

University of Cape Town

How to Create Monsters?

**A preliminary examination approach to
the role of the social environment in relation to
the origin of South African serial killers**

by

Jana Wehner
(WHNJAN001)

Submitted in the fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
MASTERS IN CRIMINOLOGY, LAW & SOCIETY

LLM coursework & dissertation

In the Faculty of Law

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

September 2020

Word count: 22 961

Research dissertation presented for the approval of Senate in fulfilment of part of the requirements for the Masters in Criminology, Law, and Society in approved courses and a minor dissertation. The other part of the requirement for this qualification was the competition of a program of courses.

I hereby declare that I have read and understood the regulations governing the submission of Masters in Criminology, law and Society dissertations, including those relating to length and plagiarism, as contained in the rules of this University, and that this dissertation conforms to those regulations.

The copyright of this thesis vests in the author. No quotation from it or information derived from it is to be published without full acknowledgement of the source. The thesis is to be used for private study or non-commercial research purposes only.

Published by the University of Cape Town (UCT) in terms of the non-exclusive license granted to UCT by the author.

Abstract

The phenomenon of serial killers is a fascinating topic for readers, as well as for researchers. This dissertation is going to expand the steadily growing stock of literature regarding the origin of serial killers, but with a focus on the social environment. As the social environment differs from country to country, depending on cultures, history, societies, and economic circumstances, it is important to take a South African perspective when studying the social environment of individuals in South Africa. After explaining the different approaches to define the term 'serial killer', this paper provides a solid review of previous research on the origin of serial homicide in South Africa. While presenting the most popular theories on the origin and development of serial killers in South Africa, it becomes evident that the social environment has never been considered to be a factor that might play a role. This paper criticises the fact that an examination of the social environment of serial killers has been absent in previous research on the development of serial killers. Consequently, it makes it its task to examine the social environment of South African serial killers via multiple case studies. Six South African serial killer cases are presented and the social environment of the individuals is explained. Moreover, similarities between the cases and other conspicuities are pieced together and analysed, followed by a discussion on how they might have an impact on a serial killer. Additionally, the paper gives some food for thought on why the social environment in South African townships is so fertile for serial killers to offend and what cultural and historical circumstances might play a role in developing such an environment. Providing incentives for further in-depth research here and there, this research expands the steadily growing body of literature on serial killers from a South African perspective. The paper concludes that the social environment of serial killers is a huge and interesting subject area, with many possible influencing factors that are therefore worth exploring further. Additionally, this paper proposes that the social environment should be taken into account when researching serial killers in general, and especially their origin and development. This paper takes the initiative to research the social environment as an independent factor within the phenomenon of serial killers. It proposes a preliminary examination approach to the role of the social environment in relation to the origin of South African serial killers for the purpose of drawing attention to the importance of including it when researching serial killers to generate a better understanding of the origin of serial killers and the phenomenon in general.

Table of contents

I.	Introduction.....	1
II.	Defining serial murder	4
A.	International history of the term `serial killer´	4
B.	South African definitions	7
III.	Previous South African research on the origin of serial homicide.....	12
A.	Pistorius`s theory on the development of male serial killers (1996).....	13
B.	Labuschagne`s interactional theory (2001)	15
C.	Barkhuizen`s theory on the early development of the individual (2004).....	17
D.	De Wet`s psychosocial personality theory approach to serial murder (2004) ..	19
E.	Summary of the literature and identification of the research gap	20
IV.	Research Methodology.....	22
A.	Aim of the research	22
B.	Research methodology	24
C.	Preparation of the case study.....	27
V.	The Study	29
A.	Definition of the social environment.....	29
B.	The Cases	31
1.	Individual A	31
2.	Individual B.....	32
3.	Individual C.....	33
4.	Individual D	34
5.	Individual E.....	35
6.	Individual F.....	36
C.	Notable aspects drawn from the cases	36
1.	Phase one: Childhood.....	37
2.	Phase two: Period of offending	38

VI.	Discussion of the findings.....	40
A.	The conspicuous external factors	40
1.	Phase one: Childhood.....	40
a.	Poverty of the family.....	41
b.	Exposure to violence	43
c.	Traumatic experiences.....	44
d.	Rejection by parents/ caretakers.....	45
e.	Disorganization in Family.....	46
2.	Phase two: Period of offending	47
a.	Poverty in the offending area	49
b.	Criminality in the offending area	50
c.	Densely populated offending are	50
d.	Large rate of unemployment in the offending area	52
e.	Lack of law enforcement in the offending area.....	52
3.	Further considerations.....	54
B.	Possible causes for the development of the social environment in South African townships.....	57
VII.	Conclusion	61
	Bibliography.....	64

I. Introduction

The phenomenon of an individual killing multiple people for pure pleasure and managing to live a normal life in between the killings without attracting any attention has always fascinated society. Blockbusters like 'the Silence of the Lambs', 'Psycho', or 'Seven' have glorified the term 'serial killer' and most people associate it with bestseller books and excitement. But serial homicide is not a fictional phenomenon; it sadly is very real in South Africa and throughout the world. Probably the most famous South African serial killer, Moses Sithole, killed at least 37 women between 1994 and 1995. He tied his victims up with their clothes and brutally raped and strangled them. He also killed the toddler boy of one of his victims.¹

Maybe it's that kind of inhuman behaviour, acted out by a human being that fascinates people all over the world. What makes such sane people so different from us that they perform such acts of cruelty, terrorism, and inhumanity?² Even among researchers, the phenomenon of serial killers triggers a certain amount of attention and excitement. This is why there is already a great amount of international research on that topic and, in the last 25 years, a few South African authors have engaged in research on the topic of serial killers, thereby building a steadily growing body of literature from a South African perspective.³

Still, most of the research on the topic originates from the UK and the US and has shown that most serial killers are not born evil, but that a lot of different factors influence their development.⁴ Those factors differ from country to country due to different cultures, economic situations, histories, and societies⁵. It is therefore doubtful that the wide range of American or English theories and literature can be applied wholesale

¹ Pistorius M, *Catch me a Killer: Serial murders—a profiler's true story* (2012).

² Knight, Zeldia G, 'Some thoughts on the psychological roots of the behavior of serial killers as narcissists: An object relations perspective' (2006) Vol. 34, *Social Behavior Personality: an international journal*.

³ Potgieter C & De Wet J, 'Serial murder in South Africa: asking different questions' (2015) Vo. 28, *Acta Criminologica: Southern African Journal of Criminology*.

⁴ Pistorius *Catcht me a Killer* ob cit note 1.

⁵ Labuschagne GN & Gabrielle Salfati CG, 'An examination of serial homicide in South Africa: The practice to research link' (2015) Vo. 12, *Acta Criminologica: Southern African Journal of Criminology*.

to South African cases.⁶ Therefore, there is a great need for a South African perspective on that phenomenon that pays special attention to the history and culture of the country and creates South African theories on serial killers as well as a South African definition of the term.

In general, the murder rate in South Africa is nine times the international average,⁷ with an average of 58 murders per day in 2018/19, according to the South African Police Service (SAPS).⁸ In contrast to this, the number of serial killer cases, with an average of five new series of murders every year, seems comparatively small.⁹ A series of murders means the murder of at least two or more victims on at least two separate occasions committed by the same person who fits the definition of a serial killer.¹⁰

Undoubtedly there certainly were serial killer cases before, however, the first South African case recorded by SAPS occurred in 1936.¹¹ By the end of 2019, almost 190 serial killer cases had been identified by the South African Police Service.¹² According to the numbers from SAPS,¹³ South Africa is considered to be one of the countries with the highest number of serial killers in the world.¹⁴ This is confirmed by a statistic from the scientist Dr. Mike Aamodt from Radford University, according to which South Africa is the country with the third-highest number of serial killers in the world.¹⁵ But what is it about South Africa that makes this country such an attractive playground for serial killers? The famous author Jacque Fresco once said: 'The difference between a serial killer and a saint is the environment. That's a very hard thing to

⁶ Hodgskiss, Brin, 'Lessons from serial murder in South Africa' (2004) Vol. 1 *Journal of Investigative Psychology*.

⁷ Salfati CG & Labuschagne GN, 'Serial Homicide in South Africa Introduction to the Special Issue' (2015) Vol. 12, *Journal of Investigative Psychology*.

⁸ South African Police Service: Crime Information Analysis Centre website, 2019.

⁹ Horning AM, Salfati CG, Labuschagne GN, 'South African serial homicide: A victim - focused behavioural typology' (2015) Vol. 12, *Journal of Investigative Psychology*.

¹⁰ Labuschagne & Safati op cit note 5.

¹¹ Labuschagne GN, *Serial murder revisited: A psychological exploration of two South African cases* (unpublished thesis, University of Pretoria, 2007).

¹² Hodgskiss ob cit note 6.

¹³ South African Police Service: Crime Information Analysis Centre website, 2003.

¹⁴ Hodgskiss ob cit note 6; Pistorius *Catch me a Killer* ob cit note 1.

¹⁵ Radford University/FGCU Serial Killer Database

accept because that raises a lot of questions'.¹⁶ One of those questions is: How does the social environment influence the development of a serial killer?

This question is based on the hypothesis that most serial killers are not born evil; they are created by their social environment.¹⁷ Although some biological theorists built on Lombroso's work, and are of the opinion that a few people are born with certain predispositions¹⁸. Nonetheless, such people are also exposed to a social environment that can influence their actions and development. Therefore, there is a great need to explore the origin of serial homicide, especially under the unique circumstances of the South African social environment.

This research uses multiple case studies to illuminate, analyse and compare the social environment of six serial killers. This way the role that the social environment might play in the development of a serial killer can be understood a little bit better. After establishing that it is not that easy to define the term 'serial killer' and further explaining which definition is used for this research and why, this paper gives a brief review of the most well-known South African theories on the origin of serial homicide. The review lays bare the lack of studies considering the social environment as an influencing part in the development of a serial killer. Although some theories considered parts of the social environment, the social environment as a whole independent factor has never been taken into account before.

Following on the above, the central argument will be made: that the social environment of serial killers might have an influence on their development and should therefore be considered in future research on the origin of serial killers. The importance of paying special attention to the social environment when researching the development of serial killers is highlighted in the methodology section. The six case studies will provide detailed and compact descriptions of South African serial killers. The focus will be set on their social environment and sharpen the reader's eye to how extensive and influential

¹⁶ Jacque Fresco, from a talk at Nichols College, 1999; www.thevenusproject.com

¹⁷ Pistorius *Catch me a Killer* ob cit note 1; Labuschagne & Safati op cit note 5; Knight ob cit note 2.

¹⁸ Ellwood, Charles A, 'Lombroso's theory of crime' (1912) *Journal of the American Institute of Criminal Law and Criminology*.

this might be. The findings of the social environment from the case studies will be summarised and organised in a logical way, making it easier to identify similarities and conspicuous features. Consequently, a variety of external factors of the social environment will come to light, which might have an influence on the development of serial killers and are therefore worth exploring further.

In a further discussion, the findings will then be set into context. The conspicuous features of the social environment will be explained in more detail and a possible influence on the development of serial killers will be proposed, using the existing theories. This way the social environment as a whole is absorbed in the theories of the origin of serial homicide and an example is shown to what extent the social environment may have an influence on serial killers. This should encourage further research to include the social environment as an independent factor when exploring serial killers. Further consideration of possible reasons for the development of the specific social environments that are present in the cases used in this study provides some additional food for thought. The exploration of those possible causes for the development of the social environment itself just scratches the surface of a huge research area and, once again, intends to encourage other researchers to deal closely with the social environment of serial killers.

II. Defining serial murder

In order to study serial killers, one must agree on what exactly a serial killer is as a first step. Not everyone who kills multiple people is a serial killer. The term 'serial killer' is relatively new and went through different phases.¹⁹ Although nowadays, the main requirements are agreed upon, several researchers have spun the term further and produced their own definitions.

A. International history of the term 'serial killer'

The term 'serial killer' first occurred as a subtype of multiple murders in Great Britain and a little bit later in the US.²⁰ It was defined differently back then, but even today the term is still controversial. When it first appeared in literature, the term 'serial killer' was

¹⁹ Holmes RM & Holmes ST, *Serial murder* 3rd ed. (2009).

²⁰ Skrapec CA, 'Defining serial murder: A call for a return to the original Lustmörd' (200)1 Vol. 16, *Journal of Police - Criminal Psychology*.

synonymous with the term 'mass murder',²¹ then changed to 'chain killers',²² where after the term 'serial killer' was used, as the need arose to differentiate between the various types of multiple murder.

Nowadays the term 'mass murderer' describes a person who kills multiple victims in one place during one single event, with no cooling-off period. Mass murders often occur within the context of terrorist attacks.²³ A 'spree killer' is defined as a person who kills two or more victims during one event, which can extend over a longer or shorter period of time, in two or more places. Although the 'spree-killer' might change the location of the killings and the whole event might spread over weeks, it is still considered one event, as there is no cooling-off period in between killings.²⁴

This cooling-off period, which describes the breaks between the killings, is the element that distinguishes a 'spree -killer' from a 'serial-killer'. Those periods can differ in duration from a two-day minimum to weeks, months, or even years.²⁵ The so-called station strangler, who murdered 22 young boys in a large township in the Western Cape, had a two-year cooling-off period from 1992 to 1994 in which he didn't commit another murder.²⁶

In addition to the cooling-off period, most of the definitions of serial killers agree on the requirements of three or more murders during three or more events at different locations.²⁷ But this definition is still pretty broad and not specific enough. For example, a bank robber, who commits four robberies at four different banks over a year with breaks in between, during which he lives his normal life, and kills one person during each robbery would be a serial killer according to this definition.²⁸ A similar case would be an assassin, who kills more than three people during three or more events at different locations while taking breaks between the killings and living a normal life. But the definition of serial killers does not wish to encompass these criminals.

²¹ Wertham F, *The show of violence* (1949).

²² Reinhardt JM, *Sex perversions and sex crimes* (1957).

²³ Holmes & Holmes ob cite note 19.

²⁴ Skrapec ob cite note 20.

²⁵ Ressler RK, Burgess AW & Douglas JE, *Sexual homicide: Patterns and motives* (1988).

²⁶ Pistorius M, *Profiling serial killers: And other crimes in South Africa* (2012).

²⁷ Holmes & Holmes ob cite note 19.

²⁸ Skrapec ob cite note 20.

This is why an additional requirement has to be included in the definition; the requirement of a specific motive. The motive of a serial killer is probably the most fascinating element of the phenomenon. What drives people to such horrible crimes and makes them repeat them over and over again? Although the reason for the origin of the urge to kill can still not be determined with certainty, there is an agreement in literature and research that the primary and only motive of a serial killer is the pure act of killing.²⁹ This act of killing is the only goal and might even give them fulfilment and satisfaction, so they feel compelled to repeat the act over and over again. This drive to wipe out human life, for no other reason than pleasure, can, therefore, be the only motive of a serial killer.³⁰

This motive distinguishes them from people who constantly kill for financial gain or other profits. They may only be classed as 'serial felony-murderer(s)'³¹ because the killing is only a subsidiary for them; both the robber and the assassin primarily kill for financial gain.³² Therefore it is important to use a 'satisfactory definition'³³ when dealing with serial killers. Commensurately, the official FBI definition of a serial killer is 'a person or persons who kill more than three victims, during more than three events, at three or more locations, with a cooling-off period in between. Premeditated planning and fantasy are also present.'³⁴ This is the most used definition in the US and has also inspired other definitions around the world.³⁵

As the phenomenon of serial killers differs from country to country, for example in terms of cross-ethnic offending, consistency of behaviour, and sex of the killer, due to geographical, socio-economic, and cultural differences, the definitions of serial killers also differ.³⁶ This leads to problems when serial killer cases from different countries are

²⁹ Pistorius *Profiling serial killers* ob cit note 26.

