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The stranger you know: predicting victim-offender relationships in sexual homicides by comparing offender behaviors by crime location

Zena Rossouw Eric Beaugard Julien Chopin

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Although crime location is known to matter in sexual homicides, it remains unclear whether predictors of the victim–offender relationship differ between indoor and outdoor settings. This exploratory study aims to examine whether these predictors distinguishing stranger and offenders known to the victim vary across crime scene locations. **Design/methodology/approach:** The sample included 440 solved adult sexual homicides (victim ages 16–65) from France and Canada. Chi-squared tests assessed the relationships between variables and the victim–offender relationship (stranger = 1, known = 0) across three groups: all cases ($n = 440$), indoor cases ($n = 289$) and outdoor cases ($n = 151$). Statistically significant predictors with sufficient case counts were then entered into logistic regression models for further analysis. **Findings:** Strangers were more likely to bring a weapon, have the victim perform fellatio, and remove items from the scene. Offenders known to the victim were more likely to target specific victims and engage in overkill. When analyses were stratified by crime scene location, the indoor model results were similar to the overall findings; however, when the offender moved the victim’s body post crime, the offender was more likely to be someone known to the victim. However, fewer behaviors significantly distinguished stranger and known offenders in outdoor sexual homicides. **Originality/value:** To the best of the authors’ knowledge, this study is the first to examine behaviors predicting the victim–offender relationship separately for indoor and outdoor crime scenes, highlighting the importance of context when interpreting offender behavior.