



I14 The Rorschach Test and Perpetrators of Homicide

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Learning Overview: The goal of this presentation is to show that criminal activity—just as in any other human behavior—is a reflection of one’s personal history and level of psychic functioning.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by demonstrating that criminal activity, as with any other human behavior, is a reflection of one’s personal history and level of psychic functioning (i.e., organization of personality).

Objective: The hypothesis of this study is that it is possible to identify correlations between certain aspects of mental functioning in addition to criminological and forensic variables that are closely related to a crime. Moreover, this study hypothesized that a trace of this correlation exists in the Rorschach test.

The existence of a correlation between aspects of personality and crime has been theorized and that criminal activity reflects the personality traits of the perpetrator, his life, and the way he interacts with the world around him. Investigative psychology was born and developed on the assumption that behaviors expressed during an act of aggression, the choice of the victim, and the mode of action is, in some way, connected to the personal history of the aggressor and to his mental and behavioral functioning, in addition to the quality of his relationships.

Methods: This study examined the Rorschach protocols administered to a sample of homicide perpetrators who underwent psychiatric examination as ordered by Judicial Authorities to ascertain the ability of the subjects to understand their intent and will at the time the crime was committed. These data were taken from the database of the Section of Criminology and Forensic Psychiatry of the University of Bari, Italy, from 1998 to 2014. The goal of this study was to identify psychometric and psychodiagnostic variables associated with characteristics of the crime committed and correlate them to the crime scene, describing them as either “organized” or “disorganized.” The sample consisted of 49 subjects—43 males (87.7%), and 6 females (12.2%), 24 unmarried (48.9%), 21 married (42.9%), and 4 separated (8.2%). Education levels ranged from 0 years (5 subjects, 10.2%) to 13 years (9 subjects, 18.4%), while the majority had an education level of five years (15 cases, 30.6%), and eight years (20 cases, 40.8%). Twenty-four subjects were between 25 and 44 years old (48.9%), and 11 subjects were between 45 and 54 years old (22.4%). Eleven subjects were between 55 and 64 years old (22.4%); two of the subjects were minors, and one was older than 65 years of age. Eight of the subjects had no previous psychiatric diagnoses (16.3%). The following psychiatric diagnoses were formulated for the remaining 41 subjects (83.7%): 13 schizophrenia, 1 delusional disorder, 1 bipolar disorder, 5 depression, 4 psychoorganic syndrome, 13 personality disorder, and 4 limited intellectual functioning.

The results of this psychiatric report indicated that 23 (46.9%) subjects were recognized as fully chargeable, 10 subjects (20.4%) were shown to have a partial defect of mind, and 16 subjects (32.6%) were shown to have a total defect of mind. The means used to carry out the offenses are as follows: 15 (30.6%) used a sharp object or cutting weapon, 12 (24.5%) used a firearm, 8 (16.3%) resorted to physical assault, 6 (12.2%) used asphyxiation, and 8 (16.3%) through other various means (3 stoning, 3 precipitation, 2 by means of an automobile).

In 14 cases (28.6%), the murder was considered “premeditated.” In the remaining 35 (71.4%), the homicides were found to be “impromptu and not premeditated.” In 31 cases (63.3%), the crime scene was described as “organized.” In 16 cases (32.6%), the crime scene was described as “disorganized.”

Results: The Rorschach test has been confirmed as a particularly effective and sensitive tool in the study of normal and pathological personalities, including within the field of forensic psychiatry, when it is rigorously applied to standardized, reliable, and validated methods of administration, labeling, and evaluation, in addition to the use of representative samples of normal subjects. It is particularly evident that some of the Rorschach indices may be significantly correlated with the crime scenes that are described as “organized” and “disorganized.”

Conclusion: This study has confirmed how the Rorschach test, which is certainly useful in the clinical study of thought functioning, the examination of reality, affectivity, and of the ability to correctly represent oneself and others in relationships, can offer one psychic split that may also play another important role in the field of forensics.

Homicide, Perpetrators, Rorschach Test