³⁰ Skrapec ob cite note 20.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Wehner J, *How to punish Monsters? – An Approach for effective sentencing of serial killers in recognition of the theories of punishment using the examples of Moses Sithole and Rodney Alcala* (unpublished essay, University of Cape Town, 2019).

³³ Pistorius *Catch me a Killer* ob cit note 1.

³⁴ Douglas JE & Burgess AE, 'Criminal profiling: A viable investigative tool against violent crime' (1986) Vol. 55, *FBI Law Bulletin*.

³⁵ Skrapec ob cite note 20.

³⁶ Hodgskiss ob cit note 6.

compared and when international statistics are compiled. This does not mean that serial killer cases from around the world cannot be compared to each other, but the variety of definitions must be considered. It is very important to note which definition of the serial killer was used for a specific statistic. Further, for international rates of serial killers around the world, it is important to note whether the statistic used one uniform definition for all the cases or used the respective definition of each country. This makes it difficult to compare serial killer cases and one always has to keep an eye on the definition used.

B. South African definitions

The South African Police Service based its definition on the definition of the FBI and describes a serial killer as someone who murders 'two or more victims on at least two separate occasions and the motive for the homicides are not primarily for material gain nor to eliminate a witness in another matter.'³⁷ This definition has two weaknesses: first, it doesn't describe a specific motive of pleasure, although it does exclude the motives of material gain and the elimination of a witness in another crime. It, therefore, fails to address other motives, such as political reasons, jealousy, or racist reasons. People who repeatedly kill for those reasons neither kill for material gain nor to eliminate a victim; the act of killing is not the primary goal they want to achieve and enjoy. They may not even like the act of killing and see it as an unfortunate component to arrive at a bigger picture. For example, the political killer might see the killing as a necessary step to make a point, but his real and primary goal is to make a political statement, to drive a change, or something else. The second weakness of the SAPS definition is the missing element of a cooling-off period, which thus makes no distinction between a serial killer and a spree killer.³⁸

In conclusion, the SAPS definition of a serial killer is very broad and includes a very high number of cases. This could be the reason why South Africa is considered one of the countries with the highest rate of serial killers in the world.³⁹ If the definition used for official police statistics is this broad already and includes such a wide range of cases then of course the rate is higher compared to a country that uses a more narrow definition

³⁷ Labuschagne & Safati op cit note 5.

³⁸ White JH, Lester D, Gentile M & Jespersen, 'Serial murder: Definition and typology' (2010) Vol. 31, *American Journal of Forensic Psychiatry*.

³⁹ Hodgskiss op cit note 6.

of serial killers. This again shows the problem that serial killer numbers from different countries cannot easily be compared if no uniform definition is used.

Furthermore, South African researchers have developed the SAPS definition further. Starting with very broad definitions, Knight defines a serial homicide as: 'the killing of three or more people over a period of more than 30 days, with a significant cooling-off period'⁴⁰ and Del Fabbro who just requires multiple murders committed, over some time by one or more individuals.⁴¹ These vague definitions don't include any kind of motive or intention of the offender and therefore include too many cases, for example, the above-mentioned bank robber would be considered a serial killer according to those definitions, which makes the group of serial killers too broad to study in a specific way.

To avoid this, the authors, Labuschagne, and De Wet, and Potgieter, include the requirement of a motive in their definitions. De Wet and Potgieter state in their article that a definition for serial killers should require the elements of the murder of three or more victims, which were unknown to the offender, cooling-off periods between the incidents, and some kind of reference to the motivation of the murder, as well as a great amount of fantasizing about the crimes.⁴² None specify the motive further, but exclude the motive of material gain and tend to require the murder being committed for control and dominance.⁴³

Seeing the motivation of a serial killer primarily in control and dominance terms poses the problem of different serial killer typologies. Of course, the person who kills another person always is in control and the dominant figure but this doesn't mean it is the primary goal of every killer. Whether the intention to commit multiple murders is control and dominance is a question to establish the serial killer typology. Various typologies have been proposed in international literature. Holmes and De Burger suggest the typologies of visionary, missionary, hedonistic, and power-motivated serial killers, of which only the power-motivated serial killer is motivated by control and dominance.⁴⁴ Although dominance and control might be the intention for some serial killers,

⁴⁰ Knight ob cit note 2.

⁴¹ Del Fabbro GA, *A family systems analysis of serial murder* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Pretoria, 2006).

⁴² Potgieter & De Wet ob cit note 3.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ De Burger J & Holmes R, *Serial Murder* (1988).

it cannot be considered a requirement for being a serial killer or even the general motive for all of them.

Over and above that, De Wet and Potgieter take up the aspect of fantasy that is also used by the FBI. The element of fantasy means that the person fantasizes about the crimes in advance, first subconsciously, then consciously till the urge is so strong that he has to act out the fantasy. The problem is that a real-life act is never as perfect as the fantasy and the serial killer, therefore, keeps fantasizing about the crime and will continue to act out the fantasy till he gets it as perfect as he imagines it to be, which will never happen so he will keep killing until he is stopped.⁴⁵ The new fantasies will also be fuelled by developments from the homicides already committed and encourage repetition.⁴⁶ For example, Siphon Agmatir Thwala, the so-called 'Phoenix Serial Killer', took the victims' underwear and other clothes home and admitted to masturbating while fondling the underwear and fantasizing about the crimes.

Not all researchers agree with the element of fantasy being a requirement for a serial killer. Hodgskiss and Labuschagne report only very few findings of fantasies in their research.⁴⁷ This could be because the interviewed serial killers just didn't tell the researchers about their most private fantasies. Furthermore, those interviews aimed to reveal 'violent sexual fantasies' and not just fantasies about the act of killing. One can postulate that their former types of fantasies were too uncomfortable to reveal whereas killers with the latter fantasies felt ignored.⁴⁸

Although the element of fantasy plays a role in the phenomenon of serial homicide a 'great amount of fantasizing about the crimes' should not necessarily be considered a requirement within the definition, as it is a very unclear term, which can be interpreted in many different ways and is almost impossible to prove.⁴⁹ But even those serial killers who claim not to have fantasized about their murders have to have planned them or thought about them and their execution in some kind of way, which is a type of fantasy. Otherwise, there wouldn't be a series of murders. Unplanned murders, spurred by emotions, wouldn't be repeated. Nevertheless, I think a 'great amount of fantasizing' goes

⁴⁵ Pistorius *Catch me a Killer* ob cit note 1.

⁴⁶ Hodgskiss ob cit note 6.

⁴⁷ Hodgskiss ob cit note 6.

⁴⁸ Labuschagne GN *Serial murder revisite* op cite note 11.

⁴⁹ Hodgskiss ob cit note 6.

too far to be a requirement for serial killers. It should rather be researched more deeply in the context of the origin and motivation of a serial killer or triggering events for the murders.

Labuschagne defines a serial killer as

one or more person(s), who is motivated to kill and actually commits three or more murders at different times that are not related to each other. The motive is primarily not for financial gain or to eliminate a witness. Revenge may play a role but never addresses a single person but is rather directed against a category of individuals, which the serial killer has selected beforehand.⁵⁰

Additional to missing out on the cooling-off periods, Labuschagne also struggles to specify the motive. Like the SAPS, he also excludes some motives but doesn't describe the specific and primary motive as the pure act of killing.

Pistorius was one of the first South African authors to include a specific motive in her definition of serial killers. According to her,

a serial killer is a person who murders several victims, usually strangers, at different locations, with a cooling-off period in between. The motive is intrinsic; an irresistible compulsion, fuelled by fantasy which may lead to torture and/or sexual abuse, mutilation and, necrophilia.⁵¹

According to this definition, the specific motive has to be intrinsic to the offender. It furthermore explains it as an irresistible compulsion. Further positive development is that the definition includes the element of fantasy, not as an individual requirement, but as a part of the motive. The developing fantasy reaches a point of consciousness at which the serial killer can't hold it back anymore and feels compelled to finally relieve himself and act it out. This intrinsic urge to act out the fantasy about killing is, therefore, the specific motive of a serial killer. The element of 'irresistible compulsion' must not be understood in a South African legal way, as it doesn't mean the person is not responsible for his actions and would, therefore, be found not guilty because of a mental illness or get locked up in state psychiatric facility.⁵² Only one South African serial killer has ever been found unfit to stand trial because of psychiatric illness, thus far.⁵³

⁵⁰ Labuschagne GN *Serial murder revisite* op cite note 11.

⁵¹ Pistorius *Profiling serial killers* ob cit note 26.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Hodgskiss ob cit note 6.

Additionally, Pistorius's definition adds the variable of possible torture and/or sexual abuse, mutilation, and necrophilia. This enumeration already covers pretty much all the side effects of serial homicide but in case it doesn't the list is left open so other side effects like pyromania can be included as well.

The most specific and detailed definition of serial homicide is introduced by De Wet, who states:

Serial homicide is committed by an individual, who murders several people, usually strangers, over a period of time at different locations or in one location, with a cooling-off period between the murders. The motivation for the murders is generally intrinsic in nature, while material gain or revenge does not play a significant role. A triggering event, whether direct or indirect, precedes each murder and motivates the person to act out his fantasies. The physical act of murder is, in essence, the re-enactment of the individual's elaborate fantasies.⁵⁴

This definition contains all the common requirements and, like Pistorius, specifies the primary motive as intrinsic. It further includes some role of fantasy, without letting it stand alone, and even tries to explain it a little bit. Additionally, the definition introduces the requirement of a triggering event. This triggering event, whether it happens directly or indirectly, marks the moment at which the fantasy or idea of killing another human being becomes so strong in the consciousness of the killer that he chooses to act it out.⁵⁵ This makes it the most precise definition but also the one that is most limited and thus only includes a small number of offenders.

Although I do not fully agree with the definition of serial killers proposed by SAPS, the cases that were used for this research fit this definition. Further statistics on serial killers from SAPS Crime Information Analysis Centre were used, which included all cases that the South African justice system characterised as serial killer cases. Additionally, the individuals in the case studies were convicted for serial murder in South Africa and in this process have been identified as serial killers according to the requirements of the SAPS definition. Describing a serial killer as someone who murders 'two or more victims on at least two separate occasions and the motive for the homicides are

⁵⁴ De Wet JA, *A psychosocial perspective on the personality development of the serial murderer* (unpublished magister artium thesis, University of Pretoria, 2006).

⁵⁵ Pistorius Profiling serial killers ob cit note 26.

not for primarily for material gain nor to eliminate a witness in another matter',⁵⁶ SAPS proposes a rather broad definition but it includes the cases used for this study and makes the statistics that were used reliably.

III. Previous South African research on the origin of serial homicide

Until 24 years ago there was no original South African research on serial killers. In 1996, Micki Pistorius, an investigative psychologist, was the first to research serial killers from a South African perspective for her dissertation. In the years that followed, the body of literature grew. Like Pistorius, who chose a psychodynamic perspective, most of the research was conducted from a psychological point of view.⁵⁷ Thus the stock of literature expanded, from smaller dissertations to large-scale studies. Some of these, like the dissertations of De Wet (2006) and Barkhuizen (2006) from the University of Pretoria, include detailed case studies and interviews with serial killers, which are rich in information about the characteristics, background, and social life of the serial killers.

The first large-scale study was conducted by Hodgskiss and involved interviews with 13 serial killers. It aimed to find out more about the offence behaviour and to which extent the international typologies could be applied to South African serial killers, which eventually resulted in the first model of the offences of South African serial murderers. During the study, information on offender characteristics, and background was collected as well.⁵⁸ In 2015, Labuschagne and a team of co-authors conducted an even larger study of interviews with 33 South African serial killers to examine crime scene behaviour and demographics, patterns of behaviour consistency, victim and offender characteristics, and then compared their findings on an international level.⁵⁹

All those case studies, interviews, and theoretical perspectives contributed to a better understanding of the phenomenon of serial killers from a South African perspective. Considering different factors, the various readings offer different discoveries on

⁵⁶ Labuschagne & Safati op cit note 5.

⁵⁷ Del Fabbro GA, *A review of South African perspectives on serial murder* (unpublished master's thesis, University of Pretoria, 2007).

⁵⁸ Hodgskiss op cit note 6.

⁵⁹ Salfati CG, Horning AM, Sorochinski M, Labuschagne GN, 'South African serial homicide: Consistency in victim types and crime scene actions across series' (2015) Vo. 12, *Journal of Investigative Psychology*.

the actions, origin, behaviours, definitions, and more aspects of serial killers.⁶⁰ In the following, I am going to summarise and explain the most significant research on the origin and development of serial killers in South Africa. They will be explained in the order in which they were published to show how the theories started and developed over time.

A. Pistorius` s theory on the development of male serial killers (1996)

In her dissertation Micki Pistorius tries to answer the questions: ‘What is the origin of serial murder and how does it develop?’⁶¹ She does so by creating a theory on the development of male serial killers. This theory is based on two of Sigmund Freud`s theories. The first is the theory of the psychosexual development phases, which states that every child goes through certain psychosexual phases while growing up, the oral phase (0-2 years), the anal phase (2-4 years), the Oedipus phase (4-6 years), the latency phase (6-12 years), and the genital phase (12-19 years).⁶²

The second of Freud`s theories is on the typology of the psyche, which consists of the id, the ego, and the superego.⁶³ The id is the most primitive and basic structure of the psyche and is based within the subconscious. It mainly consists of instincts and therefore wants its urges and needs, which are mostly of an aggressive and sexual nature, to be satisfied as fast as possible without any logic.⁶⁴ The ego is that part of the psyche that executes the personality of the individual, which could be described as the personality. It is located in the conscious but also acts in the subconscious, functions as the bridge between both of them, and manages the balance between id and superego. The ego checks whether it is realistic and useful to gratify the urges of the id.⁶⁵ The last structure of the psyche, the superego is the conscience that is developed from the ego. It represents the image of an ideal self.⁶⁶ Thus, while the ego has to check if satisfying the urges of the id is useful, it has to measure the necessary actions on what that ideal

⁶⁰ Potgieter & De Wet ob cit note 3.

⁶¹ Pistorius M, *Psychoanalytical approach to serial killers* (unpublished thesis (PhD), University of Pretoria, 1996).

⁶² Freud S, *Sigmund Freud-Gesammelte Werke* (2014).

⁶³ Pistorius *Psychoanalytical approach* ob cit note 61.

⁶⁴ Freud S & Strachey JE, *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* (1976).

⁶⁵ Freud ob cit note 62.

