

## THE VICTIMS

**W**ith an unknown number of serial killers at large in our society, how much at risk of attack are you and your loved ones?

Although it's true that most serial killers choose their victims based solely on their presence at a particular point in time at a particular place, the average heterosexual male is not likely to be targeted at random. The child in the park, the prostitute on the street corner, the homosexual male prostituting his body in clubs, the hitchhiker trying to find a ride along a stretch of highway—these individuals seem to be more vulnerable than the housewife doing laundry.

But should that housewife feel secure from the threat of a serial killer? The simple answer is no.

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### WHO ARE THE VICTIMS?

According to data on 1,246 serial killers in the United States from 1900 to 1999, 65 percent of the victims of serial killers were female. Additionally, 89 percent of the victims were white, 10 percent were African American, and 1 percent were Asian or Native American.

Although prostitutes make up the majority of female victims, that does not mean they are the only women targeted. Elderly women and women who live alone are also routinely targeted. A growing number of victims are in their homes when they meet their deaths at the hands of serial killers who choose home invasion as their modus operandi. Women also often fall victim to their lovers or spouses, who may kill them for monetary gain. But men are not alone in killing for profit; women are quite capable killers in their own right.

Children are frequently targeted by serial killers because they are unaware of their vulnerability, easily lured away, and easily subdued. Some children are also at special risk of being murdered by their mothers, as the murderers **Marybeth Tinning**, **Gayle Savage**, and **Waneta Hoyt** have proved. Children are at special risk when parents are afraid to warn them of the real threat that adults and even other children can pose to their safety. The tragic James Bulger case in England, where a two-year-old boy was killed by two ten-year-old boys, and the case of nine-year-old **Hamisi Prince** in Rwanda, who killed several younger children with clubs, stones, and by drowning or strangling, serve to remind us that children can and do kill other children. And in the third world and developing nations, children are killed in large numbers.

Male homosexuals are also at special risk. When male serial killers target other males, 48 percent of the victims will be homosexuals. As seen earlier, the number of victims of a homosexual serial killer is large. Because homosexuals are often marginalized in the larger community, serial killers seem to be able to operate for long periods of time, abducting and killing large numbers of victims before law enforcement is forced to act.

Race plays a role in the selection of serial murder victims. Approximately 7 percent of victims are chosen simply because of their race. The white racist **Joseph Paul Franklin** attempted to kill and did kill black males, many of whom were with white females. Hubert Gerald, a black male, killed black females on the South Side of Chicago. Local police and even an FBI analysis failed to notice his activity until he confessed.

Physical health can play a role in victimization. Being hospitalized can put a person at risk if he or she is unlucky enough to be admitted where an “angel of mercy” is at work. With medical personnel continually moving through patient rooms and medications frequently being given, medical serial killers easily find victims. In England, the trial of **Dr. Harold Shipman**, who killed at least 15 women in the town of old Hyde, shook up the medical community. In the United States, the reaction to **Dr. Michael Swango**’s conviction in 2000 led to the medical community’s trying to excuse its behavior. Swango was suspected of administering lethal injections to as many as 35 people while serving at a hospital at Ohio State University and a VA hospital on Long Island. The American medical community has refused to acknowledge its responsibility in allowing doctors and nurses to kill by ignoring and discouraging personnel who report suspicious activities. The mere fact that Dr. Swango was allowed to keep his medical license after he was convicted of poisoning emergency medical personnel serves to warn the public of the tolerance given to doctors who commit crimes.

At least 2 percent of victims are chosen because of their location. They are in the right house, or working in the right shop, or living in the right alley, or shopping in the right mall, or working the right street corner. They are chosen simply because they happen to be in or live in the place where the serial killer is hunting—where he feels most comfortable and safe in killing. This means that despite the statistics describing the most frequent victims, we are all at risk. If we are in the path of a serial killer, we can easily become his next victim unless we are aware of our vulnerability.

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## EXPLOITING THE WEAK

Most victims of serial killers are persons who are vulnerable—those individuals who are perceived as powerless or lacking in prestige by most of society. A lack of power or prestige readily defines them as easy prey for the serial killer. A careful

selection of vulnerable victims does not mean that the serial killer is a coward; it means only that the killer has the “street smarts” to select victims who will not resist, will be relatively easy to control, and will not be missed. Such a selection protects the killer from identification and apprehension.

