic experiences in early childhood to the potential for violent behaviour, as well as the veridicality of memory recall about events during this period in individuals with violent tendencies. Furthermore, the research will investigate the way these very early memories and their behavioural consequences have been determined by the course of developmental stages and cognitive development. This research considers whether any early childhood memory patterns, by consideration of the dynamics between environmental factors and genetic predispositions, may provide any scope for possible intervention strategies that would either prevent or reduce the levels of violent criminal behaviours.

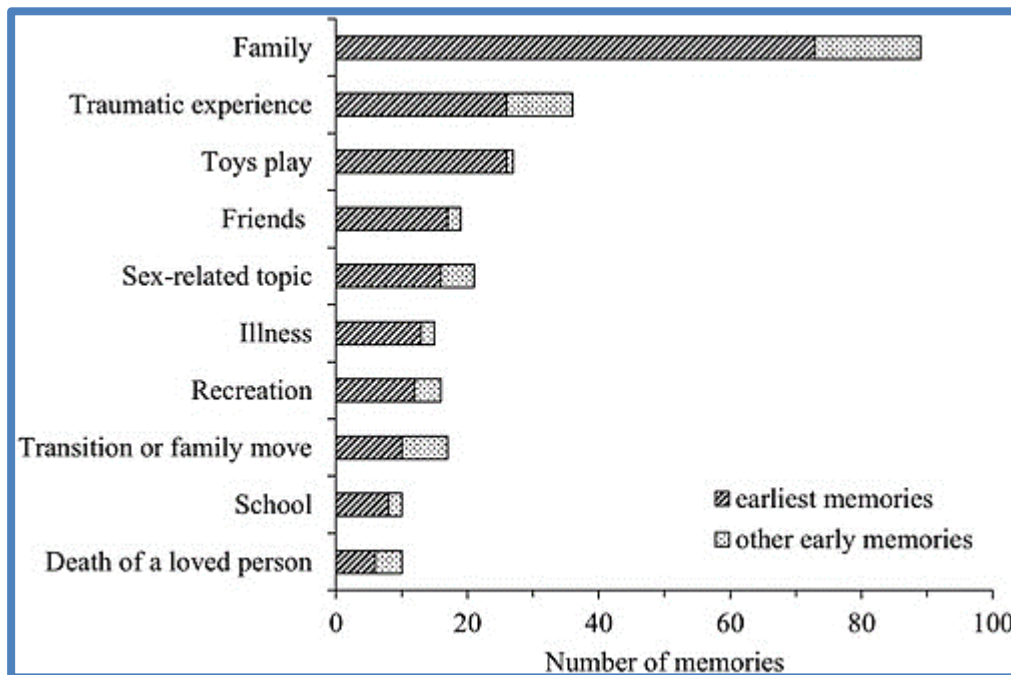


Fig.1 Content of earliest and other early memories during childhood that can influence his/her adulthood

Sebranek (2020) classified perceptions that lead to violence into two major categories. The first category entails individuals who are 'threatened.' Such individuals will commit violence to protect their reputation that they feel they should maintain because they are 'big, burly, or high-status individuals, or to enforce the social norms, in that they believe they have to pass a violent lesson to social deviants. It can trigger in some people a reactionary defence of the self-image, either in defence of perceived manliness or in an aggressive assertion of toughness. This may result in delayed retaliation to defend the image or active demonstration of fearlessness through destructive violence. For others, threats to physical safety are perceived and reacted to with violence, without any hesitation, often out of fear and paranoia. While others use force to relieve themselves from an overload of pressure when they find themselves incapable of responding verbally, for others, it is more to stop the disruption than to inflict harm on the other party.

The second group includes those people who regard other human beings only as objects for their needs. In this group, violence is practised for a variety of reasons. Some derive satisfaction when they cause suffering and go looking for easier targets to bully around, using violence to compensate for their sense of inadequacy. Others use violence as their means of exploitation, and some misbehave, dragging others into their influence when all other ways are blocked. People who expect nothing else than to have their needs met at any cost, with a childish sense of entitlement, will resort to violence to punish someone who doesn't do so.

2. Case Studies Discussion

Narrowing the concept, every murder and every murderer has a different back story which is linked with the variant forms of childhood traumas a killer has been through. For example, *William George Bonin* was also referred to as "The Freeway Killer". On record, there are instances of his having been severely physically abused as a child, which in turn contributed to his acting violently as a serial killer. Other notorious serial killers, such as *Ottis Toole* and *Henry Lee Lucas*, have been said to have received very extreme forms of physical and psychological abuse, thereby exemplifying, in some cases, relations to their criminal behaviour. *Aileen Wuornos* is a popular serial killer who was sexually abused during her childhood to the extent that she developed PTSD and exhibited violent behaviour.

