INTRODUCTION

Offender profiling as an investigative tool has been in use for a number of years throughout the world and in South Africa. However, so far there still seems to be confusion as to the use of the word “profile”. Various agencies use the term to describe different activities. Furthermore, the popular media has created an image of a “profiler” that is so strong it has even influenced academic ideas as to what profiling is. What was once a verb, to “profile” became a noun, a “profile”. This article proposes a definition of offender profiling as used by the Investigative Psychology Unit of the South African Police Service, the Unit with the mandate to provide such a service for investigating officers. The article also looks at other uses of the word “profile” and finally places offender profiling within the context of other services by using the Investigative Psychology Unit (IPU) of the SAPS as a suggested model.

OFFENDER PROFILING: A PROPOSED DEFINITION

To begin with, a proposed definition, as used by the IPU, is given to facilitate communication and understanding. The IPU defines offender profiling as:

…any activity specifically undertaken with the intent of assisting an investigator to determine the most likely type of individual to have committed a specific crime. The process would usually involve an assessment of the crime scene, attending the autopsy, examining all available docket material such as statements, photographs, forensic reports and investigative decisions. This information is then compared to any available research. Finally, hypotheses are formulated regarding the type of suspect who committed the crime. These hypotheses might be verbally communicated to the investigator but would normally also be formulated in a structured written report. The aim is to assist the investigator to focus his investigation on the most likely type of suspect.

This is the type of profiling done by the Investigative Psychology Unit of the Serious and Violent Crime Component of the Detective Service Head Office. Most notable in the definition are the following:

• The aim is to assist the investigating officer. In other words, the person compiling the offender profile is not the person leading the investigation. A myth perpetuated by the media is that the “profiler” is the one who leads or solves the case.

• The offender profile is intended to indicate the type of person who could have
committed such a crime. The profile cannot be used to highlight an individual as a suspect. The profile is intended to be compared to available suspects in an investigation. Those suspects that fit the characteristics indicated in the profile are prioritised above other suspects who fit the profile to a lesser degree. Evidence is still needed to link a suspect to a crime and lead to a conviction.

• The process would usually involve an assessment of the crime scene, attending the autopsy, examining all available docket material such as statements, photographs, forensic reports and investigative decisions. This implies that the person compiling the offender profile must have access to confidential investigative information. The ideal is to visit the crime scenes and attend the autopsy. If unable to, the person should revisit the crime-scene and compare it to crime-scene and autopsy photographs. Furthermore, the person should have access to reports relevant to the investigation such as autopsy reports, ballistic reports, fingerprint reports and statements made by relevant witnesses.

• The information must be compared to available research. With the popular media influencing the concept of offender profiling, even professionally, there are growing efforts to make the concept more scientific. It is therefore essential that available, relevant research be used to support the statements made in an offender profile. It should also be emphasised that overseas research has proved to be very limited when applying it to the South African context.

• Finally, hypotheses are made that can be communicated verbally but should be followed-up in a structured, written report. Investigations proceed rapidly, and information is often given verbally as certain hypotheses are made by the person compiling the offender profile. Since a profile is often up to 20 pages or more in a serial offence, it can take a long time to compile. However, to prevent misunderstandings, and to protect oneself in a legal environment, these hypotheses must be formulated into a structured, written report, the actual offender profile.

This definition is the current working definition used by the Investigative Psychology Unit of the SAPS.

Turvey (1999) refers to two types of profiling in the criminal context in the United States of America (USA). These are deductive criminal profiling and inductive criminal profiling. An inductive criminal profile is briefly defined by him as one that is generalised to a suspect from behavioural and demographic characteristics shared by other offenders who have been studied in the past. In other words, such as profile is strongly based on previous quantitative research on similar offenders, such as paedophiles. These characteristics are then generalised to one suspect. The type of logic would be represented in the following statement:

A study of 100 incarcerated paedophiles found that the average age when apprehended is 24, the average type of occupation is white collar, 80% are married with children, therefore, the suspect in this case must be approximately 24, be a white-collar worker, and is most likely married.

Turvey (1999) states that the advantages of such a form of profiling is that it is a relatively easy tool to use, requires no specialised knowledge, education,
training or understanding of criminal behaviour. Furthermore, such profiles can be compiled in a relatively short period of time. He lists the disadvantages as being that the statements are generalised and not related to a specific case and that the samples used are often small and only include apprehended offenders. Secondly, due to the generalisations, such a profile can implicate an innocent person. Thirdly, environmental and contextual differences are not taken into account. Fourthly, it is assumed that behaviour and motivation do not change within an individual over a period of time.