As researchers Levin and Fox note:

Serial killers almost without exception choose vulnerable victims—those who are easy to dominate.... The serial killer typically picks on innocent strangers who may possess a certain physical feature or may just be accessible.

Fellow researcher A. Karmen agrees:

The vulnerability of an individual or group to criminal deprivations depends upon an opportunity factor as well as an attractiveness factor. Extreme risks are run by people who appear at the “right time” and the “right place” from the offender’s point of view. Hence certain lifestyles expose individuals and their possessions to greater threat and dangers than others.

Karmen provides examples of these high-risk lifestyles: homosexuals cruising downtown areas and public bathrooms, cult members soliciting funds on sidewalks and in bus stations, and released mental patients and skid row alcoholics wandering the streets at odd hours.

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## **SOCIETY’S THROWAWAYS: THE “LESS DEAD”**

The victims of serial killers often come from a devalued stratum of humanity. As they fall prey to their hunters, they become “less dead”—because, for many, they were “less alive” before their death, ignored and devalued by their own neighbors and communities. Examples of these victims include prostitutes, the homeless, vagrants, migrant farm workers, homosexuals, the poor, elderly women, and runaways.

This attitude toward marginalized members of society is often reflected in conversations at the dinner table. I have heard, “They were asking for it,” too many times and in too many places not to believe that this attitude is prevalent in American society.

Unfortunately, this attitude goes beyond mere “table talk.” A great deal less pressure is on the police when the victims of a serial murderer come from the marginal elements of a community. The public is much less incensed over a serial murderer operating in their area when they feel little or no identification with the victims. In this case, the victims seem far from real, and little attention is paid to their demise.

In the United States, nearly 78 percent of female victims of serial murderers are prostitutes. It is probable that the serial killer selects prostitutes most frequently because they are easy to lure and control during the initial stages of an abduction. Potential witnesses to the abduction see only a pickup and transaction prior to paying for sex. They are programmed to see only what they expect to see when a woman gets into a car with a john.

And who will miss one less prostitute plying her trade on the streets? It becomes too easy to blame her for her own fate. As Michael Newton pointed out in his book, *Serial Slaughter* (Loompanics, 1992):

Worse yet are cases where police or members of the general public blindly overlook—or actively applaud—a killer’s work. Authorities in San Diego, California still reject Eddie Cole’s confession to five local homicides, dismissing each case—including that of Cole’s wife, found strangled to death in a closet, wrapped in a bedspread—as “death by natural causes.” In Portland, Oregon, following the unsolved murders of several prostitutes, a police lieutenant voiced his opinion that violent death was an occupational hazard for streetwalkers. England’s Yorkshire Ripper, Peter Sutcliffe, preferred to call himself “The Streetcleaner,” purging his district of whores, and few complained about his crimes until Sutcliffe accidentally bagged an “innocent” girl on his fifth outing. Closer to home, similar feelings are echoed in Lake Elsinore, California, where some residents claim that a local

prostitute-killer—as yet unidentified—is merely “cleaning up the trash downtown.” Small wonder, in the face of such an attitude, that women’s groups and gay rights activists complain of being short-changed by a legal system that evaluates a human life in terms of income, social status, sex, or race.

In many cases, selection of a prostitute assures the serial murderer that his killings may never be revealed. Even if such a victim’s remains are found, she will be difficult for the police to identify, given her lifestyle and lack of close ties to her family or the community.

It is unfortunate that to many, these “less-dead” victims become relatively unimportant over the course of a serial killing event. Instead, the multiple nature of the killer’s acts and his ability to elude the police become the central focus of this phenomenon.

For many, the serial killer is a symbol of courage, individuality, and unique cleverness, a figure who allows them to fantasize rebellion or the lashing out at society’s ills. For some, the serial killer may become a symbol of swift and effective justice, cleansing society of its crime-ridden vermin. The serial killer’s skills in eluding police for long periods of time transcend the very reason he is being hunted: The killer’s elusiveness overshadows his trail of grief and horror.

