

Organised and disorganised crime scenes

Serial murderers are almost exclusively men. Their victims are usually from within the same ethnic group as them. Although there are recorded cases of serial murderers working in pairs, they usually commit their crimes alone. Beyond these basic common factors, the FBI profiling process suggests that crime scenes – and consequently serial killers – fall into two categories.

Organised

The organised killer is in control. His crimes generally show evidence of careful planning. He will have thought about the attack extensively before carrying it out and may have taken time to select a specific victim using criteria of age, appearance, lifestyle occupation or another, less obvious characteristic. Organised killers chose locations where they believe they are unlikely to be disturbed. They may establish contact with their victims by presenting themselves initially in non-threatening ways (e.g. by impersonating a figure of trust or authority). Once the victim is overpowered they may transport them elsewhere. Organised offenders tend to torture their victims and may keep them under control for some time before killing them. The victim is often bound.

Organised killers prepare carefully for their crimes and usually bring the necessary materials (e.g. weapons, restraints) to the crime scene. They generally attempt to remove evidence from the crime scene and often hide the victim's body in an attempt to make discovery less likely. Organised killers may elaborate or increase the sophistication of their crimes with each new attack. They frequently take trophies from the crime scene and may follow coverage of their crimes in the news media.

The organised offender is socially competent and may be friendly or charming. He is also sexually competent and is likely to be living with a partner or in a stable relationship. He has normal to high intelligence (but may be a low achiever). At the time of the offences he is likely to have been angry, frustrated or depressed.

Disorganised

The disorganised killer is out of control and leaves a chaotic crime scene. His attacks are spontaneous and show little evidence of planning. Whilst his victims may have basic features in common (e.g. all women), there is little to suggest they have been carefully selected and most seem to be targets of opportunity. Disorganised killers surprise their victims and kill them at or near the scene where they first strike. The victim is usually killed quickly in an uncontrolled manner. Disorganised killers generally do not bind or control their victims and their weapons are usually improvised and/or acquired at the scene of the attack. There is usually little or no attempt to conceal the body or to hide or remove evidence. Trophies are taken only infrequently and the killer generally does not follow their crimes in the news.

The disorganised offender has poor social skills. He is unlikely to be able to maintain a stable romantic/sexual relationship and generally lives alone, probably close to the scene of his crimes. He probably has poor personal hygiene. His level of intelligence is likely to be low and if employed his work is likely to be unskilled. He may well be suffering from acute psychological disturbance and could be psychotic.