⁶⁶ Pistorius *Catch me a Killer* ob cit note 1.

self would do. If the ego fails to fulfil this benchmark the superego releases feelings of guilt as a punishment.⁶⁷

Pistorius now bases her theory on the development of male serial killers on these two theories of Freud. Like many other scholars, Pistorius sees the origin of serial homicide happening in the childhood of the killer. According to her psychoanalytic theory, the individual fixates in one of the childhood psychosexual phases. This fixation can be described as a mental short-cut. The fixation happens because of too much or too little of something.⁶⁸ For example, 'too little of something' in the oral phase could vary from not being breastfed to not having a female or motherly role model at all. 'Too much of something' is mostly over-gratification, like being allowed to sleep in the bed of the mother until the age of 20, which can lead to fixation in the genital phase. This fixation is the beginnings of a subconscious fantasy. It then forms a pattern for actions, influenced by the specific psychosexual phase in which the child fixates, which later are acted out in the murders.⁶⁹

Because of the fixation in one of the psychosexual phases of childhood, the later serial killer does not socialize with peers, is unable to build long-term friendships, and does not develop a conscience.⁷⁰ This results in a very dominant id, with sexual and aggressive impulses and fantasies, an ego that doesn't feel any guilt or anxiety because of a virtually non-existing superego. Without a functional conscience, the fantasy is allowed to grow and develop from a subconscious level to a conscious level. If a triggering event, in which the killers' self-esteem is challenged, happens at this point, he has to act out his destructive fantasies to reconstitute the mental homeostasis and due to the virtually non-existing superego, there is no conscience to stop him from acting out his fantasies.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Freud & Strachey ob cit note 64.

⁶⁸ Pistorius *Catch me a Killer* ob cit note 1.

⁶⁹ Pistorius *Profiling serial killers* ob cit note 26.

⁷⁰ Pistorius *Catch me a Killer* ob cit note 1.

⁷¹ Pistorius *Psychoanalytical approach* ob cit note 61.

B. Labuschagne's interactional theory (2001)

Labuschagne's interactional theory is based on the theoretical framework on an interactional concept by Clairborn and Lichtenberg.⁷² According to them, every behaviour of an individual is influenced by persons and situations. Therefore, it is important to analyse the whole system in order to understand the actions of an individual within the system. Further, they see personality traits as components of relationships, which influences how the individual experiences others and how the individual allows others to see him. Therefore, a person's personality, characteristics, and actions are shaped by his relationship with others. A person's patterns of behaviours, which build an individual's personality, are developed and continuously supported by his life with others. The key term for this is communication. Every behaviour of a person sends a specific message. Even silence or looks have a specific message. But the same behaviour can have a different meaning to different people; the context of the message is created and depends on the relationship of the two persons. The interaction with other people and their communication with each other are the two pillars that shape human nature – the social order and the actions and characteristics of the individual.⁷³

Labuschagne applies this theoretical framework to the phenomenon of serial killers to understand the individual that commits a series of murders in his social context and the function of the whole system that allows such murders to happen. He does not study the separate parts of the phenomenon but the relationship between them. Thereby he tries to get a better understanding of the interactional behaviour and communication of serial killers. He further tries to explore serial murder as part of the human social order.⁷⁴

In his interactional theory, Labuschagne claims that serial murder is communication or interaction 'against' something. This something might be a person, event, or thing and varies from case to case.⁷⁵ Applying the interactional framework to the origin of serial homicide means that the behaviour of a serial killer is a result of his interaction

⁷² Labuschagne GN *Serial murder revisite* op cite note 11.

⁷³ Claiborn CD & Lichtenberg JW, 'Interactional counseling' (1989) Vol. 17, *The Counseling Psychologist*.

⁷⁴ Labuschagne GN *Serial murder revisite* op cite note 11.

⁷⁵ De Fabbro *review* ob cit note 57.

and communication with others. Therefore, the serial killer is not born as such but created by the social system and the people who surround him. It further means that the act of killing itself is a form of communication and sends a specific message.⁷⁶ Labuschagne believes that the phenomenon of serial murder is a 'manifestation of a way an individual interacts with his context, for example, as a communication against his context or of a symptom of a system in which he exists'.⁷⁷ The dysfunction of the societal system in South Africa, with its high crime rate in general, the dense population in townships, high rate of unemployment, and ineffective justice system could lead to serial murder as a negative symptom. From an interactional perspective, this symptom is probably fuelled by the interaction with an ineffective or totally absent family system or only negative communication with people with which he surrounds himself. Therefore, from an interactional perspective, not only the serial killer himself or his family should be considered pathogenic, but the whole social system in which such serious crimes are committed on a daily basis.⁷⁸

Regarding the interactional effect of the act of killing itself, the murderer gets a voice through the killing, which is generated by the media as a means of interaction and message, as all behaviour is a message. But the same behaviour can mean something different in different relationships. In the case of the killing, the victim sees the serial murderer's behaviour as meaning something else as the investigator or society sees it, depending on how they describe the whole system. As serial murder is only considered a subsystem, the message it sends also depends on what is seen as the whole system. If one wants to include the justice system, the message could be 'the criminal justice system is ineffective', or, if the whole society is included, the message might be 'in what state is society, that such murders can take place?'.⁷⁹ Also, the serial killer himself gets a message out of the killing, like 'I am powerful' or 'I am successful'. This message, plus other intrapsychic benefits he gets out of the killing, like the reduction of anxiety or simply pleasure, leads to a repetition of the crime.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Labuschagne GN, 'An empirical evaluation of interactional analysis of serial murder' (2000) Vol. 13, *Acta Criminologica: Southern African Journal of Criminology*.

⁷⁷ De Fabbro review ob cit note 57.

⁷⁸ Labuschagne GN *Serial murder revisite* op cite note 11.

⁷⁹ De Fabbro review ob cit note 57.

⁸⁰ Labuschagne GN *empirical evaluation* ob cit note 76.

This is a new perspective. In order to explore the origin of serial homicide the traditional psychologist would try to diagnose the individual, the interactional psychologist, on the other hand, tries to diagnose the system instead of the individual.⁸¹ Labuschagne, therefore, takes a similar approach to the phenomenon of serial killers as this paper, assuming that serial killers are not born evil but created. The main difference is that Labuschagne primarily focuses on the communication and interaction with other people, their behaviour toward, and influence on the serial murderer. My approach to the role of the social environment does not necessarily include interaction with other people, but rather and mostly other external factors, but which inevitably includes some connection with other people.

C. Barkhuizen`s theory on the early development of the individual (2004)

Barkhuizen sees the origin of serial killers in their childhood as well. His `theory on the early development of the individual` is based on Pistorius`s theory and takes an intrapsychic approach to explore the origin of serial murder. He further includes Melanie Klein`s object relation theory for a better understanding of serial killers.⁸²

In summary Klein`s theory says that infants already have object relations, which exist from the beginning of life, the first one being the mother and her breast.⁸³ For the purpose of this theory, the term `object` is given a strong emotional meaning. It refers to a reacting partner, a person who responds to the urges and expressions of the infant. The object relations thus refer to the relationship of the infant to its world and describes the imagined relationship to a person, usually the caretaker, and can definitely deviate from the real interaction.⁸⁴ This can have an unconscious influence on the nature of the future relationship, as the infant distinguishes every object relation into good and bad. The infant internalises a certain representation of the self, the object, and links emotion

⁸¹ Labuschagne GN *Serial murder revisite* op cite note 11.

⁸² Barkhuizen J, *An exploration of the intrapsychic development and personality structure of serial killers through the use of psychometric testing* (unpublished magister artium thesis, University of Pretoria, 2006).

⁸³ Klein M, *The psycho-analysis of children* (1963).

⁸⁴ Barkhuizen ob cit note 82.

to both of them; love, when it internalises the relation as good, or hate when it internalises the relation as bad. Those feelings and emotions can be magnified in its unconscious and it can shape him for a lifetime and unconsciously determine his actions.⁸⁵

From this intrapsychic object relations point of view, Barkhuizen's dissertation tries to build a precise explanation of the intrapsychic process that forms the basis of serial homicide and influences the development of the serial killer's personality structure.⁸⁶ He developed a theory according to which the origin of serial killers is based on their early object relations.⁸⁷ They introject violence and rejection by their parents or caretakers and thus internalise those object relations as 'bad'. This leads to a general disturbance of the intrapsychic development, which results in fixation in the pre-genital psychosexual phases of childhood.⁸⁸ Therefore the serial killer has no chance to ever identify with the father figure nor to solve the Oedipus complex.⁸⁹ Barkhuizen further agrees with Pistorius, as he states that this leads to a dominating id and undifferentiating ego, so the id can freely live up to its violent and sexual impulses without being stopped by the ego or punished with guilt.⁹⁰

As a side effect, Barkhuizen's research also revealed that the disrupted object relations of the serial killer influence the victim selection, as the victims remind the killer of the rejecting or violent parent and therefore the 'bad' relation. Summarised, Barkhuizen sees the intrapsychic origin of a serial killer in the experience of a traumatic and violent childhood that is mainly characterised by a 'bad' parental figure rejecting him, which has a negative influence on his personality development, which later leads to repeated murder.⁹¹

⁸⁵ Klein M, *The Psychological Principles of Early Analysis*. Teoksessa: M. Klein (1975), *Love, Guilt and Reparation & Other Works, 1921-1945. The Writings of Melanie Klein, vol. 1* (1926).

⁸⁶ Barkhuizen ob cit note 82.

⁸⁷ De Fabbro *review* ob cit note 57.

⁸⁸ Barkhuizen ob cit note 82.

⁸⁹ De Fabbro *review* ob cit note 57.

⁹⁰ Barkhuizen ob cit note 82.

⁹¹ De Fabbro *family systems* ob cit note 41.

D. De Wet's psychosocial personality theory approach to serial murder (2004)

Combining the theories of Erikson, Fromm, and Adler, the academic De Wet takes a psychosocial approach to the development of the personality of a serial killer. He analyses internal and external factors to explain what and how incidents during childhood and adulthood influenced the development of the personality and identity of a serial killer and how this personality influences his behaviour.⁹²

For a better understanding of De Wet's research, the theories of Erikson, Fromm, and Adler, respectively, are summarised in a nutshell as follows: Like Freud, Erikson also focuses on the different childhood stages, but he takes a psychological approach to explore how the child deals with social tasks and conflicts that go hand in hand with the contest of the demands of the outside world. His attention is not on the struggle of the individual but rather on the interaction between the child, in different development stages, and the society surrounding him. He, therefore, pays special attention to the social and internal factors that influence the development of the child.⁹³

According to Fromm's theory on the development of men, the main difference between humans and animals is that human beings are appropriate functioning and not driven by their instincts, needs, or desires. The prioritised characteristic of a human being is his ability to know and differentiate himself from nature and other objects. But this ability and knowledge also separates the individual from others and shapes a sense of individuality, feelings of isolation, loneliness, and alienation. Although this awareness can help to achieve great goals, the fear of isolation can also compel the individual to dispense with his intellectual accomplishments.⁹⁴

Adler states that the primary and only underlying motivation for human behaviour is the aspiration to achieve perfection and superiority. He highlights the unique personality of every individual that is shaped by his dreams, desires, and most importantly his social context. The personality also determines every act of the individual as every behaviour serves the purpose of accomplishing the individual's aims.⁹⁵

⁹² De Wet ob cit note 54.

⁹³ Erikson EH, *Childhood and society* (1993).

⁹⁴ Fromm E, *Die Furcht vor der Freiheit: Escape from Freedom* (2014).

⁹⁵ Adler A, *Understanding human nature* (B. Wolfe, Trans.) (1969).

De Wet based his research on a combination of these three studies of the 'development of personality and behaviour of an individual' and developed his theory on the personality development of serial killers.⁹⁶ He started with the assumption that internal and external factors that occur during childhood and adulthood of a serial killer play a significant role in the development of his personality. This underlying personality is reflected in every behaviour of the killer, especially in the way he carries out the murders.⁹⁷ The serial killer will incorporate a specific lifestyle that helps him to accomplish his individual goals, which are characterised by aggression and sexuality to compensate and get over the feeling of being inferior and isolated. The urge and will to kill other people originate in his experiences during childhood and adulthood, which are influenced by external and internal factors such as the family in which he was raised. The character and appearance of these influencing factors vary from case to case and have a massive effect on the development of the identity and personality of the serial killer. These negative effects are then reflected in aggressive and destructive behaviour, which he then direct towards others around him and at some point lead to a series of homicides. Therefore, the motivation of a serial killer is the same as for every other human being, his desire for perfectionism and superiority, and the urge to improve himself in some way. With every new homicide, he tries to live up to this perfect image and has to continue to kill repeatedly till he achieves his aim of perfection.⁹⁸

E. Summary of the literature and identification of the research gap

These four South African theories on the origin of serial homicide have one similarity; they locate the aetiology of the serial killer within the individual.⁹⁹ Each theory considers different aspects and reasons that influence the development of the individual and help create the identity of a serial killer, but they all agree on the responsible factors being those within the conscience and personality of the individual. The factors discussed in the theories above, such as aggressive feelings, aims in life, fantasy, or emotional relationships all take place inside the mind of the serial killer.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ De Wet ob cit note 54.

⁹⁷ De Fabbro *review* ob cit note 57.

⁹⁸ De Wet ob cit note 54.

⁹⁹ Potgieter & De Wet ob cit note 3.

¹⁰⁰ De Fabbro *review* ob cit note 57.

It is reasonable that the development of a serial killer takes place in his conscience and psyche, as this is where every personality is formed. Especially circumstances and experiences that are present during the childhood and the formative years of an individual have a major effect on his development. Therefore, the theories explained above all agree on the development of a serial killer happening exclusively on his inside, although they disagree on the where and how. Those factors that are considered responsible, originate from the outside and occur within the context of the outside world – traumatic experiences, and contact with other people.

But none of these theories considered the social environment when discussing the development of a serial killer. Of course, the theories consider different aspects that are part of the social environment, like the way they were treated by parents, or relationships with family members and other people. But none of the existing theories took the social environment as one independent factor into account. The social environment as a whole, as the sum of the external factors created by people, society, institutions, and the geographic area, which all are able to have an impact on the person but cannot be controlled by him, is not considered. The features of the social environment can appear in a variety of ways, for example having to grow up in poverty, being assaulted by caretakers or living in an area that is characterised by criminality.

Some of the theories reviewed above take some of those features into account when discussing the origin of serial killers. Labuschagne for example thematises the interaction of an individual with his social contacts. Those social contacts are part of the social environment, but only a small part of it. There are so many more features of the social environment to which individuals are exposed and that might have an influence on the development of serial killers. For example, a densely populated area leads to anonymity and depersonalisation.¹⁰¹ This leads to a high victim availability. This feature of the social environment is not directly responsible for someone becoming a serial killer and does definitely not mean that everyone who grows up in such an environment will become a serial killer, but it might still play a role in the phenomenon of serial killers. It might make it easier or more tempting to act out the urge to kill someone or might offer more opportunities or triggering events. But this and many more features of the social environment were not taken into account by the previous research on the origin

¹⁰¹ Hickey EW, *Serial murderers and their victims* (2013).

of serial killers. This is why the following case studies will focus on the social environment of serial killers and thus highlight the importance of taking the social environment into account.

The social environment consists of a variety of external factors, which originate outside of the individual and cannot be controlled by him and none of the previous theories considered that an interaction of these different factors might be able to have an impact on the individual. To sum up, this research, while drawing from the existing literature goes one step further and examines the social environment of six South African serial killers using case studies. This will make it clear that the social environment, as an independent factor, might play a role in the development of a serial killer and therefore should be included in any future research on the origin of serial homicide.