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## GAY KILLERS—AND VICTIMS

Homosexual killers most often prey on homosexual victims, although bisexual and heterosexual males become victims as well. Whereas Jeffrey Dahmer, Larry Eyler, and **Herbert Baumeister** preyed on males who were either homosexual or bisexual, John Wayne Gacy also victimized young heterosexual males who were seeking employment, who were employed by him at the time of their deaths, or who had been employed by him in the past, as well as young male hustlers.

Note, however, that homosexual serial killers appear to be feared out of proportion to their actual statistical threat.

Homosexuals who become serial killers represent less than 5 percent of all known serial killers—even though their ranks include some of the most prolific slayers in modern times. Notorious homosexual serial killers include Donald Harvey (37 convictions; confessed to over 50 victims), John Wayne Gacy (33 convictions), Dean Corll (27 deaths; died after arrest), Juan Corona (25 convictions), Patrick Kearney (21 convictions; confessed to 28), Jeffrey Dahmer (17 convictions), William Bonin (10 convictions), and Randy Kraft (16 convictions; suspected in the deaths of 51 more victims).

One of the latest killers to prey on homosexuals was Herbert Baumeister in Indiana. A local businessman and married with children, he was not suspected of leading a dual life. But while his family was out of town, he preyed on young homosexual males. Baumeister, who buried the violated corpses at his home in Hamilton County, went undetected for years. After committing sixteen murders, he committed suicide in Canada before he could be arrested. How many deaths did he cause? No one can say for sure.

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## FROM VICTIM TO VICTIMIZER

That said, heterosexual males are responsible for the majority of serial murders. The typical serial killer is a heterosexual male wrestling with his demons who chooses to work out his problems by torturing and murdering woman after woman. Many of these female victims are prostitutes, a group of women who are especially vulnerable to predation by serial killers.

But why?

Research indicates that many serial killers were abused, neglected, or otherwise victimized in their childhood. This suggests that these killers may have chosen victims like their earlier selves or from the same general lifestyle.

Psychiatrist Helen Morrison contends that the “look” of the victims is significant. She states, “If you take photos, or physical descriptions of the victims, what will strike you is the

similarity in look.” Morrison also theorizes that some nonverbal communication exists between victim and killer: “There’s something unique in that interaction.” She believes that the victims of serial murderers are symbolic of something or someone deeply significant in the murderers’ lives. Some psychologists have specifically said that the victims represent cruel parents on whom some murderers feel they cannot directly take revenge.

But psychological explanations such as this do little to explain the carnage. Ted Bundy, for example, did prey on young coeds who looked like the woman who had dumped him. But Bundy had long been practicing sexually deviant behavior. The resemblance between victims and the former girlfriend may have been intentional, or it may have had little to do with their selection. Kimberley Leech, Bundy’s final victim, certainly did not resemble his former girlfriend. The victims’ selection may, rather, have been due to the fact that they were easily lured away and restrained.

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## DEHUMANIZING THE VICTIM

Dr. Morrison goes on to note that the typical serial murderer does not distinguish between human beings and inanimate objects. Researcher D.T. Lunde found that sexual sadist murderers often dehumanize their victims or perceive them as objects. He argued that this “prevents the killer from identifying with the victims as mothers, fathers, children, people who love and are loved, people whose lives have meaning.”

Typically, the serial killer does not think much about his victims, have any empathy for the victims’ loved ones, or reflect any feelings of remorse. When asked about his victims, Ted Bundy responded, “What’s one less person on the face of the earth, anyway?” When the Australian serial killer **James Miller**, charged with the murder of seven young girls and women, was asked about his victims during his trial, he stated: “They weren’t worth much. One of them even enjoyed it.”

The depravity of the victims' deaths is ample evidence that the serial murderer objectifies his victims. Serial killers lack the normal capacity for feeling or conscience; their ability to compartmentalize their "normal" lives and their true selves is telling. Their lack of empathy or compassion for their victims is evidence of an absence of psychological development that is rooted firmly in their early development and experiences.

The developing serial killer may also be aware that certain segments of society are objectified by the general public so that when, for instance, a prostitute dies, the public is quick to blame her. How often does the serial killer hear that a dead prostitute "asked for it" by being out on the street or climbing into a john's car? Might this awareness help the budding serial killer rationalize and objectify his victims? Most likely it does.

