

## Modus Operandi of a Serial Sex Offender

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**Abstract:** *Background.* The relevance of preventing and solving such crimes is growing, and a special place in this is occupied by forensic research, in particular, the analysis of modus operandi of criminals. The purpose of the study was to investigate the modus operandi of serial sex offenders. *Methods.* The main method of research was criminal profiling based on 50 cases in the Unified State Register of Court Decisions, for which the verdict was passed. *Results.* A number of indicators were investigated, including the characteristic method of attack, the choice of the victim, how the contact with the victim was established, and the method of committing the offence. As a result, it was established that criminals can be divided into two characteristic types according to modus operandi: the first type carries out a sudden attack or pursuit of the victim, is characterised by a violent method of attack, and the crime is often accompanied by bodily harm. The psycho-emotional portrait of attackers of this type is characterised by greater impulsivity and spontaneity of actions. The main motivation for committing a crime is to satisfy a sexual urge. Criminals of the second cluster tend to commit planned attacks, mostly indoors, establish contact with the victim, resort to manipulation and threats. They have a less pronounced passion and tend to plan crimes. The dominant motivation can be either sexual or the satisfaction of sadistic tendencies and dominance. *Conclusions.* This study focuses on the characteristic modus operandi and psychological characteristics of criminals who commit serial sexual offences.

**Keywords:** modus operandi, recidivism, series of crimes, criminal style, socio-psychological profile, criminological characteristics.

### INTRODUCTION

Rape is a type of crime that poses a danger not only to the individual, but also to society and the state in general. Ultimately, the consequences of violating sexual freedom and inviolability are physical and mental trauma to the victim, which can leave an imprint on the rest of their life, especially when it comes to minors. Victims of all forms of sexual violence are very likely to develop acute stress disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and related neurotic conditions, including anxiety, depressive disorders, and substance abuse (Stockman et al., 2023). Crimes against sexual freedom are condemned by all international humanitarian and legal organisations. World Health Organisation (2023) develops its

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own plan to prevent and respond to all types of sexual acts committed against the will of the affected person, including sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment. The organisation focuses specifically on the consequences of violence for victims and survivors.

Efforts to combat sexual violence include legal reforms and support services, but challenges persist in effectively addressing the issue and providing adequate victim support. Penalties for crimes related to violation of sexual freedom and inviolability are provided for in Section IV of the Criminal Code (CC) of Ukraine. According to the definition of Article 153 of the CC of Ukraine, sexual violence is the commission of any violent acts of a sexual nature, not related to penetration into the body of another person, without the victim's voluntary consent. Yurchenko (2020) indicates that there is an upward trend in sexual crimes in Ukraine, especially rape.

Many Ukrainian researchers are working on the problem of forensic and criminological analysis of sexual crimes, and such attention is necessary, because this type of crime is often hidden. Orlovskiy (2020) indicates that the latency of sexual crimes can reach 50%. Thus, it is important to prevent a crime and identify the characteristic pattern of committing a crime that can interrupt a series of crimes. Ukrainian and international researchers agree that the criminal's personality is the main carrier of the reasons for committing a crime. The probability of criminal behaviour is determined by a number of social and biological factors: the presence of certain personality traits, attitudes, the influence of social conditions and other people (Tymoshenko & Shakun, 2021).

Recent research into the personality traits of offenders and their impact on sexual crimes has provided updated insights into this etiological factor. For example, the study by R. D. de Vries et al. (2020) investigates how psychopathic traits are associated with different patterns of sexual offending, highlighting the role of personality disorders in shaping criminal behaviour. The work by A. D. C. Boe et al. (2021) explores the correlation between narcissistic traits and sexual violence, examining how specific personality characteristics contribute to offending patterns. Additionally, the research by P. A. N. Kivisto et al. (2022) focuses on the impact of borderline personality disorder on sexual offending, providing evidence on how emotional instability and interpersonal difficulties influence criminal behaviour. These contemporary studies offer a detailed understanding of how various personality traits affect the likelihood and nature of sexual offenses.

The personality of a criminal has a number of characteristic features that distinguish it, which include a tendency to neglect social norms, violate prohibitions, and be brought to criminal responsibility – these features are too pronounced in a recidivist person (Larionova & Shelkoshveev, 2020). These features underlie the aetiology of criminal behaviour. The individual psychological component can play a major role in sexual crimes. *Modus operandi* is defined as a series of automatisms inherent in the offender and attributed to a certain type.

In criminological and criminal sciences, the term “*modus operandi*” refers to the particular methods or patterns employed by offenders in the commission of their crimes. It encompasses the routine behaviours, techniques, and strategies used by criminals to execute their offenses and evade detection. The *modus operandi* includes details such as the choice of location, method of attack, and methods used to handle or dispose of evidence. Understanding an offender's *modus operandi* is crucial for profiling, as it provides insights into the criminal's behaviour, motivations, and potential future actions. According to the



literature, “modus operandi” is not just a set of actions but reflects the offender’s individual characteristics and operational preferences. It helps in identifying links between different crimes and can assist in predicting future criminal activities. As defined by Canter and Alison (1999), the modus operandi is a “systematic pattern of behaviour” that is “repeated and refined over time”. This approach highlights the modus operandi as a crucial aspect of criminal behaviour analysis, providing valuable information for law enforcement and investigative processes.

