

SERIAL KILLERS are individuals who **commit** multiple killings **over a period of time**, with “cooling-off” periods in between each crime. They are **NOT impulsive**; instead, their actions are **driven by psychological needs, compulsions, and fantasies**.

BACKGROUND

The term “**serial killer**” was **coined by FBI agent Robert Ressler** in the **1970s**. Its definition refers to multiple killings that show patterns and include cooling-off intervals.

- **Gilles de Rais (1404–1440)** – a French nobleman who committed child murders. During his time, such acts were explained through heresy and demonology, rather than psychology.
- **Jack the Ripper (1888)** – infamous in London for the brutal murders of women, becoming one of history’s most well-known unidentified killers.

The archetype of the modern serial killer revealed the limits of Victorian policing and later inspired criminal profiling. This period also marked the rise in documented cases and greater public awareness of serial crimes.

Notable figures include:

- **Albert Fish (1920s–1930s)** – committed extremely sadistic crimes.
- **Ed Gein (1950s)** – whose gruesome acts inspired horror films.
- **Ted Bundy & John Wayne Gacy (1970s)** – known for their charm, deception, and brutality, shocking the public with how ordinary they appeared.

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

DEMOGRAPHICS: Often single white males, intelligent but with job and family instability.

CHILDHOOD BACKGROUNDS: Absent fathers, abuse or neglect, and sometimes prenatal issues (e.g., maternal drug/alcohol use).

BEHAVIORAL PATTERNS:

- Animal cruelty, fire fascination, inappropriate bedwetting
- Fantasies of violence/control
- Collecting trophies from victims
- Stalking behaviors
- Early petty crimes (theft, vandalism)

PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAITS: Psychopathy, lack of empathy, egocentrism, impulsivity, and the “mask of sanity.”

TYPES OF SERIAL KILLERS

1. BY METHOD

- **Organized killers** – planned, controlled, socially competent
- **Disorganized killers** – impulsive, chaotic, socially awkward

2. BY MOTIVATION

- **Visionary** – driven by voices/entities
- **Mission-Oriented** – aim to eliminate “undesirables”
- **Hedonistic** – seek lust, thrill, or profit/comfort
- **Power/Control** – driven by domination over victims

IMPULSIVE TRAITS OF SERIAL KILLERS

- **Psychopathy** – manipulative, remorseless, and emotionally detached.
- **Lack of empathy** – inability to feel concern for victims.
- **Egocentrism** – self-centered, views own needs above others.
- **Impulsivity** – poor control over urges and actions.
- **“Mask of sanity”** – ability to appear normal or charming while hiding violent tendencies.

PREVALENCE OF SERIAL KILLERS

Historical Peak (1970s–1980s): Estimated 250–400 active serial killers in the U.S.

Present Day: Reduced to about 25–50 active serial killers at any given time.

DECLINING TREND OF SERIAL KILLERS

The number of serial killers has significantly declined in recent decades. Main reasons:

- DNA technology
- Improved forensic science
- Surveillance cameras
- Databases for tracking violent crimes

REALITY CHECK:

Serial killings make up less than 1% of all homicides.

HIDDEN RISKS OF SERIAL KILLERS

Some remain undetected, especially:

- **HIGHWAY KILLERS** – target vulnerable victims like hitchhikers or truck stop workers.
- **MEDICAL SERIAL KILLERS** – doctors or nurses who kill patients under the guise of care; harder to detect due to trust and access.

MOTIVES OF SERIAL KILLERS

- **VISIONARY** – Killers in this category may often suffer from psychosis.
- **MISSION-ORIENTED** – Driven by a perceived duty to eliminate certain groups or individuals.
- **HEDONISTIC** – Lust : Sexual satisfaction through killing.
 - Thrill: Enjoyment of the act itself—adrenaline, power, excitement.
 - *Comfort*: Killing for financial gain, luxury, or to eliminate threats to comfort.
- **POWER/CONTROL** – Desire to dominate, manipulate, and exert total control over victims.

MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS - known as "Angels of Death" or "Healthcare Serial Killers". Motive can include power over life and death, thrill of deception, fraud

MOST FAMOUS SERIAL KILLERS

Ted Bundy

- 30+ women murdered
- Used charm and fake injuries to lure victims
- Known as "the handsome killer"

Jeffrey Dahmer (USA, 1980S–1990S)

- 17 victims (young men)
- Crimes involved necrophilia and cannibalism
- Called "The Milwaukee Cannibal"

Andrei Chikatilo (Russia, 1970s–1990s)

- 52 women and children killed
- Brutal mutilation and cannibalism
- Nicknamed "The Butcher of Rostov"

LUST SERIAL KILLERS (CASE FOCUS)

- **Definition:** sexual gratification through killing
- **Causes:** childhood trauma fuels fantasies
- **Methods:** strangulation, stabbing, mutilation
- **Escalation:** sadism, extreme paraphilic fantasies

PSYCHOLOGICAL QUESTIONS ON SERIAL KILLERS

1. **Are serial killers mentally ill?**
Rarely legally insane; most show psychopathy.
2. **Are all serial killers psychopaths?**
Many show antisocial/psychopathic traits, but not all.
3. **Are serial killers intelligent?**
Usually have average IQ; not all are geniuses.
4. **Are serial killers born or made?**
Caused by a mix of genetics and abusive environments.
5. **Are there early signs?**
Trauma, neglect, and the Macdonald Triad (animal cruelty, fire-setting, bedwetting).
6. **Common myths**
Not all are men, not all loners, and not all masterminds.