



I19 The Psychopathologic Profile of Cannibals: A Review of Five Cases

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Learning Overview: The goal of this presentation is to highlight the importance for forensic and health care practitioners to analyze the patterns of a crime scene, as well as the characteristics of both the offender and the victim.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by increasing understanding of anthropophagy, by means of analyzing the cannibal's psychopathologic profile.

Background: In modern societies, human cannibalism (or anthropophagy) is rare and remains to most an unthinkable act of violence—a sensational crime that attracts the attention of the media. Classifications of cannibalism have varied over time. However, most authors agree on the existence of three categories, based on underlying motivations for this type of act: survival, ritual, and pathological. International psychiatric literature on the topic is sparse due to significant methodological problems, such as collecting enough data and generating unbiased analysis from adequately sized samples. The present work seeks to explore human cannibalism by presenting and comparing data concerning offenders, victims, and crime scene behaviors.

Method: This retrospective and descriptive study includes all five of the cannibal patients admitted to the Henri Colin High Secure Unit in France between 2000 and 2018. Information concerning sociodemographic, clinical, and forensic features was gathered from a variety of sources—medical records, police reports, written expert opinions, court transcripts, and autopsy reports.

Results: Most offenders were found to be men with a mean age of 26 years, who were mostly single, unemployed, living with the victim prior to the assault, and with a history of psychiatric disorder. The population of offenders falls into two psychopathologic profiles. First, three of them had a diagnosis of schizophrenia, with delusional themes of persecution and possession. The assault was characterized by brutality, lack of premeditation, precipitating factors (substance abuse and cessation of psychotropic medication). The act was part of a parricidal acting out, the ingested parts exclusively coming from relational zones (face, eye, phalanges). In the second group, the remaining two patients had a personality disorder with psychopathic and pervert tendencies. The act was part of a lethal acting out against a known victim and was characterized by the satisfaction derived from destruction, a desire for control, obsessions of omnipotence, and pre-existent cannibalism fantasies (paraphilia).

Conclusion: The results from the present study on five cannibal patients are consistent with case reports in the literature.^{1,2} Offenders fall into two psychopathologic profiles: suffering from either a severe mental illness, such as schizophrenia; or a significant personality disorder comorbid with paraphilia. Several forensic features associated to each profile are detailed. Biases in this study do not allow for the generalization of these findings, and further studies are needed to better characterize this type of act.

Reference(s):

1. McClain J.L., Jordan F.B., Blakeney R. (1986). Human Cannibalism: A Case Report. *Am J Forensic Med Pathol.* 7, 172-3.
2. Pfäfflin F. (2008). Good enough to Eat. *Arch Sex Behav.* 37, 286-93.

Cannibalism, Anthropophagy, Forensic Psychiatry