IV. Research Methodology

A. Aim of the research

Although serial murders are a relatively small number of all homicides in this country (according to SAPS only about 150 of the 20 336 murders recorded in the year 2017/18 were linked to serial killers)¹⁰² South Africa is considered one of the countries with the highest number of serial killers in the world.¹⁰³ This emerges from a 2018 statistic by Mike Aamodt, who researched serial killers at Radford University.¹⁰⁴ Of course, this information has to be used wisely and viewed critically as the statistic does not reveal how the respective numbers of serial killers were gathered. If the statistic used the official numbers from the police files from the respective countries, different definitions for the term 'serial killer' might have been used. As the SAPS definition is rather broad this might be one factor why South Africa is in third place in this statistic. Nevertheless, those statistics are all we have. Moreover, even if the definition of SAPS is rather broad, it is the definition of serial killers that is officially used in the South African justice system. Research that uses the cases classified as serial killers by the court, have to work with these statistics.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² South African Police Service: Crime Information Analysis Centre website, 2018.

¹⁰³ Pistorius *Catch me a Killer* ob cit note 1.

¹⁰⁴ Radford University/FGCU Serial Killer Database

¹⁰⁵ De Fabbro *review* ob cit note 57.

According to a statistic by SAPS, by the end of 2019, almost 190 serial killer cases had been identified.¹⁰⁶ This raises not only the fascinating question of the origin of serial homicide but also why it is so prevalent in South Africa? This might be due to the already mentioned broad definition of serial killers that SAPS uses. But even if that definition includes a lot of cases this still means that there are an average of five new offenders each year,¹⁰⁷ who kill two or more people on at least two separate occasions and the motive for the homicides are not primarily for material gain nor to eliminate a witness in another matter.¹⁰⁸ This seems a lot and raises the interesting consideration that there might be some kind of connection between the phenomenon of serial killers and the unique conditions of South Africa. Therefore, this study takes a South African perspective on the origin of serial homicide.

As this research takes the approach that serial killers are not born evil but created by a variety of factors,¹⁰⁹ this multiple case study aims to get a better understanding of what might play a role within this developing process. It does so by exploring the social environment of six serial killers and by proposing specific features of the social environment that might have an influence on the development of the individual. A better understanding of the possible influence the social environment might have on the development of a serial killer can help to include it in future research on the origin of serial murder.¹¹⁰ Moreover, it contributes to the steadily growing body of South African literature on serial homicide and gives a better understanding of the phenomenon of serial killers from a South African perspective. The influence of the social environment is present at any time in the life of an individual.

This research picked two phases in the life of a serial killer, in which the social environment of the individual is examined more precisely because they are the most interesting and influential in the development of the individual. First, the childhood till young adulthood phase, and second, the period of offending. As previous research has

¹⁰⁶ Hodgskiss ob cit note 6.

¹⁰⁷ Hornig, Salfati, Labuschagne ob cit note 9.

¹⁰⁸ Labuschagne & Safati op cit note 5.

¹⁰⁹ Pistorius *Catch me a Killer* ob cit note 1.; Labuschagne & Safati op cit note 5.; Knight ob cit note 2.

¹¹⁰ Hodgskiss ob cit note 6.

shown, childhood is a very important phase in the development of a serial killer.¹¹¹ It is where an individual develops its personality and conscience.¹¹² This is why it is very interesting to look at the social environment during this phase. Secondly, the period of offending represents the phase in the life of a serial killer in which he actually begins to murder repeatedly. In this phase, one is able to explore the features of the social environment that might have an influence on him to overcome this serious step.

Six South African serial killer cases have been used for this research and the social environment of each offender during his childhood and the period of offending has been examined. Further, the importance of considering the social environment while researching serial killers in general and especially their origin is highlighted. Finally, this paper aims to encourage a larger body of research to explore more deeply the influence the social environment has on the development of serial killers.¹¹³ Finally, this research contributes to the steadily growing body of South African literature on serial homicide and gives a better understanding of the phenomenon of serial killers from a South African perspective.

B. Research methodology

To explore the influence the social environment might have on serial killers this research uses a qualitative method to produce a first sense of what factors of the social environment might affect the development of serial homicide in South Africa and should therefore be researched more deeply. Using triangulation, the data collected through literature reviews, evaluation of previous case studies, and the use of existing interviews made it possible to gather a larger amount of data and thus reduce bias and conduct more reliable tendencies.¹¹⁴ This study uses six cases to get an incipient sense of which aspects of the social environment might influence the development of serial killers by looking at six different expressions of the social environment using real cases and not just austere theory.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ De Wet ob cit note 54.; Pistorius *Psychoanalytical approach* ob cit note 61.; Barkhuizen ob cit note 82.

¹¹² De Wet ob cit note 54.

¹¹³ Hodgskiss ob cit note 6.

¹¹⁴ Babbie ER, *The practice of social research* (2015).

¹¹⁵ John W & Creswell PC, *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (2000).

The multiple case study comprises six male South Africans who were sentenced for committing the crime of serial murder and thus fit the SAPS definition of a serial killer. The information about the six individuals was conducted via the triangulation of different data collection methods.¹¹⁶ Existing interviews with captured serial killers, existing case studies, and further literature were used to gather as much information as possible on all six cases. Those case studies and interviews were found in dissertations on the topic of serial killers,¹¹⁷ academic articles on specific serial killers¹¹⁸ and further literature.¹¹⁹ Combined, the sources gave enough information on the social environment of the six individuals to focus on this specific part of their life.

In order to set up a multiple case study, I had to gather as much information on the cases as possible. It was not possible for me to conduct my own interviews with imprisoned serial killers, therefore I had to use the already available information as explained above. It was very important for the study to only use those cases that actually provide enough information on the social environment of the individuals. The six cases used do exactly that and therefore the qualitative method of a multiple cases study is reliable and will produce convincing results that can be used and further developed in a variety of ways in future research.¹²⁰

The case studies make it possible to reproduce the complex and multiple files-long cases of several serial killers in a clear, understandable and precisely summarised manner and thus give the reader a concrete overview of each individual case.¹²¹ In addition, the specific research focus can be determined and the details that are important for the specific research goal can be highlighted and presented in detail.¹²² In contrast

¹¹⁶ Yin RK, 'How to do better case studies' (2009) Vol. 2, *The SAGE handbook of applied social research methods*.

¹¹⁷ Labuschagne GN *Serial murder revisite* op cite note 11.; De Wet ob cit note 54.; Pistorius *Psychoanalytical approach* ob cit note 61.; Barkhuizen ob cit note 82.

¹¹⁸ Knight ob cit note 2.; Flisher A et al. 'Intervention in a community crisis: Lentegeur Hospital and the case of the 'station strangler' (1998) Vol. 88, *South African medical journal*; Mellor L, Aggrawal A & Hickey EW, *Understanding Necrophilia: A Global Multidisciplinary Approach* (2017).

¹¹⁹ Pistorius *Profiling serial killers* ob cit note 26.; Pistorius *Catch me a Killer* ob cit note 1.; Murray W, *Serial Killers* (2009); Vronsky P, *Serial Killers: The Method and Madness of Monsters* (2004).

¹²⁰ Yin *better case studies* ob cit note 116.

¹²¹ Yin RK, 'The case study as a serious research strategy' (1981) Vol. 3, *The SAGE journals: Knowledge*.

¹²² Yin *better case studies* ob cit note 116.

to existing case studies on these individuals, this paper focuses on the social environment of serial killers and not necessarily only on the crime itself. Of course, it was important that the cases were comparable in order to lay a uniform foundation for further research in this area, therefore the cases used had to be convicted serial killers in order to be subject to the definition of SAPS.

Since the social environment as such was totally absent as a possible source of influence on the development of serial killers in previous research and theories, a multiple case study offers the perfect introduction to this area of research, as it provides detailed qualitative descriptions to make the proposed approach clear.¹²³ This does not create general knowledge, as large-scale quantitative research would create, but it lays the foundation for further research in this field and may encourage other researchers to devote their work to this approach. This research further works out which factors of the social environment might tend to influence the development of serial killers and are thus worthy of being explored further in future research. This way a more complete and comprehensive understanding of the connection between the social environment of serial killers and their development could be provided.¹²⁴

This research focuses on the social environment during two phases in the life of the six serial killers, the first being childhood till young adulthood, provided that throughout this period the individual still lived at his parent's house, depended on his caretakers, and was still learning and developing his personality.¹²⁵ And the second phase is the period of offending, usually from the first murder till the police catch the killer. During these two periods, the social environment of the six serial killers is analysed and those external factors that are present during the two phases are noted. For the purpose of this research, external factors are all influences of the social environment that originate outside of the individual but are perceived by and might have an impact on him. They may occur in experiences, happenings, and relationships but also in other circumstances and conditions. Those external factors of the social environment are defined in a first step to be able to say with certainty whether they are present in a case or not.

¹²³ Yin *better case studies* ob cit note 116.

¹²⁴ John & Creswell ob cit note 115.

¹²⁵ Garbarino J, *Children and families in the social environment* (2017).

Setting the focus of this multiple case study on the social environment enables the researcher to draw a broad picture of what external factors might influence the development of the individuals. Pointing out similarities and abnormalities of present factors in the different cases expands that picture and might encourage further research to take a closer look at exactly those external factors and their link to the development of serial killers. A further discussion of the information on the social environment found in the case studies and some considerations of what events and circumstances might be responsible for the development of the specific social environment in the cases used will additionally provide some food for thought for further in-depth research on particular aspects of the social environment of serial killers.

C. Preparation of the case study

In order to present the broadest possible picture of the different characteristics of the social environment and its influence, I decided to use six case studies.¹²⁶ The selection criteria, which will be explained below, were: The cases had to include a male, who was convicted of serial murder in South Africa and there had to be enough available information on their social environment.

The six cases I used were chosen because they were the ones in which I could gather the most information about the social environment of each serial killer. As this research focuses on the social environment of serial killers it was important to not only gather as much information as possible about the criminal case itself but especially the social environment of the respective individual. The more cases I could include, the more accurate my research would be, but it would have missed the core of the matter, being as much information about the social environment of each killer as possible. Consequently, I chose as many cases as possible where I was able to gather the most amount of information about their respective social environments, which resulted in the six cases chosen.

¹²⁶ Yin *serious research strategy* ob cit note 121.

Further, I decided to only use male individuals because male and female offenders engage in crime differently.¹²⁷ Especially when it comes to murder and sexual offences, which are often combined in serial killer cases, as you will see in a bit. Only about 17% of serial murder offenders in South Africa are female.¹²⁸ Pistorius explains this with the analogy: If men want to demonstrate power, they demand sex; if women want to demonstrate power, they refuse sex.¹²⁹ However, the difference between male and female serial killers is undoubtedly very interesting but would go beyond the scope of this paper. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the importance of considering the social environment when researching what influences the development of serial killers and thus has no space for the discussion of the differences between male and female offenders.

Because I wanted to generate more information on South African serial killers, of course, the cases used had to be committed in South Africa as well. And in order to create reliable research, consistent case studies had to be used. This is why the cases had to meet the requirement of involving an individual, who was convicted for serial murder. This way I could make sure the six individuals fit one uniform definition of the term 'serial killer', namely the one from SAPS and could therefore be compared and analysed in a uniform study.

The last requirement, being enough information available on the social environment, was the most difficult one. It led to the limitation of the number of cases, making only a few suitable for the study. I then choose those six cases that had the most information on the social environment of the offender, because that was my field of interest. I did not look at the content and what information there was on the social environment to prevent myself from choosing specifically those cases that would support my hypothesis. As you will see when looking at the six cases, the individuals I choose for the study don't all share the same social environment; indeed some are very different. This way the results produced by this study are reliable and free of bias.

¹²⁷Pistorius *Catch me a Killer* ob cit note 1.

¹²⁸ Salfati CG et al. 'South African serial homicide: Offender and victim demographics and crime scene actions' (2015) Vol. 12, *Journal of Investigative Psychology*.

¹²⁹ Pistorius *Catch me a Killer* ob cit note 1.

Additionally to those requirements intended in the research concept, all the individuals in the cases used were active murderers between 1985 and 1997, thus during the shift from apartheid to post-apartheid.¹³⁰ This was not planned and was just revealed after choosing the cases, but is not particularly surprising as the biggest increase in serial killer cases occurred during the shift from apartheid to post-apartheid between 1990 and 1997, according to SAPS.¹³¹ The peak of the number of serial killer cases was reached between 1997 and 1998, with an average of seven newly commenced series of murders in that year. In the years before, approximately two to three new series of murders began.¹³² Of course, those statistics only reflect those series of murders, which were identified as such. The undetected number might be way higher, especially due to the features of the social environment in which the serial killers offended and will be explained in this study. Further, the shift from apartheid to post-apartheid was characterised by riots, chaos and corruption. Many documents were forged and police operations were neither officially approved nor documented.¹³³ In such socially challenging times, it is unlikely that anyone paid special attention to accurate documentation and statistics. The statements in the statistics must therefore be viewed with a critical eye. But since they are all we have, we must be satisfied with them, even if we have to keep their possible error rate in mind while using them. Although it was not intended that all cases from the study occurred in that period it is a very interesting fact that offers further research and explanation possibilities, something which is discussed in the subtopic of the origin of the external factors.

V. The Study

A. Definition of the social environment

In order to explore the role the social environment might play in the phenomenon of serial killers in South Africa, the first thing to do is to understand the meaning of the term 'social environment'. The dictionary definition would be 'the surroundings and

¹³⁰ Hodgskiss ob cit note 6.

¹³¹ South African Police Service: Crime Information Analysis Centre website, 2003.

¹³² South African Police Service: Crime Information Analysis Centre website, 2019.

¹³³ Marks M, 'Shifting gears or slamming the brakes? A review of police behavioural change in a post-apartheid police unit' (2003) Vo. 13, *Policing & Society*.

conditions relating to society or its organization as well as the geographic area in which a person lives or operates.’¹³⁴

For the purpose of this research, the term ‘social environment’ has to be interpreted in a more focused way to analyse its relationship and impact on the individual. Therefore, I propose a definition of ‘social environment’ as the sum of the external factors created by people, society, institutions, and the geographic area the person lives and operates in, but which cannot be controlled by him. This definition includes all features from the social outside world of an individual that might have an impact on him. It focuses more on what the social environment represents for the individual than what the environment itself represents.

This research thus focuses on the social environment and further uses case studies to be able to give examples of features of the social environment that might have an impact on a serial killer. Those external factors could be able to have an actual impact on the development, offending behaviour, decision making, or other aspects of a serial killer. There are external factors, which have an internal impact on the individual, for example, rejection by the parents leading to a disorder in the psyche and the inner need of acknowledgment.¹³⁵ And there are external factors, which only have an external impact on the individual, for example densely populated areas, which lead to a higher victim availability.¹³⁶ Which external factors are formative and influence the development of the individual depends on what he can perceive and experience at that stage of development.

The social environment of an infant and a maturing child is almost exclusively the family situation;¹³⁷ the experiences with and treatment by family members and caretakers and the general home situation. This is complemented by the relationships and contact with peers and experiences that are made in school. With ‘childhood’ this dissertation describes the period from birth to becoming an adult, on the attainment of which he leaves the family house and starts his own self-determined life. As the child

¹³⁴ Hornby AS, *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English* 8th ed. (2010).

¹³⁵ De Wet ob cit note 54.

¹³⁶ Hickey ob cit note 101.