Modus operandi is part of the criminological portrait of the criminal and is implemented in the process of committing an offence. The criminological literature uses the phrase “modus operandi” to describe a characteristic way of acting, habits, and behavioural stereotypes that together form a characteristic style of offence. Its study helps in the investigation of already committed offences, and also helps to identify and prevent them among people who have a tendency to exhibit antisocial and violent behaviour. The commission of systemic crimes, which also include serial sexual crimes, implies the presence of a certain personal deformity of the criminal’s personality, which makes their behaviour more stereotypical and predictable (Hvozdiuk and Morhun, 2024).

Despite a fairly large volume of related studies, systematic data summarising various aspects of the forensic, criminological, and psychological profile of serial sex offenders in a single characteristic pattern was still not found. The purpose of this study was to analyse the features of the modus operandi of a serial sex offenders based on the materials of criminal cases. The study includes an analysis of scientific literature and materials from criminal court verdicts. It is hypothesized that surprise attacks in public spaces are more common than premeditated assaults. The choice of crime location is expected to be influenced by the offender’s familiarity with the victim or the location. Motivations for committing sexual offenses are anticipated to vary between direct sexual gratification and a desire to dominate or control the victim. Additionally, it is proposed that victims are often selected based on gender and age, with a significant proportion being strangers to the offenders. These hypotheses will structure the analysis of the criminal case materials.

## METHODS

The main method of the study was criminal profiling of the offender based on the materials of completed criminal cases corresponding to Article IV of the Criminal Code of Ukraine. Some of the cases were classified under the articles of section 2 – criminal offences against human life and health, but they included elements of sexual offences. The materials were based on criminal verdicts in criminal cases contained in the archive of the Unified State Register of Court Decisions, which is freely available. The following search criteria were applied: “form of court decision” – verdict; “category of case” – crimes against sexual freedom and inviolability of the person; “subcategory” – rape (part 2–4), forced satisfaction of sexual need in an unnatural way, coercion to enter into sexual intercourse, corruption of minors, sexual intercourse with a person under the age of majority. The keyword “repeated” was added to the context search to consider the repeated nature of the crime. According to the search parameters, a total of 580 documents were found, of which those completed later than 2014, i.e., within the last 10 years, were randomly selected. In total, the materials of sentences in 50 cases were investigated. At the first stage of the study,



the analysis of socio-demographic characteristics of the profiles of crime subjects according to the case materials was carried out, their level of education, marital status, and the presence of previous criminal records were characterised.

The characteristics of modus operandi included an analysis of criminal and legal, socio-demographic, moral and psychological characteristics. The attributes were grouped as follows:

- analysis of hunting methods – characteristic pattern of attack (Rossmo, 1999), method of establishing contact with the victim (seduction, material incentives, threats or physical violence);
- characteristics of the crime (penetrative or non-penetrative method of satisfying sexual needs), combination with other criminal actions against the victim (infliction of bodily harm, torture, murder);
- choice of crime scene (shared or private location familiar to the victim, perpetrator, or both);
- characteristics of the victim (whether she was previously familiar with the perpetrator, predisposition to a certain type of victim – by gender, age, and the presence of special signs). A total of seven indicators were studied. The Rossmo's typology detection method includes three different types based on the attack method (Beauregard et al., 2007).

For the profiling analysis, Rossmo's classification was selected due to its relevance to geographic profiling, which aligns with the focus of this study on spatial patterns and behaviours of rapists. Rossmo's approach provides a more detailed understanding of spatial behaviour concerning crime scenes and the locations of offenders' residences, which is central to this study. This choice was made because Rossmo's classification offers a nuanced view of spatial dynamics in relation to criminal activities, unlike Groth's classification, which focuses more on the modus operandi of rapists, or Holmes & Holmes' typology, which provides a broader classification of rapists' characteristics without emphasizing spatial behaviour as effectively. This detailed spatial analysis was crucial for our study's focus on understanding the geographical patterns of criminal activities and offender behaviours.

The studied materials (verdicts) did not contain the characteristics of criminals, but it was partially reproduced based on the method of action by modelling. Based on the patterns of actions, psychological profiling was carried out and hypothetical psychological portraits of criminals were compiled. The results of the study for all indications are presented as a percentage of the total number of cases under study. Statistical analysis, namely multiple variance analysis (ANOVA), was used to search for patterns in a combination of different characteristics. The study compared certain groups of the studied signs and their relationship with a particular type of attack. Based on the comparison of various indicators, characteristic patterns of criminal actions were drawn up, based on which conclusions were drawn about the existence of certain patterns of criminal behaviour of serial sexual offenders.

## RESULTS

At the beginning of the study, the distribution of selected cases by the main groups of crimes under the articles of the Criminal Code of Ukraine was calculated as follows: re-



peated rape (part 2, 3, Article 152) – 36%; repeated sexual violence (part 2–4, Article 153) – 30%, repeated forced sexual intercourse (Article 154) – 16%; causing grievous bodily harm, torture accompanied by sexual violence (Article 121) – 14%; murder accompanied by sexual violence (Article 120) – 4%. If a person was found guilty under several articles at once, a more serious offence is indicated.