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## **THE KILLING FIELDS: WHERE DO SERIAL KILLERS HUNT?**

The hunting grounds of the serial murderer vary a great deal among killers. However, serial killers tend to select their victims from the same general areas where they feel comfortable, have control over those frequenting the area, or are assured that the area is infrequently patrolled by local police.

### **RED LIGHT DISTRICTS**

Many serial killers hunt in areas where they will not be noticed or appear different from others. They seek anonymity.

This makes the red light districts of larger urban areas the most favored hunting grounds, as evidenced by the large number of prostitutes who fall victim to serial murderers. Here the killer can blend in with all the other johns and have relatively little fear of drawing special attention from witnesses.

## POINTS OF TRANSIT

In addition, many serial killers have lured and abducted their victims from business establishments providing short-term services to people in transit, such as convenience stores or service stations near interstate highways. These locations appear to provide attractive hunting grounds to the serial killer, given the almost guaranteed anonymity in places where stranger-to-stranger interaction is commonplace and witnesses remember little of their brief time spent there.

From the killer's perspective, one unique and attractive characteristic of these points of prey is that stranger-to-stranger interaction is the expected norm; no one takes any notice. The so-called I-70 Killer, for example, found businesses near interstate highways to be a perfect killing ground for all the same reasons. A similar environment can also be found on many large college campuses. **Danny Rolling**, **Edmund Kemper**, and **Ted Bundy** found these sites perfect.

## PUBLIC VENUES

Shopping malls, city parks, pools, fairs, parking lots—all are locations with large numbers of people paying little attention to their personal safety, making them easy places for stalking and abducting victims. Adam Walsh, six-years-old, was abducted from a Florida department store in 1981 when he was out of his mother's sight for only a few moments. **Westley Alan Dodd** stalked his young victims in parks and attempted to abduct his final victim, a young boy, from a movie theater. We feel secure in these places, and we forget to be aware of our surroundings and the people around us.

## HOMES AND NEIGHBORHOODS

Because of the methods serial killers adopt, we are all at risk. It's a disturbing fact that the home is not always the sanctuary that it seems to be. We've all seen the newspaper stories and television reports; every year dozens of children are abducted from their yards or from in front of their homes.

In addition, many small children have been killed by their caregivers or parents. The unexplained death of an infant is devastating, and all consideration must be extended to the grieving parents. More than one murderous mother has been able to kill her children as a result of a lack of vigilance by the medical community. These serial killers have been identified only when the number of deaths stretched the bounds of believability.

Home invasions committed by serial killers also seem to be on the rise. This is especially frightening because we all have a sense of security when we are in our homes. The Boston Strangler would gain entry, then rape and murder his victims. Richard Ramirez terrorized southern California with his nighttime invasions of Los Angeles homes. In Sacramento, California, **Richard Chase** went from house to house during the day, looking for an unlocked door and killing whoever was home.

This trend seems to be increasing as the twenty-first century begins. The cases of children abducted from their neighborhoods and young women abducted from their homes and workplaces emphasize that none of us is truly immune to the threat of a serial killer.

We are all vulnerable.

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## WHO WILL BE NEXT?

How likely are you to be the victim of a serial killer's attack? Compare your lifestyle with the following statistics about the known victims of serial murder over the past hundred years:

- Serial killers are most likely to choose their next victim on the basis of sex alone. This is the primary factor in victim selection 40 percent of the time. Killers in this category overwhelmingly select women.
- Serial killers will change their victim criteria 13 percent of the time. Arthur Shawcross, as an example, first killed

two children and after his release from prison began killing women.