Turvey (1999) defines deductive profiling as the process of interpreting forensic evidence, including crime-scene and autopsy photographs, autopsy reports, and victimology with the intention of reconstructing offender crime-scene behaviour patterns and from those patterns of behaviour, deduce offender characteristics, demographics, emotions and motivations. Such profiling is also more useful for establishing the modus operandi and signature as well as linking cases to one offender. Change in offender behaviour over a series of crimes can also be accommodated by deductive profiling.

Turvey (1999) feels that the disadvantages of deductive profiling are few but include the fact that it is not a quick fix and requires a great deal of effort and skill on behalf of the person compiling the profile. Also, since it an intensive process, it is emotionally exhausting. Finally, a deductive profile cannot point out a specific known individual and say that he or she is likely to be responsible for a certain crime(s) unless that offender’s unique signature is known and established. The type of offender profiling used by the Investigative Psychology Unit is more in line with the deductive method as described by Turvey, yet where relevant, available research is also referred to. One must also not forget that experience is unwritten research. Hickey (2002) would refer to this type of profiling as Crime Scene Profiling. However, the author is not in favour of this term as it implies that the crime-scene is the only source of information, yet when a rape occurs the crime scene is of less value than in a murder. In a series of rapes the witness statements become the important source of information for the purposes of profiling the offender.

A brief description of other types of profiling will now be given.

**OTHER TYPES OF PROFILING**

As mentioned earlier, the term “profile” can have various meanings depending on the context. A psychologist may refer to the profile of a psychometric test, such as an MMPI or MCMI profile. This is a graphic representation of the testee’s scores on a test. A profile can also refer to the side view of an object, such as in art. However, in a forensic or criminal justice setting the term has numerous definitions. To aid clarity, some of the other uses of the term “profiling” in such a setting, are explained.

**South African Police Service Profiling**

The term “profiling” is not used exclusively to refer to “offender profiling” as described above. In the SAPS, “profiling” also refers to the process when a known suspect’s name, identity number or date of birth are entered into the Case Administration System (CAS), Home Affairs, Vehicle Registration System, Firearm Register, or any other databases to which the SAPS have access, and all available information on the suspect is then sourced. This would include registered addresses, whether the suspect was previously the suspect in other cases and has any convictions, whether the suspect was the complainant in a case previously, what vehicles the suspect has owned, and any firearms licensed to the suspect. Yet, unlike offender profiling, this type of profiling involves a known suspect.
Intelligence profiling

Another type of profiling is a background profile which is often used by intelligence agencies. This involves gathering as much data about a known person as is necessary to build up an understanding of the person and gain insight into their behaviour. This might be to aid in the prediction of the person’s future behaviour, assess whether a person would be a likely candidate to recruit as an intelligence source such as an informer, or to prepare interrogators for a future interrogation. As with the profiling mentioned above, it involves a known individual. It may involve many of the activities mentioned in the SAPS profile, but goes beyond just calling up factual information. It is more in-depth, providing hypotheses about the individual’s behaviour and personality.

Geographical profiling

From the time of the Chicago School geography has played a role in crime investigation. Many television programmes depict policemen standing around a map of a city with pins inserted into it, indicating areas where a series of crimes have occurred. Yet it is only recently that a more rigid scientific approach, with the aid of computers, has been applied to understanding geography and crime.

The 1990s saw the re-emergence of a focus on the early works by Shaw and McKay (1942). This revival was referred to as the “New Chicago School”. While adopting an ecological approach, it also was spurred on by computerised mapping and spatial analysis techniques. Geographical Information Systems (GIS) allowed for the measurement of spatial aggregation and thereby opened up a host of possibilities with regards to the ecology of crime (Ainsworth 2002).

Canter (1994) and Rossmo (1995; 1997) are two figures that stand out when it comes to geographical profiling. Canter for example, states that offenders rarely travel long distances to commit their crime(s) and are more likely to offend in a relatively small geographical area, based around their home address (1994). Similarly, Rossmo also suggests that examining the exact location of a series of crimes can be helpful in identifying the most likely area in which an offender lives or works (1995; 1997). Such input can be used to help prioritise suspects by address or area and can also be used to direct increased uniform patrols in that specific area for crime prevention purposes.