At the beginning of the study, an analysis of the socio-demographic characteristics of criminals was carried out. All the accused in these cases were male. The majority of the subjects of the cases were single by marital status (72%), 24% of men had children. According to the level of education, the distribution was as follows: 58% – full or incomplete secondary education, 30% – special technical education, 12% – complete or incomplete higher education. By employment: 49% – employed, 35% – unemployed, 16% – students. 26% of the accused persons involved in the study sample had a previous criminal record. Regarding the analysis of the direct commission of a crime, the following forensic aspects of cases were studied: the type of attack, the method of committing the crime, the choice of the crime scene, the characteristics and features of the choice of the victim. Seven separate aspects were investigated in these areas of research.

The analysis of recidivism within the study sample reveals important insights into the nature of repeated sexual offenses. Recidivism, or the tendency for offenders to commit additional crimes after an initial offense, can be understood through two primary lenses: criminal specialization and pronounced sexual disorders. Criminal specialization refers to the phenomenon where offenders repeatedly commit the same type of crime, indicating a focused pattern of criminal behaviour. In this context, recidivism among sexual offenders might suggest that these individuals have developed specific techniques and preferences for their criminal activities, which they continue to refine and repeat. The data indicates that a significant portion of the sample displayed patterns of criminal specialization, with multiple offenses committed in similar circumstances and using similar methods (Schlesinger et al., 2010; Frize et al., 2020).

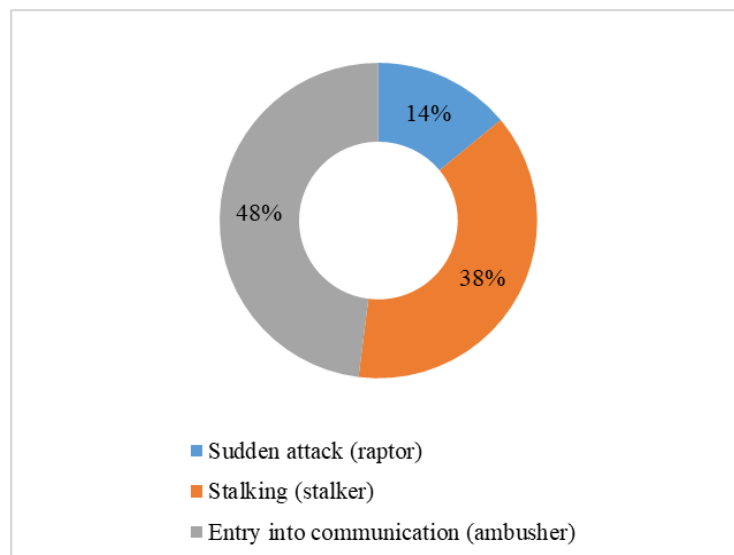
Pronounced sexual disorders involve underlying psychological or sexual disorders that drive individuals to repeatedly engage in sexual offenses. In this case, recidivism may be linked to untreated or severe sexual disorders, such as paraphilias or impulse-control issues, which compel offenders to commit sexual crimes despite legal and psychological interventions (Yusupov and Vaško, 2024). The study's findings also suggest that a subset of recidivist offenders exhibited signs of such disorders, indicating that their criminal behaviour is partly driven by deep-seated psychological issues rather than solely by a specialized criminal focus. The analysis demonstrates that recidivism in sexual offenses is influenced by both criminal specialization and pronounced sexual disorders. This dual perspective highlights the complexity of addressing recidivism and underscores the need for tailored interventions that address both the criminal techniques and the underlying psychological factors contributing to repeated offenses (Ramsoomar et al., 2023; Zappalà et al., 2023).

Rossmo (1999) classifies attack types into several categories. The Hunter actively searches for a victim, planning the attack based on specific criteria like location or appearance. The Poacher exploits opportunities as they arise, targeting victims in public or semi-public spaces without actively seeking them out. Trollers wait for a chance to commit a crime, blending into their surroundings until a suitable opportunity presents itself. Trappers create situations that lure victims into controlled environments, using deceit or manipula-



tion. Ambushers carry out attacks in predetermined locations, waiting for the victim to enter the area and executing the crime with careful planning. Chameleons adapt their methods to various circumstances and victims, demonstrating flexibility in their approach and making their actions harder to predict and prevent. Rossmo's classification provides a framework for understanding the different strategies and patterns of criminal behaviour.