In another case, *Ed Kemper* is a serial killer who underwent severe emotional and physical abuse by his mother. Thus, he turns out to be an appropriate example of the effect of emotional abuse on violent crime behaviour. *Jeffrey Dahmer* experienced enduring emotional overlooks and led an antisocial behaviour that made him kill 17 people.

Another study by Munjal (2023) on serial killers like, Stuart Wilken, John Wayne Gacy, and Surinder Koli each shows how early childhood trauma can lead to extreme violence in adulthood. Severe abuse and neglect drove Wilken to become a South African serial killer, preying on easy victims, including his daughter. Gacy was traumatized by his father's brutality, and in turn, his later crimes of torture and murder against young men reflected the extent of what was happening to him as a young boy. Koli of India had been sexually abused in his childhood and was guilty of heinous acts to the extent of cannibalism and necrophilia.

3. Thematic Analysis of Literature

Table 1 Literature Analysis

Author	Title	Key Findings	Relation to the research
<i>Toch (1969)</i>	<i>Violent Men - An Inquiry into The Psychology of Violence</i>	Focus on perpetrators' self-perception and interpersonal dynamics. Types of reactions include defending reputation, enforcing norms, compensating self-image, self-defending, and treating others as objects.	These could be learned from childhood experiences where trauma or negative reinforcement dictates that self-image is desperately needed, or that the only way to apply norms is through violence. Childhood neglect or abuse can lead to treating other people like objects.

<i>Katz (1988)</i>	Seductions of Crime: Moral and Sensual Attractions in Doing Evil	Examined seduction to violence through moral emotions and transcendence. Key concepts include moral seduction, stickup, and cold-blooded desire.	The childhood factor of abuse or neglect can distort the potential for moral development such that the person is more apt to fall prey to the "seductions" of crime for control or to deal with unresolved trauma.
<i>Surette (1990, 1998, 2002, 2012, 2013)</i>	Self-reported copycat crime among a population of serious and violent adult offenders. Crime & Delinquency	Defined copycat crime as a crime inspired by earlier, publicized crimes. Highlighted the link between media coverage and imitation.	Children who witness violence or crime-especially through media-may have a greater likelihood of repeating the same behavior later in life because their initial socialization with violence normalizes the behavior.
<i>Surette (1990)</i>	Self-reported copycat crime among a population of serious and violent adult offenders. Crime & Delinquency	Early reference to copycat phenomenon with a focus on the difficulty of identifying when an offense is truly a copycat crime.	Early exposure to violence in childhood, whether through media or direct experience, might make individuals more susceptible to becoming copycat criminals.
<i>Black (1991)</i>	The aesthetics of murder: A study in romantic literature and contemporary culture	Discussed how copycat crimes are motivated by real or fictional media representations, incorporating aspects of the original offense	Media representations during formative years can impact childhood development, potentially desensitizing individuals to violence and making them more likely to engage in similar actions later.
<i>Athens (1992)</i>	The creation of dangerous violent criminals	Developed a theory on the dangerous violent criminal through a developmental process. Emphasized social experiences and compared stages of violent socialization.	Childhood experiences, particularly those involving violence or neglect, are crucial in the developmental process that Athens describes, often leading to the creation of dangerous violent criminals.
<i>Campbell (2002)</i>	As sniper hunt grows role of media blurs. Christian Science Monitor	Highlighted the commercialization and sensationalization of serial killers in popular culture, including board games and trading cards	Early exposure to sensationalized media representations of violence may affect the way a child perceives crime and, in effect, normalize or even glamorize violent acts.
<i>Coleman (2004)</i>	The copycat effect: How the media and popular culture trigger mayhem in tomorrow's headlines	Described the "contagion effect" as the power of mass communication to create an epidemic of similar behaviours. Linked media coverage of suicides, such as Marilyn Monroe's, to increased rates of similar suicides, illustrating the impact of media on imitation.	Appropriate contagion is more effectively carried out among children since their initial experiences with media may shape later behavior through which they are more apt to imitate such violent acts.
<i>Fister (2005)</i>	Copycat crimes: Crime fiction and the	Examined the influence of media and cultural representations on criminal	Exposure to violent crime fiction at an early age could affect a person's latter behavior, provided

marketplace of anxieties	behavior, contributing to the understanding of copycat crimes.	that those early exposures were not balanced with good role models or interventions.
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The complexity of crime requires insights emanating from several academic disciplines. Thus, the Forensic Research Centre at the University of Leicester reflects an interdisciplinary approach to the study of crime, extending from archaeology through to psychology and into genetics, sociology, and even philosophy. The diversity of experts underlines the fact that no one discipline, not even psychology, explains the various forms and manifestations of crime. However, psychology still plays an important role in crime which is intrinsically human behaviour. As much as psychology might not have a complete answer to controlling and minimizing crime, it no doubt offers insight into the motives, thoughts, and feelings behind criminal behaviours. Analysis of criminal activity hence incorporates the psychological perspective among others for completeness in understanding, as reported in a book by Hollin(2013).