¹³⁷ Garbarino ob cit note 125.

is learning continuously, while developing very fast and his personality unfolding, most of the external factors during childhood have an internal effect on the individual.¹³⁸

The social environment of the adult serial killer during his period of offending consists of a larger variety of external factors. Experiences with family members, friends, and especially partners are still important external factors that influence the development of the individual. Additionally, mainly external factors that are linked to the specific living and offending area of the individual play an important role, such as the geographical and economic conditions.¹³⁹ As the development of the personality and identity of the individual is already completed at the commencement of the period of killing, the external factors present during that phase mainly have an external impact on the specific situational acts, decisions, and behaviour patterns of the serial killer. The external factors that have an internal impact on the emotions and psyche of the killer usually don't have a long-term impact on the psyche of the killer anymore, but function as a triggering event.¹⁴⁰ It is the last straw that breaks the camel's back and unleashes the urge to kill again.

To sum up, the social environment consists of a variety of external factors that are created by people, society, institutions and the geographic area and can be perceived by the individual. Those features of the social environment originate from the outside and cannot be controlled by the individual. But they are able to have an impact on him and therefore might have an impact on the development, behaviour or other aspects of a serial killer as well.

B. The Cases

1. Individual A

Individual A is a 56-year-old South African male. He committed at least 38 murders and 40 rapes between 1994 and 1995 when he was between the ages of 30

¹³⁸ Freud ob cit note 62.

¹³⁹ Salfati et al. ob cit note 128.

¹⁴⁰ Pistorius *Profiling serial killers* ob cit note 26.

and 31 years old. His victims were black women and the toddler of one of the women.¹⁴¹

He grew up in the township Vosloorus in the south of Boksburg until he was abandoned by his mother after his father died at the age of five and had to go to an orphanage. After being moved to another home in KwaZulu-Natal he ran away, back to the township, and stayed with his brother, till his brother also left him when Individual A sold the house without permission.¹⁴² He worked at farms and the gold mines in Gauteng province. He was arrested for rape in 1989 and spent four years in prison where he joined the prison choir all the while claiming to be innocent of the offences. Later he presented himself as a businessman and lured his victims with the promise of employment. For a while, he moved in with a girl in Atteridgeville and got her pregnant, but moved out eventually and slept mostly on train stations in Atteridgeville and Boksburg.¹⁴³ He also killed in Atteridgeville, a township near Pretoria with a population density of 6,500/km²¹⁴⁴ and Boksburg, a mining town, east of Johannesburg with a population density of 1.600/km².¹⁴⁵

2. *Individual B*

Individual B is a 53-year-old South African male. He committed at least 22 murders and rapes between 1986 and 1994 between the ages of 19 and 27 years. The murders occurred in two phases, the first from 1986 to 1992 and the second in 1994. His victims were coloured boys between eight and 14 years old. All of them had homes and attended school.

Individual B grew up in a township where he lived at his aunt's house until he was 15. Because he was taken away from his real mother, he believed in a bad mother Xhosa witch during pre-school. Between the ages of eight and

¹⁴¹ Knight ob cit note 2.

¹⁴² Pistorius *Catch me a Killer* ob cit note 1.

¹⁴³ Murray ob cit note 119.

¹⁴⁴ <https://census2011.adrianfrith.com/place/799056> (2020).

¹⁴⁵ <https://census2011.adrianfrith.com/place/797010> (2020).

14, he was sodomized by his older brother, who was an alcoholic. He never knew his father and only met his stepfather when he was already 15.¹⁴⁶

Later he lived in the township Mitchell's Plain where he worked as a beloved primary school teacher and preferred the company of children. For the rest, he was a loner and introvert. He was also known as a community leader, is considered very intelligent, and speaks seven languages.¹⁴⁷ Mitchell's Plain, where he lived and also killed, is one of South Africa's largest townships, with 1.5 million inhabitants and a population density of 7,100/km².¹⁴⁸ The children have to play on the streets as large families have to share small houses and most mothers are housewives. Poverty, alcoholism, crime, and gang activity are omnipresent. So, it is easy to lure children with the promise of money, work, food, or a lift. Also, the uniforms of social workers are well-known and trusted by the children of the area. Individual B was homosexual but had no long-lasting relationships. The rejection of his boyfriend was the trigger for the murders from December 1993 to January 1994.¹⁴⁹

3. *Individual C*

Individual C is a 52-year-old South African male. He committed at least 18 murders between 1994 and 1997 when he was between the ages 26 and 29 years. His victims were black girls between the ages of 12 and 30 years. Only five of them could be identified.¹⁵⁰

He grew up in the township, KwaMashu, north of Durban. His mother was overprotective and over gratifying, while he did not know his father.¹⁵¹ Individual C still lived in KwaMashu, with a population density of 8,200/km²,¹⁵² while committing the murders. He lured his victims with the promise of employment and then accompanied them into the sugar cane fields, where he would kill

¹⁴⁶ Pistorius *Catch me a Killer* ob cit note 1.

¹⁴⁷ Fisher A et al. ob cit note 118.

¹⁴⁸ <https://census2011.adrianfrith.com/place/199039> (2020).

¹⁴⁹ Pistorius *Profiling serial killers* ob cit note 26.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ Vronsky ob cit note 119.

¹⁵² <https://census2011.adrianfrith.com/place/599055> (2020).

them. He could overlook those fields from the window in his room and walk around them daily. Individual C is described as aggressive and quick-tempered and was smoking and drinking. He had been in prison for vehicle theft.¹⁵³

4. *Individual D*

Individual D is a 54-year-old South African male. He committed at least nine murders between 1990 and 1997 during the ages of 24 and 31 years. His victims were four female prostitutes, one prostitute boy, two street boys, his own daughter, and the son of friends.¹⁵⁴

He was left in a telephone booth with his two-year-old sister when he was six months old and then taken home by a man who took orphans to get money from welfare. His sister disappeared shortly after that and Individual D never knew her. He was abused by the man who took him, his genitals were burnt with cigarettes, he had to eat from dog bowls and he had to perform oral sex on the man. The neighbours adopted the child and moved to Port Elizabeth with him. He was bullied by his classmates because he was adopted and was very aggressive, assaulting his teacher, and biting his mother. He was often locked in a cupboard in his room as a punishment. Later he went to a reformatory school where he was sodomised by older children and a deacon and often locked up naked as punishment. When he was eleven, he started smoking *dagga*. Individual D was kicked out of the army after two months because of a suicide attempt. He married and fathered two daughters; his first daughter later became one of his victims. His wife got a divorce after he only wanted anal sex and he accused her of prostitution. He also fathered two more daughters with his second wife, with whom he is still married, although he also accused the second wife of prostitution.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ Pistorius *Catch me a Killer* ob cit note 1.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Lauschagne, Gerard N. 'Chapter 36: Stewart "Boetie Boer" Wilken: Serial murder, Necrophilia and Cannibalism - A South African Case Study' in Mellor, Lee; Aggrawal, Anil; Hickey Eric 'Understanding Necrophilia – A Global Multidisciplinary Approach' (2017).

Individual D sometimes lived with his wife but often just slept in the parks of Port Elizabeth like a homeless person. He used to walk through the suburbs of Port Elizabeth from Sydenham to Mill Park looking for suitable locations for his murders. Those suburbs of Port Elizabeth have an average population density of 1.350/km².¹⁵⁶ He mainly killed in parks or at empty playgrounds, once at the beach, and once in an underdeveloped ravine.¹⁵⁷

5. *Individual E*

Individual E is a 58-year-old South African male. He committed at least eight murders around 1990 when he was in his late twenties. His victims were seven women and one baby.¹⁵⁸

He grew up in a rural town called Barberton in the province of Mpumalanga. His father was a miner and his mother was a domestic worker, they were both drinkers, did not get along and assaulted each other. When Individual E was two years old his mother took him away to his grandmother because she did not want to be stuck with a child and would not let the father see the child. The grandmother loved the child and played an important role in his life. He had contact with both his parents but they incited him against each other. Individual E's grandmother told him that both parents had abandoned him, insisted that he had to take care of himself, and warned him of other children as friends, as they would put him on the wrong path. He became a loner and wanted to commit suicide at one point. When his grandmother died, he had to live with a man who assaulted him cruelly without any reason.¹⁵⁹

Individual E lived in poverty his whole life. He was in and out of prison in his adulthood for theft, damage to properties, attempt rape, and other small crimes. He always stayed somewhere near Barberton, where he committed the murders and lived in different townships and rural towns.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ <https://census2011.adrianfrith.com/place/299007> (2020).

¹⁵⁷ Pistorius *Catch me a Killer* ob cit note 1.

¹⁵⁸ Barkhuizen ob cit note 82.

¹⁵⁹ De Wet ob cit note 54.

¹⁶⁰ Barkhuizen ob cit note 82.

6. *Individual F*

Individual F is a 63-year-old South African male. He committed at least 19 murders and rapes around 1987 when he was in his late twenties. His victims were black girls and women.¹⁶¹

He was born on a train platform in the township Meadowlands, a suburb of Johannesburg with a population density of 12.000 /km².¹⁶² He was raised by his mother, grandparents, and older siblings. The father was an alcoholic who often fought with his mother and assaulted the whole family. Individual F was even stabbed with an *assegai* and beaten with a *sjambok*. Individual F did not get any emotional or financial support from his father and earned his own money for school supplies by walking the streets selling apples. He fathered a girl and is still in contact with the mother – even calls her his girlfriend.¹⁶³ During the period of the murders, Individual F lived with his girlfriend in Meadowlands. He would promise employment to his girl victims, lured them to a secure place, where he would overpower them.

C. Notable aspects drawn from the cases

The portrayed cases show various noteworthy aspects, similarities but also striking differences with regard to the social environment in both phases examined. It becomes clear that almost all individuals were exposed to similar or the same social environmental conditions during the period of offending, while the social-environmental aspects during the childhood phase vary a lot. In the following, the factors of the social environment are highlighted and put into context, which this study sees as relevant possibilities for influencing serial killers. The selection criterion for this was that these factors occurred in all or almost all social contexts of the cases presented and are therefore worthy of further investigation.

¹⁶¹ De Wet ob cit note 54.

¹⁶² <https://census2001.adrianfrith.com/place/77414> (2020).

¹⁶³ Barkhuizen ob cit note 82.

1. *Phase one: Childhood*

With 'childhood' this dissertation describes the period from birth to becoming an adult, on the attainment of which he leaves the family house and starts his own self-determined life. During the first phase in this study, childhood, only two features of the social environment were present in all six cases. The first one is poverty of the family and the second one is rejection by one or both parents/caretakers. Further, all but one of the individuals were exposed to violence during their childhood and young adulthood, reported traumatic experiences, and grew up in disorganised families. Often those external factors go hand in hand. For example, Individual F was rejected and violently assaulted by his father on a lot of occasions. He reports one extremely traumatic experience, being when he told his father his girlfriend was pregnant. The father got furious and assaulted him and his girlfriend so badly that the girlfriend later aborted, which traumatized individual F.¹⁶⁴

Further, only three of the individuals were victims of sexual abuse, four did not get any encouragement from their parents, also four of the individuals grew up in broken homes and two of the individuals had parents that had a substance addiction. As the social environment is an interaction of multiple external factors, it is also possible that those factors that are not *generally* present in all the cases play together with those that are present, as they all affect the psyche of the individual.¹⁶⁵ They might supplement each other and have a collective internal impact on the psyche of the individual and the development of his personality traits.

¹⁶⁴ De Wet ob cit note 54.

¹⁶⁵ Garbarino ob cit note 125.

External Factor	Individual A	Individual B	Individual C	Individual D	Individual E	Individual F
Poverty of the family	X	X	X	X	X	X
Exposure to violence	X	X		X	X	X
Victim of sexual abuse	X	X		X		
Traumatic experiences	X	X		X	X	X
Rejection by parents/ caretakers	X	X	X	X	X	X
No Encouragement from Parents/ caretakers	X	X		X		X
Disorganization in Family	X	X		X	X	X
Broken home	X	X		X	X	
Substance abuse by parents					X	X

2. Phase two: Period of offending

The periods of offending varied in the six cases, from one to eight years, although in those extremely long offending periods, cooling-off periods for years without any murders existed as well. The similarity in all the cases was, once the person started his murders he only stopped killing because he got caught by the police. During this phase, four similarities were remarkable, as they were present in all six cases. All individuals were living and offending in an area that suffers from poverty, criminality, a high rate of unemployment, and a lack of law enforcement. Further, all but one individual lived and offended in a densely populated area.

This of course does not mean, that everyone who lives in an environment that is characterised by those external factors becomes a serial killer. South Africa would be populated by serial killers almost entirely, as the majority of the

population is living under these conditions.¹⁶⁶ But as this research focuses on the social environment of serial killers and the serial killer examples share this similarity with the majority of South Africa, these features of the social environment are examined. Moreover, it attempts to propose an explanation of how these factors might influence serial killers without doubting that these factors, of course, also have an impact on all other residents of these living areas. But this is a topic for other research.

All those notable features of the social environment are related to the living and offending area of the serial killers. In all cases, the serial killer murdered and lived in the same area. That many offenders commit crimes near their place of residence rather than travel somewhere far away is also shown as the 'journey to crime'.¹⁶⁷ One reason for this is that South African serial killers, as well as the majority of the South African population, tend to be poor.¹⁶⁸ Due to a lack of stable employment or due to growing up in poverty and therefore without a perspective of something better, most of the South African serial killers cannot afford a vehicle to travel somewhere else for their murders. Another reason is that serial murder is not a one-time event, as one can already conclude from the name. Most series of murders drag on for years and are only terminated because the killer gets caught, therefore it is easier to commit the murders where the killer lives, as it is part of his lifestyle. Also, serial killers tend to be impulsive and are triggered by specific events, thus give in to the urge to kill and want to satisfy their desire immediately. Just stepping out of the door without having to travel far to kill is thus fortunate for the killer.¹⁶⁹ Therefore they kill where they stay, feel safe, and sometimes will even search for a convenient spot for their murders. So individual D used to walk through the suburbs of Port Elizabeth, where he lived, looking for suitable locations for his murders.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁶ Woolard I & Leibbrandt M, *Measuring poverty in South Africa* (unpublished working paper, University of Cape Town 1999).

¹⁶⁷ Rengert GF, Piquero AR & Jones PR, 'Distance decay reexamined' (1999) Vol. 37, *Criminology*.

¹⁶⁸ Woolard & Leibbrandt ob cit note 167.

¹⁶⁹ Pistorius *Profiling serial killers* ob cit note 26.

¹⁷⁰ Pistorius *Catch me a Killer* ob cit note 1.

Therefore, the living/offending area is one of the most important parts of the social environment. Four out of the six individuals were living and offending in townships, while one was living and offending in the suburbs of Port Elizabeth and one was active in and around the rural town Barberton.

Further, in all but two cases, the individual was rejected by his partner, and only two out of the six individuals were exposed to violence during their period of offending.

VI. Discussion of the findings

A. **The conspicuous external factors**

1. *Phase one: Childhood*

During the phase of infancy and childhood, the individual is dependent on his caretakers. They are the whole social environment of the child and controls the outer influences on the child. As the only relation to the world, the caretakers are automatically the child's first object of extreme affection.¹⁷¹ They play a significant role in the early life of an individual and all factors of the social environment, the child comes into contact with, are controlled by them.¹⁷² During this first phase, the child is constantly developing a conscience and a personality, thus most experiences it makes during this time will have an internal effect on it. Because all the external factors in this phase are controlled by the parents and have an emotional and internal effect on the conscience and psyche of the individual, their effects complement each other. It is the overall situation and atmosphere of the social environment that is decisive for the child's development.¹⁷³

If the atmosphere the child grows up in is hostile, cruel and without any love and affection so its development might be shaped by this as well. If the social environment consists of factors that influence the psyche of the individual in a negative way, like rejecting the child or exposing it to violence, the child

¹⁷¹ Garbarino ob cit note 125.