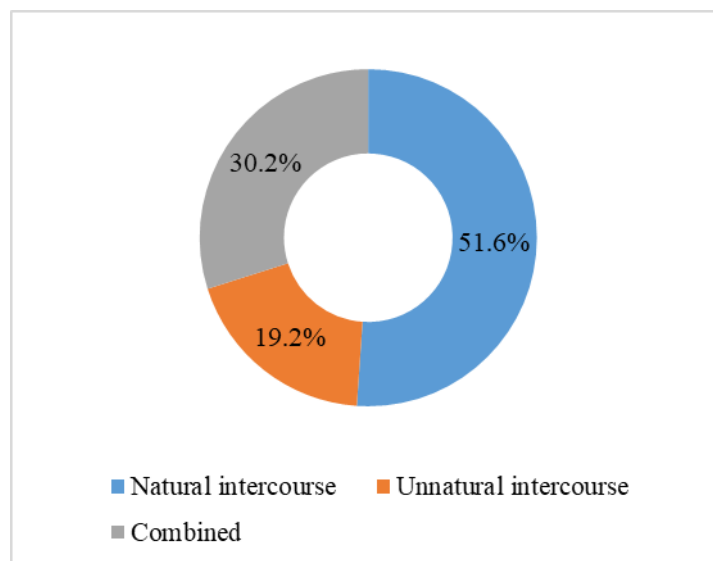
As mentioned above, the classification of attack types by Rossmo (1999) was used to describe the attack process. Ambush attacks are carried out in places where the perpetrator has a great deal of control, such as a place of residence or work. This criminal sometimes hides the bodies of victims, most often on his own territory. This type of attack, which involved contacting and communicating with the victim, was the most frequent (48%). Communication may have been accompanied by actions aimed at misleading or intimidating the victim, which will be discussed below. Often this type of attack is associated with the commission of a crime in the place of residence or work of the latter. Usually, this type of attack contributes to the deanonymisation of the criminal, so to hide the traces of the crime, the attacker intimidates or even kills the victim. Stalking of the victim (38%) was the second most common type of crime, in which the perpetrator chooses a victim and follows them for some time, waiting for the right time to attack. This type is called a stalker, he follows victims or watches them and waits for the right moment to attack. Thus, the sites of attacks, killings, and release of victims are strongly influenced by the space of victims' activities. This type of criminals is characterised by less impulsivity and better ability to plan, usually the criminal series in the case of such attacks can be longer and include more victims. A sudden attack, without coming into contact with the victim, was typical for 14% of the cases under study, this type of criminal is called a raptor. The psychological profile of criminals of this type is characterised by greater impulsiveness and lack of detailed planning of crimes. The success of criminals of this type is explained by the effect of surprise and the shock state of the victim, who cannot remember the circumstances and the attacker after the crime was committed. The data is shown graphically in Figure 1.



Source: Compiled by the author based on Unified State Register of Court Decisions.

**Figure 1.** Frequency of Characteristic Type of Criminal Attack

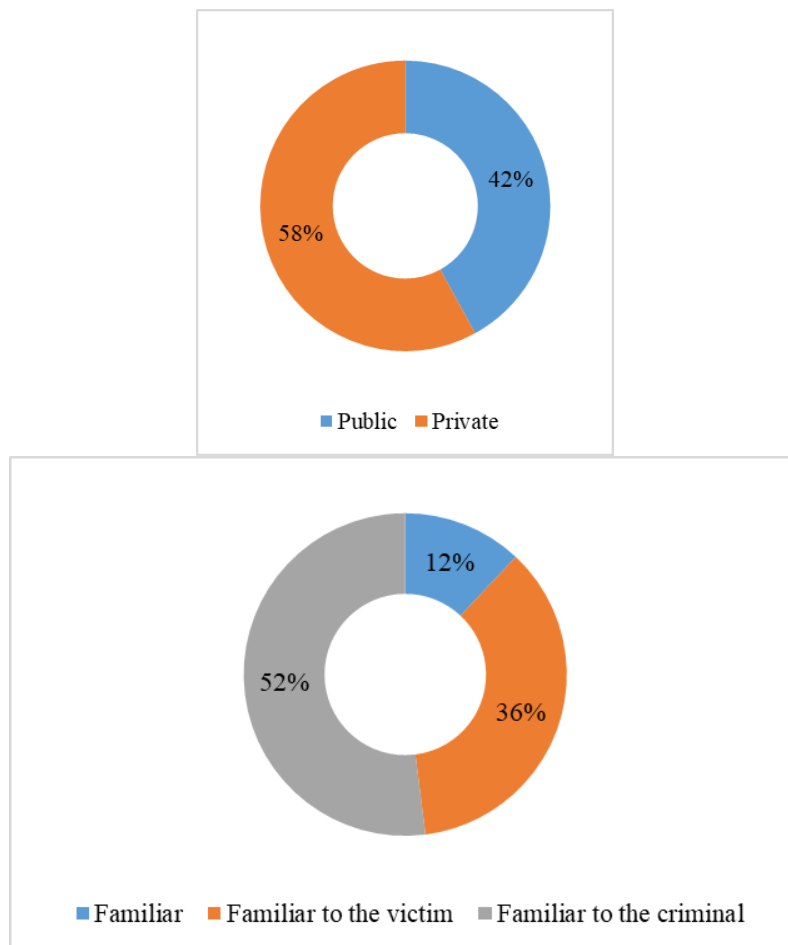
Notably, the amount for all types of crimes is more than 100%, since in some cases, the criminal used several hunting techniques, but this concerned a rather small number – 8%, which indicates the presence of pronounced trends towards a certain type of hunting for victims. The type of crime committed – natural or unnatural – is of great importance for the characterisation of modus operandi. The majority of the cases reviewed were naturally occurring penetrative rape (52%), while 20% were unnatural actions of sexual nature. Another 28% used both methods for the same or different victims (Figure 2). The method in which a violent act is committed can be important for establishing the identity of the perpetrator, especially when there is only a non-penetrative way to satisfy sexual needs, as this may indicate the sexual incapacity of the perpetrator and the presence of problems in the perpetrator's personal life and marital status, which can sometimes narrow the range of suspects.



Source: Compiled by the author based on Unified State Register of Court Decisions.