The work of Allely (2020) gives a detailed review of extreme violence from psychological, mental and environmental factors that permit these actions. Extreme violence comes in the forms of serial killing, mass shootings, school shootings, and lone-actor terrorism, as it goes on to stress the points about brain abnormalities and psychological motivations in offenders.

This study will make use of the mixed-method approach by discussing how early childhood experiences are associated with a predisposition to violent criminal behaviour, including both qualitative and quantitative data to maintain comprehensiveness in the overall research.

This study will use qualitative data that will be derived from the application of semi-structured in-depth interviews among convicted persons who have committed violent crimes. They will be asked about their early childhood experiences regarding abuse or any other form of trauma and how they perceive these to affect their behaviour. The results will be further expanded with interviews with mental health professionals and experts in criminal justice. Detailed case studies on a few individuals will explain, with more detail on personal history, psychological assessments, and documented interventions or treatments, specific cases of childhood trauma progressing into violent behaviour.

4. Methodology

Quantitative data will be gathered through structured questionnaires administered to a larger sample of subjects with violent criminal histories as done by Marono (2020). The questionnaires will measure early childhood experiences and current psychological symptoms and behavioural patterns using standard, previously validated measures. Archival research will supplement these data by reviewing existing files from the criminal justice and psychological case files for the identification of patterns and relationships between early childhood trauma and violent behaviour. In this study, criminal case files, psychological evaluations, and crime reports will be used to determine whether there are any patterns or relationships between early childhood trauma and violent behaviour. It will involve two key groups as follows.

- Subjects with a violent criminal history
- Group where such histories are absent

The participants sampled for this research were selected based on some criteria, including age, background information, and recorded early childhood experiences. Inclusion criteria for the violent criminal behaviour group will be based on a conviction for violent crimes and documented histories of childhood trauma, and for the comparison group, individuals from similar demographic backgrounds with no history of violent behaviour who have as similar socio-economic and familial contexts as possible.

As done by, Marono (2020), data analysis will consist of both thematic analysis for qualitative data and statistical analysis of quantitative information. The thematic analysis shall take place on what will come out from interviews and case studies on childhood trauma and its influences on violent behaviour. On the quantitative front, statistical tools will be employed to quantify the associations between early childhood trauma and violent behavior, using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis.

Ethical concerns shall be foremost at all stages of the study. The subjects will provide their informed consent; that is, they will clearly understand the purpose of the research and their right to exit from the research at any time. Confidentiality will be ensured by anonymizing data during storage, with personal identifiers removed from the transcripts and records, as reported in a guide by Simpson, R., & Coté, W. (2006). For this reason, the study shall offer support to distressed participants who could be disturbed by discussing their horrible experiences during an interview or at any other time; this shall include referrals to mental health professionals if necessary.

