

Multiple Murderers and Early-Life Maltreatment: The Critical Role of the First Three Years of Life

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Abstract: This paper proposes the Critical Period Hypothesis: multiple murders may be rooted in maltreatment during the first three years of life, when attachment, emotional security, and basic trust are formed. Abuse may contribute to a serial-murder mindset, while neglect may contribute to a mass-murder mindset. Because such experiences may occur before conscious memory develops, they may explain why some offenders cannot identify the source of their destructive urges. And later adversarial experiences may not develop the same foundation but only shape the specific modus operandi. Thus, early emotional protection may be crucial for preventing serious violent behavior.

Keywords: early childhood maltreatment; childhood abuse and neglect; early-life adversity; childhood trauma; attachment; developmental psychopathology; critical period; violent behavior; serial homicide; mass murder.

I. INTRODUCTION

According to Abe, serial murder is caused by childhood abuse, while mass murder is caused by childhood neglect [1]-[3]. However, if this is so, why are there so many people who experienced childhood abuse or neglect but did not commit such murders [4]? Also, why are there so many serial killers who say they do not know why they commit such murders [5]? For example, Dennis Rader, aka BTK, said that the motive for his murders came from his "X Factor," indicating that he could not explain it. Sam Little also said that God may have had a certain intention in creating a man like him [6].

II. 0-3 YEARS OF LIFE AS HUMAN IMPRINTING PERIOD FOR SERIAL MURDER?

It is well known that chicks come to believe that the first moving thing they see after hatching is their mother through imprinting [7]. Likewise, in humans, **the first three years of life are considered a critical period during which attachment, emotional security, and basic trust are formed [8]**. So, is it possible that this critical period also plays a role similar to an imprinting period? And could multiple murders be caused by maltreatment during these first three years of life, when people may not remember what happened to them? There is also a saying that what you learn as a child lasts a lifetime.

During the first three years of life, the brain is still growing, while synapses are being formed [9]. Emotions also develop during this period. Therefore, if a child is emotionally distorted or misses the natural emotional input expected during this critical period, the child may fail to develop normal human emotions. Thus, it is possible that abuse occurs during this critical period in those who later become serial killers, while neglect occurs during this period in those who later commit mass murders. This may be why some serial killers do not remember what happened to them. However, if a child is emotionally protected during this period, the child may develop a normal emotional foundation [10]. Therefore, even if the child later faces highly adverse conditions, those experiences may not reach the same depth that leadS to serial or mass murder due to higher resilience [11].

According to Abe [12], the abusive conditions that may contribute to serial murder include a hysterical or controlling mother, a volatile father, or both. It could also be constant conflict between the parents. It could even involve adoptive parents or orphanage staff who impose similar unnatural forces on the child's emotional development. If such experiences occur during the first three years of life, they may distort the child's emotional development and form the foundation of a serial-murder impulse, which may eventually become their second nature.

III. MODUS OPERANDI ARE SHAPED AFTER 4 YEARS OF LIFE?

Abe also claims that the type of motive is determined by the types of experiences a person goes through [3]. For example, if a child is raised by a highly controlling mother who suppresses the child's natural sexual desires, the child may later develop power/control as a motive. If a child grows up extremely introverted and has difficulty communicating with others because of excessive pressure from the parents, the child may later develop thrill-seeking as a motive, and so on. However, these specific experiences cannot occur during such an early period [13]. But if we consider these specific experiences as occurring after the serial-murder foundation was formed during the first three years, it makes more sense. In other words, the basic serial-murder mindset is established during the critical period, and the specific *Modus Operandi* (M.O.) is determined by later experiences [14].

Thus, Rader bound his victims to make them look like puppets, likely because of an old memory of his mother playing with him by pretending she could not pull her hand out from the gap between the back and seat of a sofa. But even before that, Rader's serial-murder mindset may have been formed by his mother's provocative and inattentive parenting during his first three years of life [15]. Likewise, Sam Little strangled his victims, likely because of a sexual memory associated with the beautiful neck of his white elementary-school teacher. Yet his serial-murder mindset may also have been formed during his first three years, when his mother abandoned him as an infant and his strict, disciplinarian grandmother raised him [16]. In this way, the specific modus operandi may be formed by later experiences, after the critical period has established the foundation for serial murder.