**Figure 2.** *Frequency of Characteristic Method of Satisfying Sexual Needs by a Criminal*

Studying the places where crimes were committed, it was decided to divide them into two categories: general and private. This division corresponds to common areas and homes of the victim, perpetrator, or persons connected with them in some way, therefore, the category of familiarity with the crime scene was also allocated. The data was combined and shown in Figure 3. As it turned out, criminals chose private homes as a crime scene somewhat more often (58%), while 42% of the crimes investigated were committed in public places. As for the degree of familiarity with the area, it is expected that more often places were chosen with which the criminal was familiar (52%), less often – familiar to the victim (36%), and in some cases familiar to both (12%), the latter category is more related to cases when the victim and the attacker had a common territory of work or residence and were previously familiar, therefore, more typical for intruders of the fundamental type of hunting.

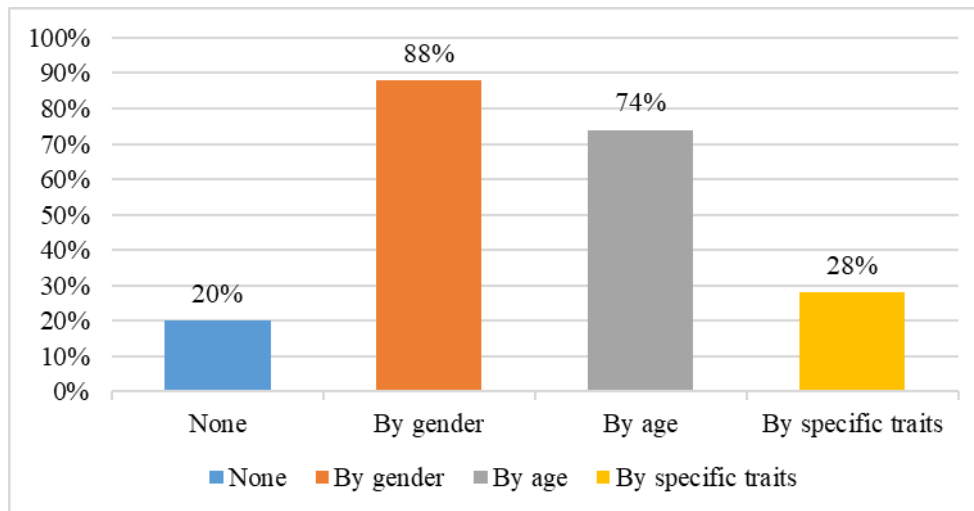


Source: Compiled by the author based on Unified State Register of Court Decisions.

**Figure 3.** *Frequency of Criminal's Propensity to Choose a Particular Crime Scene*

Considering the choice of the victim of an attack, the most obvious is attachment to a certain gender (88%), usually the opposite, although in some cases, there was a homosexual predisposition. Criminal acts against persons of both sexes were committed by 22% of subjects from the sample. All the cases of sexual crimes under study were committed by men, but sometimes women were involved in provoking, inciting, or organising crimes. There was also a pronounced tendency to choose victims by age, 74% of crimes had an attachment to a certain age category, these could be young women, teenagers, and cases of paedophilia. Another 28% had a tendency to choose victims based on the presence of a certain specific trait, often due to their own life experience, or chosen randomly, for example, subsequent victims have some similarity to the first one that started a series of crimes. These groups partially overlap, meaning that the attacker chooses the victim based on several characteristic criteria at once. The summarised data are shown in Figure 4.

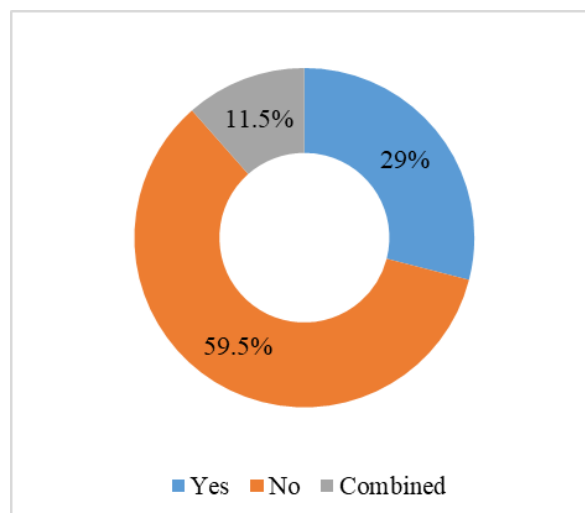




Source: Compiled by the author based on Unified State Register of Court Decisions.

**Figure 4.** *Criminal's Propensity to Choose a Certain Type of Victim*

As for the previous acquaintance with the victim, it was established in 30% of cases, while the majority (60%) met with the victim for the first time. This trend is understandable given the serial nature of the crimes under study, since in the case of violent acts committed against a familiar victim, the criminal is much more likely to be exposed and receive punishment. In cases where violence is committed against a victim familiar to the perpetrator, it is often accompanied by the use of alcohol or other psychoactive substances. In 10% of cases, there is a combination of familiar and unfamiliar victims in one series. Sometimes it turns out that sexual acts against acquaintances and family members took place at the beginning of a series of crimes, but the victims did not report them for fear of reprisal or loss of reputation, in which case they become known only after other crimes are solved (Figure 5).

