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Neurodevelopmental and psychosocial risk factors in serial killers and mass murderers

Clare S. Allely ^a  ... Christopher Gillberg ^c 

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Highlights

- Among all the 239 eligible killers, 28.03% (N = 67) had definite, highly probable or possible ASD.
- Among all the 239 eligible killers, 21.34% (N = 51) had had a definite or suspected head injury.
- Out of the 106 killers with ASD and/or head injury 55% (N = 58) had experienced psychosocial stressors.

Abstract

Multiple and serial murders are rare events that have a very profound societal impact. We have conducted a systematic review, following PRISMA guidelines, of both the peer reviewed literature and of journalistic and legal sources regarding mass and serial killings. Our findings tentatively indicate that these extreme forms of violence may be a result of a highly complex interaction of biological, psychological and sociological factors and that, potentially, a significant proportion of mass or serial killers may have had neurodevelopmental disorders such as autism spectrum disorder or head injury. Research into multiple and serial murders is in its infancy: there is a lack of rigorous studies and most of the literature is anecdotal and speculative. Specific future study of the potential role of neurodevelopmental disorders in multiple and serial murders is warranted and, due to the rarity of these events, innovative research techniques may be required.



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Keywords

Autistic Spectrum Disorder; Serial killer; Mass murder; Brain injury; Psychosocial stressors

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