Most likely, the closer to birth the unnatural external force is placed on the child, the deeper and more unconscious its influence may become [17]. Consequently, the person may kill a victim instantly without enjoying the process [18]. However, if the abusive condition occurs closer to the age of three, the person may remember the pain he experienced. As a result, he may enjoy the killing process more because the victim experiences pain similar to the pain he experienced before [19].

IV. MASS MURDER SUBJECTS ARE NEGLECTED DURING 0-3 YEARS OF LIFE

On the other hand, mass murder may be considered to result from emotional neglect during the same first three years of life. That is, the child may miss the appropriate emotional exchanges and physical contact with a mother figure during this critical period that are biologically important for normal emotional development. This could happen because the mother is busy pursuing her own interests. It could also happen because the child becomes a scapegoat in a highly stressful family, because the parents are constantly arguing and leave the child uncared for, because the parents are not emotionally expressive by nature, or because a family member requires extra care during this period, such as hospitalization [3]. Either way, the child is not provided with the emotional exchanges necessary to develop a normal emotional foundation. Consequently, the child may fail to develop basic communication skills and may not receive enough emotional energy to live life positively. Because of this, the child may have difficulty making friends at school and may often be bullied or isolated [20]. Believing that he does not deserve his parents' love, he may also develop constant negative thinking [21].

Socially, he may constantly experience friction with others, causing frustrations and stress to build up inside. His life becomes like a tunnel in which only he exists. When the stress and frustration exceed what he can bear, he may proceed to commit suicide [22]. However, strongly believing that he is not responsible and that the people who rejected him are responsible, he may consider committing *extended suicide*, involving specific people he considers responsible or as many people as possible. Having been rejected by others, he may come to see society and even the whole humanity as his enemy [23]. This vengeful anger becomes his source of energy in place of love. When a triggering incident occurs, he may act it out. But during his rampage, he may appear completely emotionless because he is just following a scenario he has imagined repeatedly, to the point where he can no longer distinguish fantasy from reality [24]. It is as if he were an automobile programmed to run until it runs out of fuel.

V. FOUNDATION OF BOTH SERIAL AND MASS MURDERS ARE ESTABLISHED DURING THE CRITICAL PERIOD THE SUBJECTS DON'T REMEMBER?

Research suggests that roughly half of the risk for antisocial and aggressive behavior is genetic, while the other half comes from the environment [25]. However, just as some tigers and bears can become family pets, some people may never commit such crimes despite carrying genes associated with aggressive behavior. This suggests that environmental factors may strongly influence whether violent tendencies are acted upon [26]. As such, it is possible that violent acts due to trait aggression as opposed to reactive aggression such as serial murder and mass murder have their roots in abuse and neglect that occur as early as the first three years of life. Because these experiences may occur before people can remember them, they may be unable to identify the cause of their uncontrollable destructive urges. This could also explain why people who experience similar abuse or neglect later in life do not necessarily commit such multiple murders. Thus, abuse during the first three years of life may contribute to serial murder, while neglect during the same period may contribute to mass murder. Neglect that occurs after the initial abuse may promote the effects of that abuse, while abuse that occurs after initial neglect may promote the effects of that neglect [27]. Their specific M.O. may then develop during the years after the first three years, as they experience various events during childhood.

VI. CONCLUSION

Although it has long been a dark mystery why some people commit such ultimate inhumane acts, I hope this critical-period hypothesis can explain part of that mystery. Serial killers and mass murderers are not monsters who deserve to be the main characters of movies and TV dramas. Rather, they may be victims of early abuse and neglect who developed serious personality disorders. Therefore, providing social protection and emotional security during this early period of life may significantly improve public safety by reducing the development of these aggressive personality disorders caused by attachment disorders [28].

Note. Multiple murders are also caused by the type of emotional neglect, in which true self of the child is left alone despite the availability of superficial communication [29]. Even in that case, this paper suggests that emotionally untouching exchange is considered to start happening during the critical period.

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