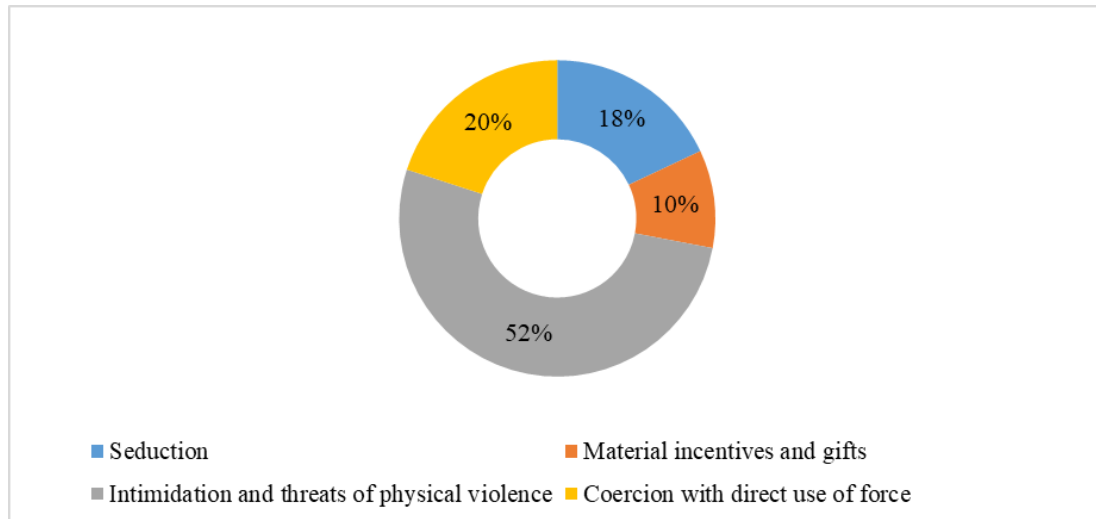


Source: Compiled by the author based on Unified State Register of Court Decisions.

**Figure 5.** *Criminal's Propensity to Commit a Crime with a Familiar/Unfamiliar Victim*



Analysing the method of establishing contact with the victim, the following characteristic methods of influence were identified: seduction (18%), material incentives, promises, and gifts (10%), intimidation and threats of physical violence (52%), and coercion with direct use of force (20%). The data is shown in Figure 6. Notably, most attackers are characterised by a combination of different methods of influencing the victim, so in this case, it is only a question of the preferred style of interaction.

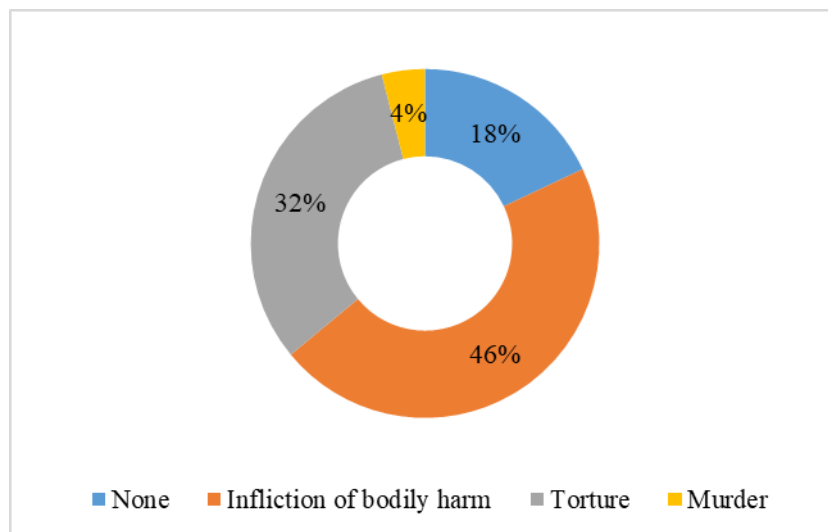


Source: Compiled by the author based on Unified State Register of Court Decisions.

**Figure 6.** *Typical Method of Establishing Contact with the Victim*

As mentioned earlier, sexual acts are not always the primary intent, often rape or other actions of sexual nature are a way to influence the victim, demoralisation, or self-assertion after committing other criminal offences. Regardless of the original intent, sexual crimes are often combined with intentional infliction of bodily harm of varying severity (46%). Most of them were mild to moderate in severity and were associated with overcoming the victim's resistance. Torture occurred in 32% of cases, while 4% of sexual crimes were combined in a series of crimes with murder (Figure 7). If the victim was killed, the criminal intent could be different: the murder could have been planned or committed through an attempt to hide the traces of the crime, respectively, the crimes had different qualifications. Only 18% of the cases did not contain signs of other crimes.





Source: Compiled by the author based on Unified State Register of Court Decisions.