One concern of such a method is that if inaccurate information is recorded or if information is missing, such as certain crimes that are not included in the series because they were not reported or if crimes not committed by the suspect are included, it can skew the geographical profile. However, this is the same criticism that may be levelled at any other form of profiling. Furthermore, this method has so far only been tested in Europe and the USA, not in South Africa. While the generic suggestion that an offender will offend in an area he feels comfortable with, such as an area near his home or workplace, has been correct for some instances of serial offences in South Africa, there are also many examples where this has not been the case. Samuel Sydino, the Capital Park Serial Murderer, did operate near his home, as did Sipho Twala, the Phoenix Serial Murderer; Kobus Geldenhuys, the Norwood Serial Murderer; and Cedric Maake, the Wemmerpan Serial Murderer. Moses Sithole, who operated in Atteridgeville, Boksburg and Cleveland did live in Atteridgeville where he began his murders. He had previously been incarcerated in Boksburg prison but was obviously not living there when the Boksburg murders were committed. The recent Highwayman Serial Murderer in Pretoria, did not operate anywhere near his place of residence.

South Africa’s socio-economic circumstances can be
one reason why geographical profiling is not as useful.
A large portion of our population travels great
distances to and from work and makes use of informal
transport such as taxis. Also, due to the high rate of
unemployment, people are often quite willing to go
with a stranger if it may mean the promise of
employment, thus victims are easily lured to out of the
way areas where the crime is committed. In offender
profiles compiled by IPU, commentary is always made
regarding the geography and environment of the crime
scenes.

**DNA profiling**

DNA is being increasingly used in investigations as an
extremely effective means of linking a specific suspect
to a specific crime. Once DNA from, for example,
semen or hair is collected, it is sent to the Forensic
Sciences Laboratories of the SAPS and the DNA is
processed, or “profiled”. Should a suspect be arrested,
his DNA is then compared to see if the two profiles
“match”.

**Victim profiling**

By identifying the personality and behavioural
characteristics of people who become victims of
crimes committed by certain types of offenders, steps
can be taken to reduce those people’s risk of
becoming victims. This is very useful in serial murder
and serial rape cases as victim selection might reflect
something about the motives of the offender. Victim
profiling information is gathered from various sources
such as personal records, interviews with witnesses,
victims, family and friends, crime scenes and
autopsies (Hickey 2002). In the SAPS this makes up
part of the offender profile as compiled by the
Investigative Psychology Unit.

**Psychological profiling**

Hickey (2002) also refers to psychological profiling
and describes it as using the crime scene to identify
and interpret certain items of evidence that would be
indicative of the personality type of the individual
who committed the crime and possible motives. This
also forms up part of the offender profiles compiled by
the Investigative Psychology Unit of the SAPS.

**Crime Scene Assessment**

This is another term often incorrectly used as being a
synonym of offender profiling. The IPU defines a
*crime scene assessment* as being an attempt to try and
understand what was taking place during the
commission of the crime based on what is left on the
crime scene itself. It is not intended to go further by
making statements about the offender’s personality,
occupation etc, as would be the case with an offender
profile. It is therefore focused on the time-period of
the crime. It also aims to try and determine what took
place between the offender and victim. In other words,
it acts as a reconstruction of the crime. A crime scene
assessment is an activity on its own. If an offender
profile is later requested, the crime scene assessment
is incorporated into the offender profile. Owing to its
nature it is more appropriate for murders than rapes.

**Computer databases and profiling**

Computer databases have proven to be a valuable
source of information for investigators. Such
databases would often be referred to when compiling
an inductive profile. In a further attempt to consolidate
information to assist in creating links between crimes,
the National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime
(NCAVC) in the USA became operational in 1984
with the purpose of acting as a “clearing house” of
information regarding violent crimes. It is a law
enforcement- orientated behavioural science and
computerised resource centre which consolidates
research, training and operational support functions.
The NCAVC consists of four programmes: Research
Other computer databases include the Homicide Investigation Tracking System (HITS) in Washington, the Homicide Assessment and Lead Tracking (HALT) in New York and the Violent Crime Linkage Analysis System (ViCLAS) in Canada (Hickey 2002).

THE CONTEXT OF OFFENDER PROFILING

As mentioned in the introduction, offender profiling is an activity, represented by a verb. Ideally the person compiling the offender profile should be part and parcel of a greater service to the investigating officer as offender profiling can be limited. The offender profile should be one of a variety of services that should include crime-scene assessments, assistance in investigative decision-making, assistance with interviewing witnesses and suspects, assistance in dealing with the media and managing the vast amounts of information often collected in the type of crimes in which offender profiles are often used, such as serial murder and serial rape cases. Furthermore, training is an area where individuals can make large contributions. The Investigative Psychology Unit of the SAPS is one such unit in which the members offer a wide range of services to investigating officers. A description of the roles of the Unit will be given to provide a context within which offender profiling can be placed.

