

Re-Thinking Typologies of Multiple Murders: The Missing Category of Serial-Mass Murder and its Theoretical and Practical Implications

Arnon Edelstein

Senior lecturer in Criminology, Kaye college, Israel
General Manager of Re-integration of prisoners company, Israel

ABSTRACT: *The concept of multiple murders (mm) is as old as humanity itself, but it has only become prevalent in academic thought within the last three decades. Over this period scholars have introduced two main attitudes regarding multiple murders. Some argue that multiple murders are, theoretically and empirically, one concept that includes different sub-types: mass murder, spree murder, and serial murder. Other scholars claim that those "sub categories", are a whole different phenomenon, which are worthy and needed a separate examination and discussion because its uniqueness. To my opinion, this argument is more a semantic one than a fundamental one, as long as we consider each type of these murders as a unique phenomenon, with its own and unique characteristics. In addition both parties agree that the concept of multiple murders is differentiated into the same three main sub-categories. My argument is that a fourth sub-category of mm exists which goes unrecognized by most scholars. This sub-category, named "serial-mass murder," will help to differentiate the sub-categories more accurately and will more clearly define each of the remaining sub-categories.*

Key words: *Multiple murder, mass murder, spree murder, serial murder, serial-mass murder*

INTRODUCTION

Many publications deal with the phenomenon of serial killing, and less with the phenomenon of mass killing (Edelstein, 2014). In the last decade, there has been a new trend in criminology which attempts to acknowledge these separate notions in an all-encompassing manner, the *mm* (DeLisi & Scherer, 2006; Fox & Levin, 2005; Edelstein, 2006, 2009, 2014; Holmes & Holmes, 1998; Morton, 2014).

Fox and Levin argue that "all forms of multiple murders were considered mass killing" (Fox & Levin, 2005). These scholars, like theirs (DeLisi & Scherer, 2006), see *mm* as a sweeping concept. In order to make sense of this phenomenon, Fox and Levin (2005) offer a typology which includes different kinds of *mm*. However, in the summary of their book, they return back to the over-arching theory of *mm* (Fox & Levin, 2005).

The question of whether or not the concept of *mm* can stand by itself arises; if so, why do scholars need to deal with different sub-categories within this phenomenon? The answer is that the *mm* phenomenon is not a unique one; it includes different kinds of motives, state of mind, modus operandi and so on. Hence, *mm* is a title for different kinds of phenomena. In other words, there are different behaviors that should be differentiated from each other, theoretically as well as empirically; these behaviors should not be lumped together under the single label, multiple murders (Holmes & Holmes, 1998; Edelstein, 2009). Whether we use this concept in one of the two possibilities mentioned above, there is still a missing sub-category in its typology, "serial-mass murder," which should be taken into account. After re-visiting the three categories of *mm*, I will clarify and justify the need for the fourth category, "serial-mass murder."

*Correspondence regarding this article should be directed to: arnone101@inter.net.il

MASS MURDER

The concept of mass murder seems, at first glance, to be simple: the murder of three or more victims in a single occasion by one or more killers (Fox & Levin, 2005; Meloy & Felthous, 2004; Holmes & Holmes, 1994; Hickey, 1992; Newton, 2006; Petee, Padgett & York, 1997; Duwe, 2004; Blackman, 1999). Scholars tend to use the term "massacre" mainly when describing events of mass murder in schools, despite the fact that the number of victims is similar to those of other occasions of mass murder. The following are examples of mass murder: the 9/11 terror acts in New-York, suicide bombers in central places like Tel Aviv, London, Japan and Norway, shooting in schools and university campuses across the United States, etc.

The first problem with the theory of mass murder is its name. The word 'mass' is often used to denote hundreds, thousands, or millions of people. For example, the term "mass media" means that this media includes millions of potential watchers or that millions of people are watching a television program like the Olympic Games at the same time. However, when we review the number of victims of mass murder, we find significantly lower figures: the mean number of victims is 4.8 per occasion (Blackman, Leggett, Olson et al., 1999). Alternatively, the number of mass murder victims per year in the United States is approximately one hundred people (Fox & Levin, 1994, 1998; Mullen, 2004).