**Figure 7.** *Combination of Crimes with Other Types of Violence*

The actions described above are aggravating circumstances, especially given the repeated nature of actions in the cases under study. In addition, among the aggravating circumstances, the use of alcohol, narcotic and psychoactive substances stand out, with 22% of such cases identified. Often, the victim and the rapist consumed alcoholic beverages together, after which a sexual offence occurred. Notably, the proportion of crimes committed under the influence of alcohol is significantly higher in isolated cases of sexual crimes, but this is outside the scope of this study. Statistical analysis of the relationship between the action patterns showed the presence of a statistically significant relationship between some behavioural categories. In particular, the raptor (sudden) and stalker (pursuing) attack styles tend to commit attacks in public places (in open areas, parks, courtyards, or house entrances) – 46%. To subdue the victim, they use threats and physical force. Stalkers were most often inclined to choose a victim according to a certain type – age, specific features. The ambushers (the largest proportion), who usually come into contact with the victim, mostly commit attacks in private places (homes), and the victim often has a prior acquaintance with the attacker. Most often, the ambusher uses seduction or material incentives at the initial stage of acquaintance with the victim and threats and coercion later. Among the cases under study, the most serious consequences for the victim (grievous bodily harm and murder) were obtained in sudden attacks, and in crimes committed by ambushers, in particular committed in the territory familiar to the criminal, where he felt impunity or disposed of the victim in order to destroy evidence. This type accounted for 42% of crimes. Some of the crimes (12%) had signs of both types, which could alternate with each other. No significant relationships were found between the method of satisfying sexual needs and other behavioural patterns.

The six identified styles of behaviour in criminal activities represent various methods and patterns used by offenders (Beauregard et al., 2023). Each style reveals distinct approaches and motivations behind criminal actions, offering important insights into the strategies and techniques employed by criminals:

- *Surprise Attack*: This style involves offenders who strike suddenly and unexpectedly, often in public spaces. The attack is characterized by a high degree of spontaneity and impulsivity. Offenders using this method typically employ physical force to subdue their victims, and the crimes are often carried out quickly, without prior planning or premeditation.
- *Stalking*: Offenders employing a stalking approach engage in prolonged and targeted surveillance of their victims before committing the crime. This method involves a detailed process of observing and tracking the victim's routines and habits, allowing the offender to plan the attack meticulously. Stalking can involve various forms of harassment and can occur over an extended period before the actual crime.
- *Ambush*: In this style, the offender sets up a premeditated trap to capture or assault the victim. This approach is characterized by careful planning and preparation, with the offender selecting a specific location and time to maximize the likelihood of successfully executing the crime. The ambush often involves elements of deception or manipulation to lure the victim into the trap.
- *Seduction*: Offenders using the seduction style employ charm, persuasion, or deceit to gain the victim's trust or compliance. This method often involves creating a false sense of security or establishing a seemingly benign relationship with the victim. The goal is to manipulate the victim into a vulnerable position where the crime can be committed with minimal resistance.
- *Intimidation*: This style is characterized by the use of threats, coercion, or psychological pressure to control the victim. Offenders using intimidation aim to instil fear in the victim, making them comply with the offender's demands or acquiesce to the criminal act. Intimidation can involve verbal threats, displaying weapons, or other forms of psychological manipulation.
- *Opportunistic*: Offenders employing an opportunistic approach commit crimes based on immediate availability and chance encounters. This style is marked by a lack of premeditation and planning. The offender seizes the opportunity presented by the circumstances, such as an unlocked door or a moment of vulnerability, to commit the crime.

Summarising the analysed data, the existence of different patterns of modus operandi of serial sexual offenders can be assumed. Some of them tend to commit sudden attacks or choose the victim spontaneously, without coming into contact. They are characterised by greater spontaneity of actions and use physical force more frequently. From a psychological standpoint, these criminals are more impulsive and aggressive, prone to uncontrolled affect, and the main motivation for committing a crime is the desire to satisfy sexual needs. When making charges, they are more likely to make a sincere confession. Another type is characterised by longer contact with the victim, planning a crime, manipulative behaviour towards the victim, often victims of such attacks do not seek help out of fear and intimidation, and committing a crime in a private room reduces the likelihood of being exposed. They are less likely to engage in affective behaviour and use torture and physical violence to subdue the victim. The psychological-emotional state of these criminals at the time of committing a crime is characterised by greater control. The motivation to commit a sexual crime is both the direct desire to satisfy sexual need, and the satisfaction of sadistic tendencies to dominance. The same group includes cases of domestic sexual violence that victims conceal.



This study acknowledges several limitations related to the use of recorded data and its implications for profiling accuracy. The primary limitation stems from the reliance on materials from the Unified State Register of Court Decisions, which provides a substantial but incomplete dataset. The available case materials often contain incomplete or insufficient details about the offenders' modus operandi, which can affect the depth of profiling, particularly in understanding the nuances of how perpetrators approach and execute their crimes. Additionally, certain critical details that could enhance profiling accuracy may be missing from the records. For instance, information about specific methods used to coerce or manipulate victims, or the precise nature of interactions between offenders and victims, may not be fully documented. Such omissions can limit the ability to develop a complete behavioural profile of offenders.

The data derived from court decisions may reflect only those aspects of the crimes deemed significant by the judicial system, potentially overlooking other relevant factors. This can impact the overall accuracy of the profiling process, as the available data might not fully represent the complexity of each case. These limitations highlight the need for caution when interpreting the results of this study. While the findings provide valuable insights into offender behaviours and spatial patterns, they are constrained by the quality and completeness of the recorded data.