- It is impossible to determine the victim criteria in 12 percent of the known cases.
- For-profit killing is a primary motive in victim selection 7 percent of the time. **Margie Barfield**, **Rhonda Bell Martin**, **Herman Drenth**, and **Herman Mudgett** all found ready sources of money by killing family members.
- Victims selected on the basis of their age (6 percent) include not only children but also the elderly. Killers such as Westley Alan Dodd specifically targeted children, whereas the killers **Carlton Gary** and **Edward Kaprat**, and the French team of killers **Thierry Paulin** and **Jean-Thierry Mathurin** have targeted the elderly.
- Victims who are chosen because of their health or physical condition (3 percent) most often fall prey to medical serial killers. Britain's Dr. Shipman is believed to have killed over two hundred of his patients. The American nurses Donald Harvey, **Lynn Majors**, and Richard Angelo all found their patients perfect victims for their murderous cravings. Other serial killers have targeted the physically handicapped.
- Race is another characteristic that can lead to being targeted by a serial killer. In 2 percent of cases, race is the primary reason for being victimized. White racist killers such as Joseph Paul Franklin and **Richard Clarey** randomly targeted African American males. The **De Mau Mau** gang consisted of African American males who targeted solely white victims. Other serial killers prefer to prey on their own race.
- Where a victim lives is the primary criterion in 2 percent of cases of serial killers. The homeless have been repeatedly victimized by men such as **Charles Sears**, **Vaughn Greenwood**, and **Bobby Joe Maxwell**. **Calvin Perry**, **Henry Lee Moore**, and **Sylvester Mofokeng** of South Africa based their victim selection on the location of their victim's residence.
- A victim's occupation is the primary concern in only 1 percent of serial killings. Prostitutes are specifically tar-

geted, as are topless dancers and female college students. Victims targeted by occupation are overwhelmingly female, although male prostitutes are just as likely to be targeted by these serial killers.

Little else is known about the victims of serial murderers other than that they are commonly murdered by a stranger—unless the murder takes place inside the family, of course. In a preponderance of known cases, the victims seem to be young females, presumably chosen to satisfy craving for dominance of the mostly male serial murderers. The victims are sometimes young males, as in the cases of John Wayne Gacy, **Elmer Wayne Henley**, and Jeffrey Dahmer. (It has been estimated that 50 percent of unidentified bodies in county morgues or medical examiners' offices across the country are those of young children or adolescents; unfortunately, we do not know how many of these bodies represent victims of serial murder.)

In a number of cases, it appears that the victims were selected solely because they crossed the path of the serial murderer and became a vehicle for his arousal and pleasure. Some victims may be self-selecting only because of their presence at a certain place and time. This and possibly the physical appearance of the victim, which may hold some symbolic significance for the killer, are apparently the only known precipitating factors for their selection.

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## REDUCING YOUR RISK

None of the statistics and research answer the question that is most immediate for most of us: How do we avoid becoming the victim of a predatory serial killer?

The simplest answer is to avoid being out alone in parking lots, malls, public parks, and the other usual hunting grounds of the serial killer. We need to be aware at all times that there is a legitimate threat out there, not only from serial killers but also from other predators, such as rapists, pedophiles, and robbers. We also need to be aware that our home is not a sanctuary but is another common target of predators and of a

growing number of serial killers. Home invasions have increased over the past decade as a way of satisfying the serial killers' needs. And above all, we need to keep in mind that although the "less dead" are the most common targets of a serial killer, more and more serial killers are targeting mainstream victims.

But the best answer to the question is simply to cease creating these monsters so that succeeding generations do not have to deal with them. How do we do this? We need to ensure the safety of all children, not only from outsiders but from their own families as well. We have seen that children are especially vulnerable to the murderous desires of a parent. We as a society need to recognize that children deserve special protection from physical, emotional, and sexual abuse by adults, including their parents. We need to remember that serial killers were once children who needed protection, help, and comfort but didn't get it.

If we want to avoid victimization, we need to protect the next generation from being victimized. We can do that by providing economic, academic, and social support for all children, regardless of their socioeconomic standing; we also need to be aware of the social environment in which our children are growing up. Only by breaking the cycle of victimization can we reduce the number of serial killers in our midst.

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## STUDYING THE KILLERS

The next section of this book presents case studies of seven of history's most notorious serial killers:

- John Wayne Gacy
- Henry Lee Lucas
- Kenneth Bianchi
- Ted Bundy
- Jerry Marcus
- Joseph Miller
- Jeffrey Dahmer

These particular cases were selected based on four criteria:

1. Ease of access to information
2. Currency of the murderer's arrest or conviction
3. Geographical representation
4. Murderer's mobility

These killers are good examples of the overall serial murder phenomenon and can help you better understand those monsters who choose to make victims out of strangers.