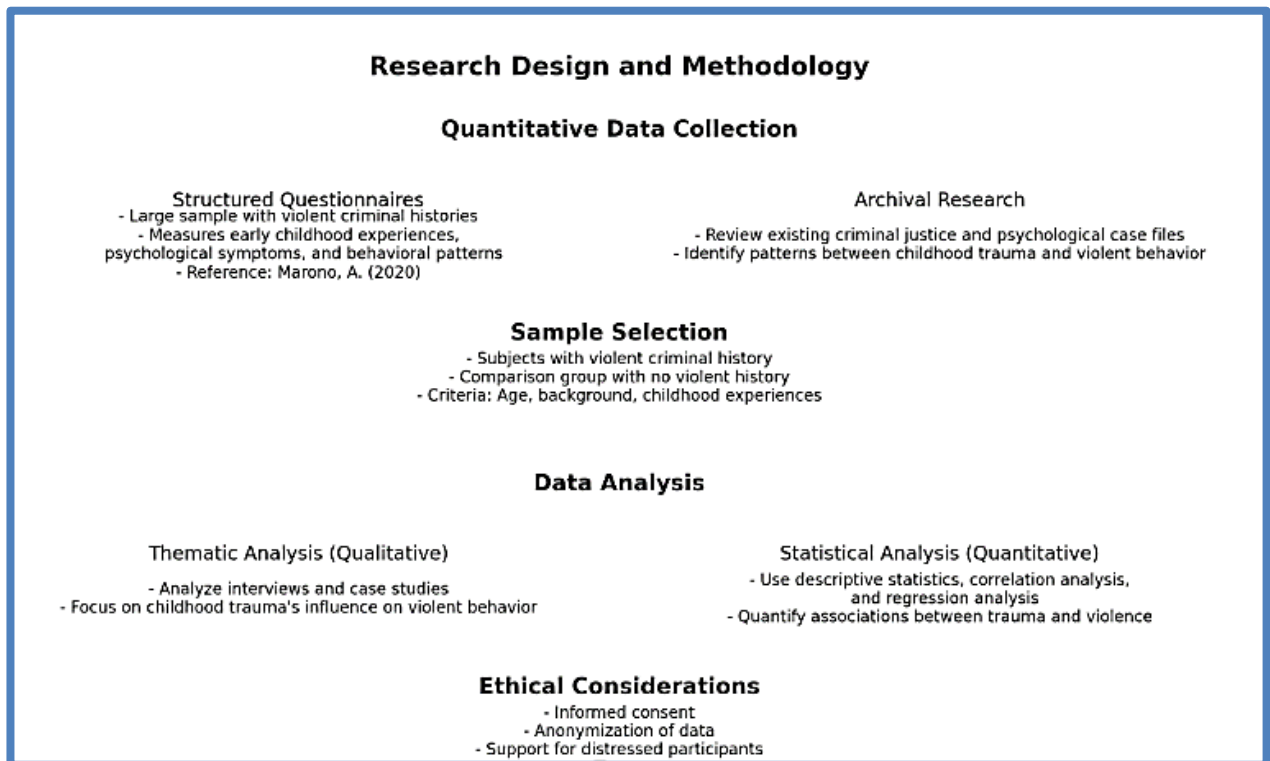


Figure 2: *Research Design and methodology of the proposed study*

5. Conclusion

It is important to understand how early childhood experiences set the ground for later violent behaviour for several reasons. First, it speaks to a significant gap in the literature about the developmental origins of criminal behaviour. While several studies look into the general effects of trauma and abuse on psychological well-being, very few of them have approached the focused investigation of how particular early childhood experiences contribute to a predisposing tendency toward violent criminal behaviour. In doing this, the research will bring up information that will highly increase the probability of enhancing preventive measures, guiding therapeutic interventions, and giving a lead in policy guidelines within the criminal justice and mental health systems.

These findings are of practical importance for strategies of early prevention. Being able to identify and understand the processes of change that operate from childhood to violence supports advances in effective programs of prevention and, therefore, implies targeted support systems for the most vulnerable children and families, the strengthening of child protective services, and a trauma-informed approach to the care within educational and social services. Early intervention would reduce this predisposition of the child to commit or perpetrate acts of violence in the future and hence assist in lessening the total number of crime levels in society, in the process improving public safety. The relation of early childhood trauma to violent behaviour is relevant to current trends in criminology and psychology, all of which stress the need for an understanding of criminal behaviour at its root. Contributing to this space, therefore, this study shall add to further knowledge, foment debate about what works best in prevention and intervention efforts, provide a baseline for subsequent investigations, and, with some hope, alter policy and resource distribution for better support of this at-risk population.

According to Sugiarti *et al.* (2022), parenting sets up a child for his behaviour and character. The kind of environment that the parents create, the values and behaviours parents imprint, and the way they model this all, highly affect their child's development. Several studies consistently indicate that most children who grow up under harsh, abusive, and neglectful environments or otherwise harmful conditions are at high risk of developing behavioural issues. These children are more likely to struggle with emotional regulation, have difficulties regarding the development of healthy relationships, and may even resort to criminal activities as a means to cope with or give meaning to unresolved trauma. The absence of positive role models and nurturing care in their young years leads them many times into a road of joining gangs or, in severe instances, becoming violent offenders. The consequences of bad parenting run deep, which means that supportive, stable, and nurturing environments are needed by all to ensure proper development and to prevent such destructive behaviours from arising.

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Conflict of Interest

Authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of the paper.

Author Contribution

The authors confirm contribution to the paper as follows: **study conception and design:** S.M.S.M., N.S.M.I. and I. M.H.A. **data collection:** S.M.S.M., N.S.M.I. and I. M.H.A. **analysis and interpretation of results:** S.M.S.M., N.S.M.I. and I. M.H.A.; **draft manuscript preparation:** S.M.S.M., N.S.M.I. and I. M.H.A. All authors reviewed the results and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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