



E68 A Practical Classification for Spree Killers

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Learning Overview: After attending this presentation, attendees will be familiar with a classification system for spree killers that includes subtypes for which it is possible to develop a strategy of identification and capture.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by illustrating to the legal and investigative community the need to restore and hone the concept of a spree killer toward the development of tactics for apprehending them and protecting their potential targets.

Multicides have traditionally been categorized as double, triple, mass, serial and spree.¹ Mass and serial have been further divided into subcategories.² However, spree killing, which involves the killing of at least three persons at two or more locations in a close timeframe, due to a precipitating incident that fuels the urge to kill, remains a unified but poorly defined concept.³ The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) eliminated this term from its discussions of multicide in 2005, citing its lack of utility for law enforcement.⁴ However, an examination of 112 incidents involving 134 spree killers from 26 countries reveals that not only is there enough diversity among spree killers to form classifications similar to those devised for mass and serial, but also that two spree subtypes offer distinct utility for identification, tracking, and warning potential targets.

This makes the designation of spree killer unique, in that law enforcement personnel who are trained in what to look for can respond efficiently to identify and stop certain types. The behaviors and motives for spree killers align in six categories, at least three of which can be divided into subcategories. Some sprees are random, and some occur in a timeframe or set of locations too tight for an effective response. However, many have identifiable targets, due to grudges or a mission, and some incidents last long enough for law enforcement to mobilize and predict where the killer will likely go. Examples are Christopher Dorner and Dwight Lamon Jones, who left behavioral tracks that served as guides for future targets.^{5,6} The killers' agendas were clear and required several days to achieve.

Forty-six of the 112 incidents (41%) are in one of two categories for which law enforcement can form a viable strategy. This percentage supports the need to research spree killers as a distinct type of multicide, standardize the definition, identify categories and subcategories, and provide tools for response strategy. Since the law enforcement response to a spree killer is different than for a mass murderer or serial killer, for those cases for which there is sufficient time to identify potential targets, the data from research on spree killers can be used toward honing an effective response. In addition, spree killer subcategories will inspire more research in criminology for improved comprehension of these killers' diverse triggers and for improved intervention.

Reference(s):

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5. Simon, M. (2103, Feb. 9). Alleged Cop Killer Details Threats to LAPD and Why He Was Driven to Violence. *CNN*. <https://www.cnn.com/2013/02/07/us/dorner-manifesto/index.html>.
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Spree Killer, Multicide, Rampage