¹⁷² Pistorius *Profiling serial killers* ob cit note 26.

¹⁷³ Pistorius *Psychoanalytical approach* ob cit note 61.

might react to that and his development and conscience will be affected.¹⁷⁴ Feelings of mistrust, being unloved, inferiority, aggression, and rage could then be dominant in the phase when the child develops a personality and character traits.

This does not mean that every child that grows up in such a hostile environment will become a serial killer. A socially negative environment affects the development of every child that grows up in such circumstances, but every child might react to this in a different way. In all six cases the individuals had grown up in a hostile environment and all of them developed into serial killers. This might just show that some children that have to grow up in a social environment that is characterised by hostile and negative factors might react to this by developing a personality that is prone to develop into a serial killer. This can further have a variety of consequences but also shows the impact the social environment might have on every individual and thus on serial killers as well.

In the presented cases, common features and trends are evident. Therefore, the focus of this study is on those characteristics of the social environment of the six series murderers. In the following, those conspicuous factors of the social environment are explained and defined. Their possible impact on the development of the individual is proposed and they are put into context. Additionally, an approach is made to link them to the phenomenon of serial killers, using the six cases presented.

a. Poverty of the family

In all six cases, the individuals were living below the poverty line of South Africa. Poverty can occur in different types and has social factors, like the educational level of parents, and material factors, like the employment of the parents or other sources of income.¹⁷⁵ In essence ‘family poverty’ means that the family has not enough material possessions or income, therefore they lack the means to satisfy the basic personal needs of their family members, like clothing or food.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ De Wet ob cit note 54.

¹⁷⁵ May J & Govender J, 'Poverty and inequality in South Africa' (1998) Vo. 15 *Indicator South Africa*.

¹⁷⁶ Woolard & Leibbrandt ob cit note 167.

Growing up in poverty has three outcomes that influence the development of the individual. First, the child is unable to get what he wants or needs. He might have to earn his own money or resort to other means, such as criminal offences. This can overwhelm an adolescent child as it is expected to be more mature than it really is and thus skips important stages of development.¹⁷⁷

Secondly, growing up in poverty has a direct effect on the psyche of the individual. The child might develop feelings of jealousy about other children, feeling like he is not as valuable as they are. Sometimes this even builds into aggression towards others. Further problems in the development of the individual are revealed in achievement deficits and mental health consequences.¹⁷⁸

Thirdly, those harsh living conditions can lead to further stressful circumstances; despairing parents may result in violence against or rejection of the child; the child might be bullied by other children and other traumatic experiences. Those additional external factors might have an impact on the psyche of the individual causing depression, feelings of worthlessness, aggression, and resentment towards others and the world. And of course, the individual also has fewer or no resources to compensate for those negative effects.¹⁷⁹

Individual E was bullied by other children at school because he was poor. He had to go to school barefoot and never had any of the toys, clothes, or snacks the other children had. He felt he did not belong there and isolated himself. Because the other children rejected he hid during breaks and never had any friends. He was self-conscious about being poor. So, one day after school he tried to commit suicide. He was stopped by a

¹⁷⁷ De Wet ob cit note 54.

¹⁷⁸ Nikulina V, Widom CS & Czaja S, 'The role of childhood neglect and childhood poverty in predicting mental health, academic achievement and crime in adulthood' (2011) Vol. 48, *American journal of community psychology*.

¹⁷⁹ Woolard & Leibbrandt ob cit note 167.

security guard who talked him out of it and met him regularly after this incident.¹⁸⁰

This shows what a serious impact family poverty has on the development of the individual. Blaming his parents for his poor circumstances may result in holding a grudge against them or aggression toward them. He may blame others, who always had what he never had, for his poverty, all of which shape his personality, and can be anchored in his personality traits. Of course, not everyone growing up in poverty is going to become a serial killer but the effects caused by family poverty might have an impact on the development of the individual. A personality created by these influences might reveal a tendency for developing into a serial killer. At a minimum, it affects the development of the child in a negative way.

b. Exposure to violence

In South Africa, violence is not only over-represented in crime but also in society in general. Many forms of violence are not only used on a daily basis but also legally and socially accepted. This also leads to a very high rate of domestic violence.¹⁸¹

Being exposed to violence during childhood can cause feelings of shame, inferiority, and mistrust and create aggression and anger towards the tormentors.¹⁸² Such strong feelings also influence the development of the individual and his personality will probably be characterised by feelings of rage and being unloved.¹⁸³

Individual D was violently abused by his caretaker, he was beaten up and his genitals were burnt with cigarettes by this man. He was locked

¹⁸⁰ Barkhuizen ob cit note 82.

¹⁸¹ Collins A, 'Violence is not a crime: The impact of 'acceptable' violence on South African society' (2013) Vol. 43, *South African Crime Quarterly*.

¹⁸² Fischer G & Riedesser P, *Lehrbuch der psychotraumatologie* (2003).

¹⁸³ De Wet ob cit note 54.

up in a cupboard by his adoptive parents, and at boarding school, he was also locked up naked as a punishment.¹⁸⁴ Additionally, he was cruelly sexually abused by older children, a deacon, and his former caretaker. This exposure to violence leads to feelings of fear, desperation, helplessness, and aggression while growing up.¹⁸⁵

This shows how continuous exposure to violence is able to make an individual believe that the only way to achieve his goals in life and get what he wants is to take what he wants by force. This might include relationships and affection as well. For any decision, violence and force are the logical solution to get it, because that's all the individual knows and what he learned while growing up.¹⁸⁶

c. Traumatic experiences

Traumatic experiences are defined as extremely stressful events that cause mental or emotional injuries or a strong psychological shock.¹⁸⁷ Often this external factor results in other external factors, such as exposure to violence or sexual abuse, and is closely connected to them.

For example, individual B was cruelly sodomised by his brother between the ages of eight and 14. This extremely stressful event caused a mental and emotional injury, which made him feel depressed and unable to empathise and thus to interact with people of the same age in a normal way when he was an adult because he isolated himself and became a rejected outsider. He later tried to overcome his trauma by killing and sodomising boys between the ages of eight and 14 years that reminded him of himself as an act of rage against the community that did not help him. Individual B hates the boys that remind him of himself, of being the victim. By sodomising and killing them he fights his fears of the past, and thus he is no longer the victim. This way he repeats his

¹⁸⁴ Lauschagne GN *Chapter 36* ob cit note 155.

¹⁸⁵ Pistorius *Profiling serial killers* ob cit note 26.

¹⁸⁶ De Wet ob cit note 54.

¹⁸⁷ Fischer & Riedesser ob cit note 183.

trauma and commits psychological suicide with each murder of the boys.¹⁸⁸

According to Ressler, the experience of trauma during a child's formative years tends to have an impact on his becoming a serial killer.¹⁸⁹ The feelings of mistrust, being inferior, isolation and aggression burn themselves into the child's soul and leave scars in his subconscious that cause a tendency to become a serial killer.¹⁹⁰

d. Rejection by parents/ caretakers

The rejection by those that are important and emotionally significant for a child can be expressed in many ways.¹⁹¹ Be it one or both parents or any other person that has a special place in the child's life. From simply neglecting or ignoring the child to actively repelling it and literally leaving it.¹⁹² The essential factor here is depriving the child of the parents or caretaker's love and affection. Similarly, rejection by the parents or caretakers can also be expressed by being emotionally absent, completely indifferent, or not interested in the child at all.¹⁹³

Individual F was rejected by his father. The father usually ignored the child except when he was physically or verbally assaulting him. He was emotionally absent and had no love and affection for the boy. He even beat him with a *sjambok* and continuously offended him verbally telling him that he was scum and not worth living and thus repelled him in an aggressive way. Further, he deprived him of any financial support, so that Individual F had to sell apples on the streets to afford what he needed for school.¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁸ Pistorius *Profiling serial killers* ob cit note 26.

¹⁸⁹ Ressler R, Burgess A, D'Agostino R and Douglas J, 'Serial murder: a new phenomenon of homicide' (1984).

¹⁹⁰ Knight ob cit note 2.

¹⁹¹ Fisher A et al. ob cit note 118.

¹⁹² De Wet ob cit note 54.

¹⁹³ De Wet ob cit note 54.

¹⁹⁴ Barkhuizen ob cit note 82.

Being rejected by someone, for whose appreciation and love the child strives for, makes it really unlikely that the child will recognise true love or affection later on. The child will probably tend to lack the capacity to receive or give affection and love and might develop strong selfishness and see life as the enemy.¹⁹⁵ This is due to an intense feeling of frustration that can interfere with the child's ability to recognise love, tenderness, and affection. Additionally, a strong desire for affection and acknowledgement might be created, coupled with a twisted view of sexual relations. The individual can tend to try to satisfy his desires by force and use his victims to show him affection. Because he completely controls them and they are inferior to his power, he feels superior and believes he can gain their acknowledgement and affection with force.¹⁹⁶

e. Disorganization in Family

Disorganisation within the family can appear in many different ways. It is characterised by the lack of a stable family environment, shaped by disturbance, lack of supervision, and carelessness.¹⁹⁷ For example, when there are no clear rules, or a parent is missing, the child grows up without any parental figures. Other sorts of family disorganisation are: not allowing the child to freely interact with his environment, neglect by the parents, assault or disputes between family members, violent punishment for no obvious reason, or the failure of parental figures to serve as positive role models.¹⁹⁸

Of course, a lot of families are disorganised and this does not mean that every child growing up in a disorganised family becomes a serial killer. But there is a negative effect on the development of every

¹⁹⁵ Anspacher H & Anspacher R, *The individual psychology of Alfred Adler: A systematic presentation in selections from his writings* (1958).

¹⁹⁶ De Wet ob cit note 54.

¹⁹⁷ Crankshaw O, 'Social differentiation, conflict and development in a South African township' (1996) Vol. 7, *Urban Forum*.

¹⁹⁸ Resser, Burgess & Douglas *Sexual homicide* ob cit note 25.

individual that results from this disorganisation. Pronounced disorganisation within the family can lead to feelings of doubt, guilt, and shame, as seen in the example of Individual E.¹⁹⁹

Individual E was born as a child of two drinkers, that did not get along and he had to watch them assault each other. When he was only two years old his mother took him to his grandmother, forbade the father to see him, and left the boy. The grandmother was loving but never applied any rules. When he went to primary school, he had occasional contact with both his parents but they both incited him against each other and every meeting with one of his parents disturbed and unsettled the boy. Additionally, his father used violence as a punishment. Once he beat Individual E so cruelly that the boy ran away and slept at a scrapyard.²⁰⁰ Also, his grandmother told him that his parents had left him and he would always be alone. When his grandmother died, he had to stay with his mother again, but again gave him up, this time to his uncle, who assaulted him violently without any reason. Later he found out that the man was not even his uncle. Individual E grew up in a totally disorganised family, which lead to a restless personality. He felt upset, disturbed, and worthless his whole childhood and developed an impatient personality, and always felt disadvantaged.²⁰¹

2. *Phase two: Period of offending*

During the period of offending the individual is exposed to a social environment that is no longer controlled by his caretakers but by his local area, because he has now left the family home and freed himself from the environment to which he was exposed as a child.²⁰² In five out of the six cases, the serial killer stuck to his particular area of offending during the whole period. Sometimes those areas extended over several suburbs or city parts, but always stayed the same. Only Individual A moved from his first area of offending almost 80 km to his second

¹⁹⁹ Erikson EH, *Identity and the life cycle: A reissue* (1980).

²⁰⁰ Barkhuizen ob cit note 82.

²⁰¹ De Wet ob cit note 54.

²⁰² Erikson *Childhood* ob cit note 93.

and then even to a third area of offending, but he moved his place of residence each time too.²⁰³

Similar to the first phase, the external factors present during the second phase all melt together and depend on each other. They can be summarised as disorganisation or disruption in society, which has an external effect on the individual.²⁰⁴ The stressful and chaotic social environment is due to poverty, criminality, population density, unemployment, and a lack of law enforcement. All these factors of the social environment were notably present in the case studies. Further, these conditions are especially present in South African townships, although in local suburbs or rural towns too.²⁰⁵ The majority of the South African population lives under these conditions and only a microscopic percentage of them are serial killers.²⁰⁶ This makes it evident that the social disruption in those areas is not causal for the origin of serial killers but creates a suitable playground in which they can easily offend. Thus, it nourishes the growth of the rate of serial killers not by actively creating them but by attracting them with a suitable offending area.

The following will explain what is meant by each of the conspicuous factors that were noticed in the cases of this study and how these are attractive to a serial killer. Further, the way in which this might benefit the operation of serial killers and might affect their development is discussed. As four out of the six serial killers in this study were living and offending in townships, the following explanations will mainly refer to those areas. But of course, the rural environment, where Individual E was offending, and the suburbs of a big city, where Individual D was offending are specifically dealt with where it is important as well.

²⁰³ Pistorius *Catch me a Killer* ob cit note 1.

²⁰⁴ Crankshaw ob cit note 198.

²⁰⁵ Hodgskiss ob cit note 6.

²⁰⁶ Crankshaw ob cit note 198.

a. Poverty in the offending area

All six individuals lived and offended in an area that was characterised by poverty, be it the townships outside of the cities, rural towns, or even suburbs of big cities. The widespread poverty in those areas leads to easy victim availability.²⁰⁷ For example, large families have to share small houses and therefore the children have to play on the streets all day and without any food or toys.²⁰⁸ Therefore it is easy to lure them away with the promise of money or food. Individual D took advantage of this situation and talked to boys hanging around on the streets and lured them with the promise of money and food if they would help him carry some boxes. Thereby he gained their trust and the boys accompanied him to a secure place, where he sodomised and killed them.²⁰⁹

Additionally, the high rate of poverty leads to despair within the population, which forces people to engage in high-risk employment, like street prostitution.²¹⁰ It is even easier to lure a street prostitute into a car by soliciting her services.²¹¹ And what are the chances that someone will ever report a missing street prostitute?

Moreover, poverty leads to a high rate of homeless people and abandoned kids that have to live on the street.²¹² Those are easy victims as well, and engage in sexual or other favours for some money or food and voluntarily accompany any stranger who promises them some kind of benefits. Individual D killed two street boys this way.²¹³ Holmes and Holmes describe this sad phenomenon as victims that are 'less dead'

²⁰⁷ Hodgskiss ob cit note 6.

²⁰⁸ Woolard & Leibbrandt ob cit note 167.

²⁰⁹ Pistorius *Catch me a Killer* ob cit note 1.

²¹⁰ Woolard & Leibbrandt ob cit note 167.

²¹¹ Hornig, Salfati, Labuschagne ob cit note 9.

²¹² Woolard & Leibbrandt ob cit note 167.