The second problem with this concept is the disagreement between scholars regarding its definition. There is no agreed upon number of victims which defines an occasion as a mass murder. While the requirement of more than one victim is reasonable, thus distinguishing between "regular"/single murder (with one victim) and other kinds of murder, requiring two, four or ten victims seems arbitrary (DeLisi, 2006; Dietz, 1986; Duwe, 2004; Fox & Levin, 2005; Hempel, Meloy, & Richards, 1999; Holmes & Holmes, 1998; Meloy & Felthous, 2004; Messing & Heeren, 2004; U.S. Department of Justice, 1996).

SERIAL MURDER

We can simply say that serial murder is not mass murder; in an occurrence of serial murder, there is only one victim and it is not a one-time event. Using this definition of serial murder, the immediate question that arises is, "What is the difference between "regular" and serial murder if, in both cases, there is one victim?"

While in both cases the number of victims is only one, there are essential differences between the behaviors of murderers in these situations (Edelstein, 2014). The most important difference between the two is that a serial murderer does not stop after his first murder, continuing to murder until he has killed at least three or more victims. This is the main definition of serial murder. Another important difference is that serial murder, in most cases, is a well-planned behavior; this is in contrast to a one-time murder which, in most cases, tends to be spontaneous, following an argument between two persons (Edelstein, 2014).

A third difference is that serial murder involves a victim who is unknown to the murderer; there is an exception in a few cases where the victim has intimate relations with the murderer (Edelstein, 2014; Fox & Levin, 2004; Holmes & Holmes, 1998; Kraemer, Lord, & Heilbrun, 2004; Levin, 2008; Meloy & Felthous, 2004; Vronsky, 2004).

The theory of a serial killer does not escape some of the theoretical problems that characterize a mass murder. First, there is a major problem with the definition of a serial murder. While today, there is no agreement on the detailed definition of this behavior, serial murder is often defined as: two or more incidents of murder of one victim by one or more murderers on different occasions and with a "cooling off" period of at least three days between incidents (Edelstein, 2014).

Various scholars give different arguments concerning the number of victims required to define murder as serial. Some scholars argue that the dictionary definition of a serial pattern is when it appears in at least three cases, which relate to each other and have some order between themselves (Harbort & Mokros, 2001).

Again, it is clear that the minimum number of victims must be more than one in order to distinguish serial from single murder. However, most scholars demand that the number of victims should be two, three, four, even ten, without any reasoning. In other words, arbitrariness is found in this concept as well (Edelstein, 2006; Egger, 1998; Gerberth, 1996; Giannagelo; Hickey, 1992; Holmes & Holmes, 1994; Skrapec, 2001; Turvey, 1999; Vronsky, 1996, 2007).

Yet another problem exists regarding the definition of serial murder: the "cooling off" period. Originally, the rationale behind this demand was to distinguish serial murder from spree murder. Then again, once the notion of spree murder vanished, this demand became unnecessary. Even if the notion of spree murder is still considered to be relevant, the demand for three days between murders without any theoretical rationale to support such a criterion seems arbitrary (Edelstein, 2006, 2009, 2014).

In addition, there is no requirement for a maximum time interval between the murders. According to the definition, a man who kills every 20 or 30 years will be labeled as a serial murderer; this seems absurd and is clearly not the intention of those that set the criteria when defining serial murder.

Also, as in the case of the mass murderer, there are myths which often mislead scholars in the field. One myth states that all serial killers act out of sexual motivation (Fox & Levin, 2005), while evidence shows that only 66% kill for this reason (Edelstein, 2014). Another myth claims that serial killers travel all over the country in search of potential victims, while the truth is that most of them kill in a familiar environment, examples being at home or at work (Ferguson, 2003; Hinch & Scott, 2000).

The third problem stems from the myth which surrounds the phenomenon and the unreliable descriptions of the event which usually follow its occurrence. For example, one myth describes a mass murderer as a mentally-ill person who shoots everybody around him, as a reaction to some kind of wingding in a spontaneous manner (Petee, Padgett, & York, 1997). Evidence shows that most of these murderers are psychopaths who know the difference between right and wrong, who plan their attack carefully, and who do not commit murder (most of them) in public places (Blackman et al., 1999; Walsh, 2005). Another myth which can mislead scholars is that mass murder is an occasion where a murderer kills strangers. To the contrary, data indicates that most mass murders involve victims who are acquaintances of the killer (family member, classmate, employer, etc.).