Investigative Psychology Unit (IPU) of the South African Police Service

The IPU has been in existence for approximately seven years and falls under the Serious and Violent Crime Component of the Detective Service of the SAPS. It is a National unit, which can be called upon to provide investigative support throughout the country and has also assisted in the neighbouring country of Swaziland. The unit has interacted with foreign law enforcement agencies such as Scotland Yard on the “Adam” torso murder. The SAPS is one of the few police services in the world that has a full-time unit devoted to Investigative Psychology.

The unit’s mandate is to assist with any psychologically motivated crimes. These crimes include serial murder, serial rape, sexual murder, muti murders, infant rape, spree and mass murders, analysing letters of extortion, blackmail and death threats, and once-off murders under bizarre circumstances. Some of the well-known cases the unit has assisted on are the following: The Wemmerpan Serial Murderer; the case of Moses Sithole, the serial murderer; the rape of 9-month-old baby Tshepang in Upington; the Torso murder in the Thames river, London; the Nasrec serial murderer; the Capital Park serial murder, Samuel Sydino; the Phoenix serial murderer, Sipho Twala; and the Highwayman serial murderer, to name but a few. Recently their services were used in the case of a triple murder of a professor and his companions in Pretoria. The unit also has a co-ordinator in each province to monitor and co-ordinate any investigations that would require the services of the unit.

Staff

The unit currently has three members. The commander of the Unit and the other staff members are:

- Dr Gérard Labuschagne, Senior Superintendent (MA Clinical Psychology,
The Investigative Psychology Unit has a world-renowned, distinguished reputation when it comes to the field of serial murder. Over the past 12 years approximately 52 serial murderers have been active in South Africa, the majority of them having been apprehended and convicted. Numerous serial murderers have been apprehended within six weeks of a task team being assigned to the case, and has received praise from retired FBI agent and serial murder expert, Colonel Robert Ressler for the speed of their successes. This highly successful rate of apprehension of serial murderers is in part due to the training programmes offered by the Investigative Psychology Unit. The unit assists in the training of detectives as part of the Serious and Violent Crimes course, and also offers a specialised three-week course known as the “Psychologically Motivated Crimes Course” for Serious and Violent Crime Unit detectives, Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offences (FCS) Unit detectives and general detectives. This course is a prerequisite for someone to be able to investigate a serial murder case.

Almost 200 detectives have undergone the Psychologically Motivated Crimes Course. This course focuses on investigative psychology issues unique to serial murder investigation, and furthermore focuses on issues related to serial rape, child molestation, sadism, sexual murder, muti murder, and certain paraphilias. Previously known as the “Investigative Psychology Course”, the course was re-named the “Psychologically Motivated Crimes” course in 2002. The focus is on the investigation of such crimes and the practical application of research and experience. In 2002 the Unit also expanded its training function to include courses for crime-scene photographers who often cover areas that include the jurisdiction of numerous detective units that would be investigating murders, and are therefore ideally placed to help link serial crimes. Furthermore, crime-scene photographers are called out to all crimes, not just murder, and can therefore also help link incidents of
sexual burglary, serial rape, etc which can be associated with serial murder.

Research

Besides the investigative support and training roles, the Unit also has a research role and is currently involved in research focusing on muti murder and serial murder. Other research projects include criminal mutilation, foreign object insertion in sexual murder, spree murders and infant rapes. These are aimed at supporting the investigative support function and training function of the Unit.

CONCLUSION

Offender profiling is an activity that has taken on a life of its own, partly due to the popular representation of people providing such a service. This image is a powerful one which has also influenced the academic opinion of offender profiling. South Africa is no exception to such influence. This article has attempted to provide a South African definition for offender profiling as used by the Investigative Psychology Unit of the South African Police Service. This unit is the only Unit in the SAPS with the mandate to provide such a service for investigating officers. Furthermore, it has also given brief definitions as to the other uses of the word “profiling” in the South African context. Mention was made of how a person providing such a service has a greater role to play in investigations, and proposed a model for how such services can be provided by using the Investigative Psychology Unit as one such example. Hopefully, a South African viewpoint can promote discussion and facilitate understanding of this service and the role that forensic professionals can provide in investigations.

REFERENCES