²¹³ Pistorius *Catch me a Killer* ob cit note 1.

because they were 'less alive' and finally became a 'never where' because they were abandoned long before and are not missed by anyone.²¹⁴

b. Criminality in the offending area

In all six cases, the individuals lived and offended in areas that had high crime rates. Because of the high rates of criminality in the offending area the police are already overwhelmed with the cases they have to solve. It is, therefore, more likely that a serial killer will not get caught and just melt into the criminal environment. Criminality is a daily problem and is seen as normal in some areas of South Africa, especially in townships. Thus, just another missed person will not draw any attention.²¹⁵

Between the usual high rate of murders and missing people in the townships, the victim of a serial killer just melts into the statistics and is not seen for what it really is: the victim of a serial killer.²¹⁶ Between all the other crimes going on, the similarities in certain murder cases are not noticed, and therefore the police service does not even investigate a serial killer case. Where do you best hide a duck egg? Yes, between some chicken eggs. The difference will not be noticeable unless someone takes the time to examine the egg more closely and the SAPS does not have time due to the generally high crime rate.²¹⁷ Only when there are so many duck eggs between the chicken eggs that it can no longer be overlooked it becomes obvious. But at this point, there have been too many murders already...

c. Densely populated offending area

All but one individual lived and offended in densely populated areas. The South African suburbs and especially the townships are known for their large-scale population. The townships outside of the big cities like

²¹⁴ Holmes & Holmes ob cite note 19.

²¹⁵ Hodgskiss ob cit note 6.

²¹⁶ Salfati, Hornig, Sorochinski, Labuschagne ob cit note 59.

²¹⁷ Hodgskiss ob cit note 6.

Cape Town were created to limit black people to live there to prevent them from settling in the cities, which was seen as 'white land'.²¹⁸ Large families have to share small homes and the family members will escape the narrowness and wander around the streets, which increases the probability of continuously meeting strangers.

The high population density leads to anonymity and depersonalisation. As there is so much movement and so many people in the townships it is difficult to keep an overview of who is actually living where.²¹⁹ This results in a lot of crimes being unnoticed. Especially missing people are not noticed and even if they are noticed they are often not reported because it is not unusual that a family member is gone for a few days because he was wandering around and staying with friends or he found a short-term working arrangement. The fact that victims are not reported as missing or are not known in the area they are found makes it very hard to identify them when they are finally found. Individual C for example killed 18 victims that were all found, but only five of them could be identified.²²⁰

Previous studies also showed that most of the serial murders happened in the most densely populated areas.²²¹ Statistics put together by SAPS show that as urban settlements grew and the population became denser, cases of serial murder grew as well.²²² Hodgskiss shows in his study that murder rates, in general, are highest in densely populated areas.²²³ As serial murders are just repeated murders this, therefore, makes sense.

An area with a high population density, therefore, is a very suitable place for serial killers to offend for two reasons: First, it provides

²¹⁸ Hodgskiss ob cit note 6.

²¹⁹ Hickey ob cit note 101.

²²⁰ Pistorius *Profiling serial killers* ob cit note 26.

²²¹ Pistorius *Catch me a Killer* ob cit note 1.

²²² South African Police Service: Crime Information Analysis Centre website, 2016.

²²³ Hodgskiss ob cit note 6.

a large number of potential victims and secondly it ensures that the victim is probably not missed by anyone and if found cannot be identified. An overcrowded area is a perfect disguise for a serial killer because he melts into the population as just another unfamiliar face.

d. Large rate of unemployment in the offending area

The high rate of unemployment in the South African townships, suburbs, rural towns, and just in South Africa, in general, goes hand in hand with the poverty and despair of the population.²²⁴ It is therefore easy for serial killers to lure victims with the promise of employment, be it because they are so naïve or because they are full of hope and want to believe that, finally, there is the possibility of a better life.²²⁵

Individual F lived and offended in a township with a high rate of unemployment. He used to walk up to his victims and lured them with the promise of work and employment. He exploited his victims' despair over their poor situation and easily gained their trust because people in those situations want to believe in a better future and employment. Claiming to take them to his office to take care of the paperwork, he took the victim to a secure place, where he then raped and killed the victim.²²⁶

Thus a high rate of unemployment provides a serial killer with greater availability of easy victims. High rates of unemployment increase the poverty in the area, which in turn leads to high rates of despair and criminality in those areas.²²⁷ This shows how these external factors all depend on and interact with each other.

e. Lack of law enforcement in the offending area

In general, law enforcement has to overcome two major difficulties when it comes to serial murder cases. The first is the general lack of law

²²⁴ May & Govender ob cit note 176.

²²⁵ Hodgskiss ob cit note 6.

²²⁶ Barkhuizen ob cit note 82.

²²⁷ Salfati, Hornig, Sorochinski, Labuschagne ob cit note 59.

enforcement in specific areas of South Africa. In all six cases of this study, there was a major lack of law enforcement in the offending areas. An effective police investigation is made considerably more difficult in rural areas or townships, because of a variety of political, social, and economic factors that limit the policing ability.²²⁸ Lack of resources such as money, personnel, and equipment are factors that prevent an efficient police investigation. Additionally, the lack of reporting missing people, the high murder rate in general, and the enormous population density in some areas make crimes go easily unnoticed so that a police investigation is not even initiated. Also, the lack of online databases of missing people and unsolved crimes to create links between cases makes it difficult for the police to work properly.²²⁹

Another difficulty is the still existing mistrust of society towards the police. People don't report crimes or missing people because they do not trust the police, as they see them as the enemy that will harm them. Because of the history of South Africa, the population was very hostile and defensive towards the police in the early days of democracy. Nowadays they are sceptical still and don't trust the police, so they often hinder the investigations, for example by not telling the police what they saw or know.²³⁰ Also, the difficult condition in these areas due to the bad relationship between police and the population creates an even harder situation for the police as they see themselves in danger of being attacked by the locals because communities still have a problem with the SAPS.²³¹ This of course hinders and limits the police investigation in those areas considerably.

The second major problem that hinders effective law enforcement is that serial killer cases in particular are very difficult to resolve. This is due to high media interest, resulting in public pressure and panic.

²²⁸ Ressler, Burgess & Douglas *serial murder* ob cit note 190.,

²²⁹ Hickey ob cit note 101.

²³⁰ Hodgskiss ob cit note 6.

²³¹ Ressler, Burgess & Douglas *serial murder* ob cit note 190.,

Additionally, the police have to deal with special victim selection and it's often not clear whether it actually is a serial killer that is offending. There is often a so-called 'linkage blindness', meaning that, without a clear motive, those different murders are all committed by the same person is often not noticed.²³² Even if people are reported missing, one more missing person will simply melt into the already numerous missing people that have no connection to a serial killer's offences. The result is that many a time a series of murders is detected only once bodies are found. Also, these bodies are often found very late, thus are in late stages of decomposition and cannot easily be identified. Nor can a specific *modus operandi* be picked up, linking it to other murders with the same *modus operandi*.²³³ This makes it very hard for the police to determine whether a serial killer is operating, never mind the task of catching him in a depersonalised society.

3. *Further considerations*

The six serial killer cases analysed in this study show some striking similarities. The social environment during the childhood of the individuals was characterised by external factors that were controlled by their parents.²³⁴ Having to grow up in poverty in a disorganised family in which the individual was exposed to violence, traumatic experiences, or rejection by the caretakers had an internal effect on his development.²³⁵ The hostile social environment influenced the development of the individual's conscience and created a permanently impaired personality. A personality that has to develop in such a hostile social environment can develop in different directions. One of them might be becoming a serial killer, as happened in the case studies presented. This is certainly not the norm but suggests that the social environment in which a child has to grow up could influence the development of him becoming a serial killer.

²³² Hodgskiss ob cit note 6.

²³³ Ressler, Burgess & Douglas *serial murder* ob cit note 190.,

²³⁴ Garbarino ob cit note 125.

²³⁵ De Wet ob cit note 54.

The social environment during the period of offending is characterised by external factors that were controlled by the living and offending area of the individual. A society that is disorganised and disrupted due to poverty, criminality, population density, high rates of unemployment and a lack in law enforcement creates the perfect offending area for serial killers and increases the likelihood of the individual actually acting out a series of murders.²³⁶ It further is important to note that serial killers are not created by the social environment in which they offend, but certainly are attracted and tempted to actually act out their murder fantasies by that particular environment, since it represents the perfect environment for undetected murders and thus a suitable playground for serial killers.

The difference between the external factors during the two phases is due to the individual having left the family home, where all the external factors present in the first phase were created. In the second phase the external factors can no longer be controlled by the caretakers and the individual is enabled to make his own decisions and has to interact with the outside world and is exposed to the external factors of his local area. Four of the individuals in the cases presented had left their family home before they started killing. The first exception to this is Individual B who still lived with his mother and sister when he committed the murders. But the reason for the presence of a hostile social environment during his childhood was his brother, who violently abused and sodomised him.²³⁷ This brother had left the family home at that point, so the features of the social environment Individual B was exposed to during his childhood had gone with the brother. The second exception is Individual C, who also lived with his mother and sister while committing the murders. But this case was the one in which ‘only’ two factors were present: rejection by his father and growing up in poverty.²³⁸ As soon as he was not a child anymore and his mother was not able to over-protect him and watch all his steps anymore he became his own master. He was able to create his own life and choose freely who to interact with and

²³⁶ Salfati et al. ob cit note 128.

²³⁷ Pistorius *Catch me a Killer* ob cit note 1.

²³⁸ Pistorius *Profiling serial killers* ob cit note 26.

where to go, therefore he was exposed to those external factors controlled by his living area.

Moreover, it is very interesting that those external factors that make the social environment so tempting for serial killers to offend in also seem to be responsible for the presence of other forms of crime.²³⁹ The recorded annual murder rates in South Africa were the highest between 1994 and 1997. During the same period, rapid social change that leads to disruption and chaos in the social environment happened, and also during the same years the serial murder rate was at its peak.²⁴⁰ This shows that there is a connection between serial murder and other forms of crime, as they are subject to the same influences. Because serial murder is just the repeated commission of murders it seems logical that it is influenced by the same external factors as murder and other forms of crime. The only difference in what kind of crime a person is going to commit is his inner motivation. A thief might steal for financial gain or to feed his family and therefore uses the tempting situation of an overcrowded and anonymous environment. He too is influenced by the external factors of his social environment that create the possibility of committing a crime in the first place.²⁴¹ The motive of a serial killer, on the other hand, is vastly more versatile and complex and is attributed to a deeper fixation in his emotions and personality traits that are formed under negative influences.

There definitely is a need for more in-depth research on the motive of serial killers and this would clearly go beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, I will make a limited attempt here, derived from what we learned from the cases used in this study. The motive for repeatedly killing people is an inner urge to do so and to use force to achieve what the individual really wants. This in turn arises from the lack of alternative behaviour. The goal the individual deep down really wants to achieve is not simply to kill another human being, but rather a deeply anchored wish for something else, like the striving for superiority, the desire to be loved, seeking for acknowledgment or to overcome trauma. These

²³⁹ Hodgskiss ob cit note 6.

²⁴⁰ Hickey ob cit note 101.

²⁴¹ Hodgskiss ob cit note 6.

inner goals are due to a malformation, resulting in a ruthless, unstable, and mistreated personality.

These responsible character traits are developed during childhood and influenced by the social environment in which the child grows up. If certain external factors are present during this period it is very likely that they have a negative effect on the child's psyche and therefore create exactly this kind of fanatic personality.²⁴² The inner wish for achieving the actual goal creates the urge to kill because the individual does not know any alternatives to achieve his goal. The social environment he grew up in taught the individual that the only way to achieve his goals in life and get what he wants is to take what he wants by force. This includes relationships and affection as well. For any decision, violence and force are the logical solutions to get it, because that's all he knows and what he learned while growing up.²⁴³ In summary, the motive of a serial killer is his inner urge to kill – which is due to a lack of alternatives that might be due to the social environment in which he grew up – and the opportunity to release this urge and live out his fantasies in the suitable social environment in which he finds himself as an adult.²⁴⁴

The disruption and disorganisation in South African society create a social environment that tends to nourish the acting out of murder and other forms of crime.²⁴⁵ Thus a social environment like that might also be responsible for the high rate of serial killers in these areas and should therefore always be taken into account when dealing with the phenomenon of serial killers.

B. Possible causes for the development of the social environment in South African townships

The previous examination of the social environment of the six serial killer cases presented in this study shows that the social environment during the childhood of the six individuals was dominated by poverty and negative experiences caused by

²⁴² Pistorius *Profiling serial killers* ob cit note 26.

²⁴³ De Wet ob cit note 54.

²⁴⁴ Hodgskiss ob cit note 6.

²⁴⁵ Hodgskiss ob cit note 6.

their caretakers. The six serial killers grew up in a hostile and sometimes violent environment. The social environment during the period of offending was dominated by a disorganised and disrupted society. To examine where this social environment shaped by violence, isolation, and poverty in South Africa originates from one has to take a closer look at where the individuals grew up and where they lived during their series of murders. Five out of the six individuals in this study grew up in South African townships, where the family lived in poverty and a disorganised and disrupted social environment.²⁴⁶ Additionally, four out of the six serial killers also offended in townships. Therefore, the following explanation will especially focus on the situation in South African townships in order to try to examine possible causes for the development of the social environment in South African townships.

The townships outside the big cities of South Africa were created to prevent the black population of South Africa from settling in the cities, which was considered 'white' land, by legislations such as the Resettlement of Natives Act of 1954.²⁴⁷ Today townships are still largely inhabited by an ever-growing black population. When the townships first were erected, their only function was to provide residence places for the low-skilled labour force needed in the cities. It was not planned that labour opportunities would be in the township itself. As more and more black people were deported from the city centre, the population density grew and large families had to share very small abodes if they had any at all. Until today there still is a large influx of the rural population into townships then and now, because of the perceived availability of job opportunities in cities. These often do not materialize especially if the economy is stagnant and this creates a steady stream of the population into a dense area who cannot find work in the cities, resulting in densely populated townships full of poor unemployed people. Additionally, the townships are located far away from the big cities and therefore the place, where there might

²⁴⁶ Woolard & Leibbrandt ob cit note 167.

²⁴⁷ Breetzke GD, 'Modeling violent crime rates: A test of social disorganization in the city of Tshwane, South Africa' (2010) Vol. 38, *Journal of Criminal Justice*.

be some work is far away and the journey would be long, dangerous and exhausting.²⁴⁸ This being the only alternative, increased the rate of criminality inside the townships.

Children that grow up in those townships, therefore, grow up in poverty. Solely due to the location of their place of residence, they are told they are inferior and should be deported.²⁴⁹ The caretakers are probably unemployed or away all day, trying to earn some money or food. Their predicament results in depression and despair, which may lead to physical abuse towards people in the home.²⁵⁰ This way the growing child might experience traumatic experiences and violence. Additionally, violence is in many ways still socially acceptable in South Africa, be it childrearing, education, or intimate relationships, as it is so present in everyday life.²⁵¹ To explain the cause of domestic violence or child abuse here would go beyond the scope of this paper and requires in-depth research and studies. But living in a township means having to cope with poverty, unemployment, and criminality on a daily basis. This might lead to physical assault in the family home or traumatic experiences caused by the caretakers.²⁵² This is a major problem but is being researched in other academic papers. But it is a fact that living in a disrupted and disorganised society leaves scars on the psyche of people, which is hard to live with.²⁵³ Therefore an attempt is made in the following to find possible reasons for such a disrupted and disorganized social environment that impacts the adults living in it and therefore their relationships with their children as well.

These crime-promoting circumstances occur particularly in times of social unrest and change. During the shift from apartheid to post-apartheid there was a massive change in society, which resulted in a rapidly growing urban population and made the line between legal and illegal means blurry. This anonymous environment with an overstrained of law enforcement agency enhanced the rate of criminality in

²⁴⁸ Khayelitsha commission report available at https://www.khayelitshacommission.org.za/images/towards_khaye_docs/Khayelitsha_Commission_Report_WEB_FULL_TEXT_C.pdf pp. 30-46, accessed on 19.04.2020.