The literature on this subject shows that forty percent of mass murders occur within the family setting, while another forty percent occur in work places (Fox & Levin, 1998, 2003, 2005). Only twenty percent of mass murders fit the media description of shootings in malls, schools, and university campuses (Fox & Levin, 1998, 2003, 2005; Mullen, 2004). Moreover, there are known cases of school shootings or shootings in former work places where the mass killer specifically did not shoot or hurt potential victims because he saw them as "okay"- meaning that they did not hurt his feelings (Duwe, 2004; Levin, 2008).

SPREE MURDER

To better distinguish different kinds of murder when more than one victim is involved, scholars developed another concept: spree murder.

Spree murder is defined as the murder of three or more victims in different locations occurring over hours or days without a "cooling off" period (Fox & Levin, 2003, 2005; U.S Department of Justice, 2006). An example of spree killing would be if a person shoots his parents at home, then moves to the street and kills more people, then goes to the local mall and shoots everybody in sight, until he is caught or killed by the police (known as "suicide by proxy").

The spree murderer kills everybody who stands in his way (those who are in the wrong place at the wrong time). However, this motive cannot be a fundamental trait that justifies a special typology which is mainly considered to be a rare phenomenon. As with mass murder, there is disagreement about the number of victims required to define an event as a spree murder (Fox & Levin, 2003, 2005; U.S Department of Justice, 2006).

More importantly, a second problem exists concerning the "cooling off" period between the murders. If a murderer acts in different locations, it will naturally take him time to move from one location to another. During this time, he can think, feel, and plan; these intervals can be regarded as "cooling off" periods between murders even if this is not the case (Edelstein, 2014).

A third problem concerning the maximum time spent between the first and the last murder appears to be the most critical issue. Should seconds, minutes, or days be the maximum gap in time to define a spree murder? If the murders occur in intervals of minutes, it is mass murder, and if it occurs in intervals of more than three days, it is serial murder (Edelstein, 2014).

These problems caused scholars to abandon this notion of spree murder, because it does not clearly distinguish between spree murder and serial murder on one hand or between spree murder and mass murder on the other hand. Other scholars (Fox & Levin, 2003, 2005) argue that spree murder is just a sub-type of mass murder.

With these insights, scholars moved on to create a fabric that encompassed all other cases of murder where more than one victim is involved. This promising fabric is called serial murder.

Another important shortcoming stems from confusion among scholars between mass and serial murder. For example, scholars often use the term serial murder to describe cases of mass murder, as in the cases of a family destroyers, armed robbery, murder by cult members, and so on (Fox & Levin, 2005; Newton, 2006; Vronsky 2004, 2007).

This use of the same term to describe different behaviors results in greater confusion in relation to the terms mass and serial killers. This confusion became the basis for considering multiple murders to be one phenomenon (Fox & Levin, 2005). This shortcoming is due to a missing sub-category of multiple murders in both the theoretical and empirical literature (Edelstein, 2014).

Serial Mass Murder- the Missing Category

In order to remove the confusion illustrated above, a new notion should be introduced: serial-mass murder. When characterizing an event of multiple murders, we have learned that cases exist which do not exactly match either the criteria set for mass murder, nor those for serial murder. Consider the example of a terrorist placing a time-bomb and running away in three or more separate events, where each time the bomb kills at least three victims. While this example can be defined as mass murder because there are at least three victims in each occasion, it can also be defined as serial murder—the killer repeated his actions for at least three times (Edelstein, 2014).

According to Edelstein (2014), from this example we learn the importance of the missing sub-category, serial-mass murder. This sub-category enables us to better differentiate between the various notions of mass murder which appear to be similar at first glance. For example, there is a difference between a terrorist who sets a bomb and runs away in order to repeat his action in the future and a terrorist who carries a bomb in order to explode himself and kill others. The first scenario describes a mass-serial murderer while the second situation portrays a mass murderer Edelstein, 2014.

Although it seems that we could have named this category "terror murder" (Fox & Levin, 2005, p. 24), this issue is more comprehensive. It includes cases of terrorism as well as hate crimes by cult members and territorial combats between crime organizations, etc. (Edelstein, 2009, 2014; Holmes and Holmes, 1998; Levin, 2008; Newton, 2006; Vronsky, 2004).

By creating this new sub-category, we can now distinguish more clearly between a "one time" mass murderer and a serial-mass murderer.

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