²⁴⁹ Woolard & Leibbrandt ob cit note 167.

²⁵⁰ Fisher A et al. ob cit note 118.

²⁵¹ Collins A ob cit note 182.

²⁵² Crankshaw ob cit note 198.

²⁵³ Crankshaw ob cit note 198.

the townships.²⁵⁴ Moreover, political violence grew from the 1970s on and culminated in 1990 with the unbanning of black liberation movements. Political violence played out particularly in the townships and remains a major problem even today. Violence accompanied by criminality has always been present in the townships, as they were created by force.²⁵⁵ Moreover, the South African Police Service is also associated with political violence in townships, because they were the ones who carried out the instructions of the apartheid government and were often involved in social conflicts and fuelled political riots. This burdened history of unfairness, violence and lack of respect on the part of the police makes it still very hard for them to be accepted in the townships today.²⁵⁶ This explains the existing lack of law enforcement and the lack of trust in the SAPS in the townships and among the black population in South Africa in general.

The shift from apartheid to post-apartheid was a period of massive political and social change. There was an increase in diversity in society, a rapid social change that resulted in an unstable social environment, and made the society more susceptible to crime. This is also due to the ineffectiveness of law enforcement in those challenging times, as explained above, and a growing sense of anonymity caused by the rapidly growing population in densely settled areas. This creates a ripe playground for serial murders, who can just melt into the highly disruptive social chaos.²⁵⁷ The deprived conditions in black urban townships coupled with a high rate of political violence tend to create an even more stressful and socially disintegrating environment. This stressful socially disintegrating environment can also be found in other urban areas, both in the small rural towns and also densely populated suburbs of big cities.²⁵⁸ The American researcher Hickey observed a similar correlation between a period of social change and the increase in the rate of serial murders in the USA. With the explosion of political violence in 1990, the rate of serial murders increased in the years after 1990. It is also notable that the rate of serial killers in

²⁵⁴ Labuschagne GN *Serial murder revisit* op cite note 11.

²⁵⁵ Crankshaw ob cit note 198.

²⁵⁶ Khayelitsha commission report available at https://www.khayelitshacommission.org.za/images/towards_khaye_docs/Khayelitsha_Commission_Report_WEB_FULL_TEXT_C.pdf pp. 30-46, accessed on 19.04.2020.

²⁵⁷ Labuschagne GN *Serial murder revisit* op cite note 11.

²⁵⁸ Hodgskiss ob cit note 6.

South Africa declined after its peak in 1997/1998, when the political change levelled off slowly.²⁵⁹

A general level of crime and violence in society and the depersonalisation of overcrowded areas, like townships but also areas with widespread poverty and unemployment, like rural areas, are often met with a wide range of alienation and thus high rates of serial murders.²⁶⁰ South Africa and especially its townships were just not capable of coping with the massive social change during the shift from apartheid to post-apartheid. This resulted in a stressful social environment in which criminality, poverty, and alienation rapidly grew. Until today the population of the townships suffers these ills and has to live in a disorganised and disrupted society with no prospect of recovering from it, as ineffective government policies and recovering programs have shown.²⁶¹ Thus the social environment created in townships is characterised by poverty, criminality, high population density, high rates of unemployment, and a lack of law enforcement. For the reasons already stated a social environment characterised by those factors represents a suitable offending area for serial killers and thus should always be taken into account when researching the topic of serial killers or dealing with the manhunt of a serial killer.

VII. Conclusion

The phenomenon 'serial killer' is extremely complex and until today there has been no consistent, scientifically proven explanation for the origin of this horror. This multiple case study did not make it its business to solve this mammoth task but wanted to focus on the social environment of serial murderers. When researching serial killers in general, their motivation, or their development, it is particularly important to include their social environment. It is essential to analyse not only the individual himself but also his social environment in order to understand his development, motives, procedures, and behaviour.

²⁵⁹ Pistorius *Catch me a Killer* ob cit note 1.

²⁶⁰ Crankshaw ob cit note 198.

²⁶¹ Khayelitsha commission report available at https://www.khayelitshacommission.org.za/images/towards_khaye_docs/Khayelitsha_Commission_Report_WEB_FULL_TEXT_C.pdf pp. 30-46, accessed on 19.04.2020.

The specific factors of the social environment that might be able to influence the development of a child seem to be controlled by its parents while the factors that might be able to influence the adult serial killer seem to be due to a disorganised and disrupted society.²⁶² If an individual is exposed to a hostile social environment during his childhood and formative years this has an effect on his conscience and personality development. These experiences could have planted the seed inside the mind of the individual that leads to his becoming a serial killer.²⁶³ The tendency that he starts offending during a later period could further be strengthened when he is located in an area that is characterised by disruption and disorganisation in society. This is not generalising anything but proposes a variety of external factors that might have the power to influence the development of an individual and might even create the tendency of him becoming a serial killer. This also shows how serial murder is connected to other forms of crime, as they are subject to the same external influences. The only thing that distinguishes a serial killer from another criminal is his motive.²⁶⁴

Further, the social environment of South African townships suffers from poverty, criminality, a high rate of unemployment, and a lack of law enforcement.²⁶⁵ This might be due to the social change that ambushed South Africa during the shift from apartheid to post-apartheid.²⁶⁶ It leads to a disrupted society and social chaos with no clear boundaries, in which criminality and poverty rapidly grew.²⁶⁷ Until today South African townships have not recovered from this. Society is still exposed to high rates of criminality, unemployment, poverty, high population density, and a lack of law enforcement, which creates disorganisation and disruption. In this kind of society serial killers can offend undetected and melt into the population as another stranger.²⁶⁸

This study requests that the social environment should be considered in further research on the topic of serial killers. The social environment is influenced by social, political, economic, and historical factors, as seen above. Therefore, it is important to

²⁶² Garbarino ob cit note 125.

²⁶³ Pistorius *Catch me a Killer* ob cit note 1.

²⁶⁴ Hickey ob cit note 101.

²⁶⁵ Crankshaw ob cit note 198.

²⁶⁶ Breetzke ob cit note 248.

²⁶⁷ Crankshaw ob cit note 198.

²⁶⁸ Hodgskiss ob cit note 6.

take a South African perspective when studying South African serial killers and not just try to apply international research on South African cases. The specific factors of the social environment that might be able to influence serial killers and their development are too unique in every country, maybe even region to make general, cross-border statements. This research took a South African approach on serial killers for the purpose of understanding the specific features of the social environment that might have an impact on South African serial killers.

No one is just born a serial killer but a variety of factors and influences shape this development.²⁶⁹ Even if it is not consistently established with certainty what these factors are, this research definitely suggests the social environment is one of them. Drawing from the multiple case studies conducted in this paper the social environment can be considered an important factor in the development of the six serial killers examined and thus is worth being explored further. Consequently, the social environment should always be taken into account when serial killers are researched in the future to get a better understanding of the origin of serial killers and the phenomenon in general.

²⁶⁹ Pistorius *Catch me a Killer* ob cit note 1.; Labuschagne & Safati op cit note 5.; Knight ob cit note 2.

Bibliography

Adler A, *Understanding human nature (B. Wolfe, Trans.)* (1969) Fawcett Publications, New York.

Anspacher H & Anspacher R, *The individual psychology of Alfred Adler: A systematic presentation in selections from his writings* (1958) George Allen & Unwin, London.

Babbie ER, *The practice of social research* (2015) Nelson Education Ltd, Toronto.

Barkhuizen J, *An exploration of the intrapsychic development and personality structure of serial killers through the use of psychometric testing* (unpublished magister artium thesis, University of Pretoria, 2006).

Breetzke GD, 'Modeling violent crime rates: A test of social disorganization in the city of Tshwane, South Africa' (2010) Vol. 38, *Journal of Criminal Justice*.

Claiborn CD & Lichtenberg JW, 'Interactional counseling' (1989) Vol. 17, *The Counseling Psychologist*.

Collins A, 'Violence is not a crime: The impact of 'acceptable' violence on South African society' (2013) Vol. 43, *South African Crime Quarterly*.

Crankshaw O, 'Social differentiation, conflict and development in a South African township' (1996) Vol. 7, *Urban Forum*.

De Burger J & Holmes R, *Serial Murder* (1988) Sage Publications, Beverly Hills.

De Wet JA, *A psychosocial perspective on the personality development of the serial murderer* (unpublished magister artium thesis, University of Pretoria, 2006).

Del Fabbro GA, *A family systems analysis of serial murder* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Pretoria, 2006).

Del Fabbro GA, *A review of South African perspectives on serial murder* (unpublished master's thesis, University of Pretoria, 2007).

Douglas JE & Burgess AE, 'Criminal profiling: A viable investigative tool against violent crime' (1986) Vol. 55, *FBI Law Bulletin*.

Ellwood, Charles A, 'Lombroso's theory of crime' (1912) *Journal of the American Institute of Criminal Law and Criminology*.

Erikson EH, *Childhood and society* (1993) WW Norton & Company, New York; London.

Erikson EH, *Identity and the life cycle: A reissue* (1980) WW Norton & Company, New York; London.

Fischer G & Riedesser P, *Lehrbuch der psychotraumatologie* (2003) Ernst Reinhardt Verlag, München.

Flisher A et al. 'Intervention in a community crisis: Lentegeur Hospital and the case of the 'station strangler' (1998) Vol. 88, *South African medical journal*.

Freud S & Strachey JE, *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* (1976) WW Norton & Company, New York; London.

Freud S, *Sigmund Freud-Gesammelte Werke* (2014) Anaconda Verlag, Köln.

Fromm E, *Die Furcht vor der Freiheit: Escape from Freedom* (2014) Open Publishing Rights GmbH, München.

Garbarino J, *Children and families in the social environment* (2017) Transaction Publishers, New Jersey.

Hickey EW, *Serial murderers and their victims* (2013) Cengage Learning Inc, Mason, OH.

Hodgskiss, Brin, 'Lessons from serial murder in South Africa' (2004) Vol. 1 *Journal of Investigative Psychology*.

Holmes RM & Holmes ST, *Serial murder* 3rd ed. (2009) Sage Publications, Beverly Hills.

Hornby AS, *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* 8th ed. (2010) Oxford University press, Oxford.

Horning AM, Salfati CG, Labuschagne GN, 'South African serial homicide: A victim-focused behavioural typology' (2015) Vol. 12, *Journal of Investigative Psychology*.

John W & Creswell PC, *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (2000) Sage Publications, Beverly Hills.

Klein M, *The psycho-analysis of children* (1963) The Hogarth Press, London.

Klein M, *The Psychological Principles of Early Analysis. Teoksessa: M. Klein (1975), Love, Guilt and Reparation & Other Works, 1921-1945. The Writings of Melanie Klein, vol. 1* (1926) New York: The Free Press, Glencoe, IL.

Knight Zelda G, 'Some thoughts on the psychological roots of the behavior of serial killers as narcissists: An object relations perspective' (2006) Vol. 34, *Social Behavior Personality: an international journal*.

Labuschagne GN, 'An empirical evaluation of interactional analysis of serial murder' (2000) Vol. 13, *Acta Criminologica: Southern African Journal of Criminology*.

Labuschagne GN & Gabrielle Salfati CG, 'An examination of serial homicide in South Africa: The practice to research link' (2015) Vo. 12, *Acta Criminologica: Southern African Journal of Criminology*.

Labuschagne GN, *Serial murder revisited: A psychological exploration of two South African cases* (unpublished thesis, University of Pretoria, 2007).

Lauschagne, GN. `Chapter 36: Stewart "Boetie Boer" Wilken: Serial murder, Necrophilia and Cannibalism - A South African Case Study` in Mellor, Lee; Aggrawal, Anil; Hickey Eric `Understanding Necrophilia – A Global Multidisciplinary Approach` (2017) Cognella Academic Publishing, San Diego.

Marks M, 'Shifting gears or slamming the brakes? A review of police behavioural change in a post-apartheid police unit' (2003) Vo. 13, *Policing & Society*.

May J & Govender J, 'Poverty and inequality in South Africa' (1998) Vo. 15 *Indicator South Africa*.

Mellor L, Aggrawal A & Hickey EW, *Understanding Necrophilia: A Global Multidisciplinary Approach* (2017) Cognella Academic Publishing, San Diego.

Murray W, *Serial Killers* (2009) Canary Press, Brunswick.

Nikulina V, Widom CS & Czaja S, 'The role of childhood neglect and childhood poverty in predicting mental health, academic achievement and crime in adulthood' (2011) Vol. 48, *American journal of community psychology*.

Pistorius M, *Catch me a Killer: Serial murders—a profiler's true story* (2012) Penguin Random House South Africa, Cape Town.

Pistorius M, *Profiling serial killers: And other crimes in South Africa* (2012) Penguin Random House South Africa, Cape Town.

Pistorius M, *Psychoanalytical approach to serial killers* (unpublished thesis (PhD), University of Pretoria, 1996).

Potgieter C & De Wet J, 'Serial murder in South Africa: asking different questions' (2015) Vo. 28, *Acta Criminologica: Southern African Journal of Criminology*.

Reinhardt JM, *Sex perversions and sex crimes* (1957) Charles C Thomas Publisher, Springfield, Ill.

Rengert GF, Piquero AR & Jones PR, 'Distance decay reexamined' (1999) Vol. 37, *Criminology*.

Ressler R, Burgess A, D'Agostino R and Douglas J, 'Serial murder: a new phenomenon of homicide' (1984) *paper presented at the tenth triennial meeting of the International Association of Forensic Sciences*, Oxford, England.

Ressler RK, Burgess AW & Douglas JE, *Sexual homicide: Patterns and motives* (1988) Simon and Schuster, London.

Salfati CG, Horning AM, Sorochinski M, Labuschagne GN, 'South African serial homicide: Consistency in victim types and crime scene actions across series' (2015) Vol. 12, *Journal of Investigative Psychology*.

Salfati CG et al. 'South African serial homicide: Offender and victim demographics and crime scene actions' (2015) Vol. 12, *Journal of Investigative Psychology*.

Salfati CG & Labuschagne GN, 'Serial Homicide in South Africa Introduction to the Special Issue' (2015) Vol. 12, *Journal of Investigative Psychology*.

Skrapec CA, 'Defining serial murder: A call for a return to the original Lustmörd' (2001) Vol. 16, *Journal of Police - Criminal Psychology*.

Vronsky P, *Serial Killers: The Method and Madness of Monsters* (2004) Berkley Books Penguin Group, New York.

Wehner J, *How to punish Monsters?— An Approach for effective sentencing of serial killers in recognition of the theories of punishment using the examples of Moses Sithole and Rodney Alcala* (unpublished essay, University of Cape Town, 2019).

Wertham F, *The show of violence* (1949) Doubleday, New York.

White JH, Lester D, Gentile M & Jespersen, 'Serial murder: Definition and typology' (2010) Vol. 31, *American Journal of Forensic Psychiatry*.

Woolard I & Leibbrandt M, *Measuring poverty in South Africa* (unpublished working paper, University of Cape Town 1999).

Yin RK, 'How to do better case studies' (2009) Vol. 2, *The SAGE handbook of applied social research methods*.

Yin RK, 'The case study as a serious research strategy' (1981) Vol. 3, *The SAGE journals: Knowledge*.