## DISCUSSION

In the above study, a number of features related to the identity of serial sex offenders and the features of their modus operandi were investigated. An attempt was made to reproduce socio-demographic, criminological, moral and psychological characteristics based on the materials of criminal cases. Based on the materials under study, it was found that the most common type of serial sex offender is an unmarried man, childless, with a general or special secondary education. He is often unemployed and has a previous criminal record. According to the data provided by Shalunova (2012), 99% of those convicted of sexual crimes are male, unmarried, with secondary education, the share of unemployed is 57.4% (35% in this study). Larionova and Shelkoshveev (2020) provide data from a survey of paedophile criminals, of whom 55% were married, most reported being employed or self-employed, 60% had a general secondary education, and 40% had a special secondary education. Thus, the data on the socio-psychological profile in these studies are quite similar. Basto et al. (2021) present the results of an analysis of adolescent sexual crimes in Brazil. The researchers note that the variety of profiles of juvenile delinquents is quite large, but the greatest concern is that crimes committed during this period usually tend to recur at a more mature age, thus, there is a tendency to create a serial criminal. Among the main factors influencing the commission of the first crime, the researchers highlight the low socio-economic level of families. Based on the materials of this study, it was not possible to analyse the causes of deviant behaviour, but the repeated nature of crimes certainly indicates the presence of character-related deformities. In the study by Larionova and Shelkoshveev (2020), half of sex offenders reported having a problem in their parents' family, while the rest did not confirm this. Some researchers, however, suggest that violent crimes do not differ much from other criminal offences in terms of the beginning and dynamics of the criminal career of offenders (Robert et al., 2023; Ovsianiuk, 2024).



The structure of crimes in the study sample was as follows: rape – 36%; sexual violence (part 2–4, Article 153) – 30%; coercion to engage in sexual intercourse – 16%; infliction of grievous bodily harm, torture accompanied by sexual violence – 14%; murder accompanied by sexual violence – 4%. Yakymova (2014) cites the following statistics of serial sexual crimes (registered in 2013): rape – 42%, forced satisfaction of sexual urge in an unnatural method – 27.6%. The researcher also notes that the share of premeditated murders combined with sexual violence is insignificant. Since the case materials used in the current study date back to after 2014, despite the small sample size, it is obvious that the ratio of types of crimes has similar indicators, which suggests that the dynamics remain in this period of time. The combination with other types of crimes (infliction of bodily harm, torture, murder) accounted for 90% of cases under study. These data coincide with the results provided by Shalhunova (2012) – 92%. For the most part, sexual crimes in the sample were the primary motive for committing the crime, most injuries, judging by the case materials, were the result of an attempt to subdue and demoralise the victim. Deslauriers-Varin and Beauregard (2014) provide data that there are 2 types of serial sex offenders: those who specialise in sexual crimes and those who commit various types of crimes. Heiler et al. (2023) conducted an assessment of the criminal specialisation of criminals, covering 580 results of anonymous criminal cases. It was found that sexual crimes have a very high degree of specialisation, that is, criminals tend to re-commit this type of crime. This indicates the presence of a pronounced sexual disorder in this type of violator. Based on the data provided in the study, it can be assumed that the presented sample rather confirms the model of specialisation, although combined with other types of violent crimes.

Along with the mental state, it is important to investigate the intelligence level of serial sex offenders. Brothers and Suchi (2023) cite the results of a comparison of cognitive tests of sexual and non-sexual offenders, concluding that the former have a lack of executive brain function, manifestations of this are slower information processing, fluctuations in performance, poor concentration. The consequence is exhaustion after behavioural inhibition, which makes the respondent prone to impulsive actions. Larionova and Shelkoshveev (2020) also cite the results of the Wexler test for intellectual development and general awareness, and conclude that the serial sexual crimes of the sample under study had below-average levels of general intelligence and vocabulary. Due to the lack of comprehensive information about the identity of the criminal, within the framework of this study, it was not possible to investigate the intellectual indicators of criminals, so it is possible to rely only on data on education – among the cases under study, 12% of the defendants had higher education, the rest had secondary or special education. Cooley (2022) provides a study of sex offenders who commit crime again or do not reoffend. The researcher points out that the majority of criminals (79.3%) do not commit a second offence, according to self-reports, they experience a cognitive reevaluation of their actions and do not associate the crime with their personality, but only with temporary circumstances. In contrast, 20.7% of sex offenders with previous criminal experience repeat their crime. It is obvious that the identity of the offender plays a role in the basis of these two types of offences.

The typology of attack strategies used in the study belongs to Rossmo. All three types of criminals identified by the researcher were found in the study sample: surprise attacks



characteristic of a raptor who attacks his victims almost immediately upon meeting them (18%), a stalker (32%) and an ambusher who make prepared attacks when making contact (46%). Beauregard et al. (2007) conducted a detailed study of the strategies of serial sex offenders on 72 convicts from the United States of America, which was also based on the above typology, and combined with other characteristic features of behaviour, they distinguish six criminal behavioural styles. The researchers also found that the choice of shared or private locations occurs with almost the same probability, which is consistent with the results obtained in this study. The most common method of influencing the victim was intimidation and threats of physical violence (52%), which could be combined with the use of force (20%). Intimidation of victims of violence is one of the main factors leading to high latency of sexual crimes. According to Orlovsky (2020), the number of hidden sexual crimes that victims do not report reaches 50%. Kipane (2018) provides data for Latvia that is even higher, with an estimated 85% of female victims of violence not reporting to law enforcement. Moreover, the researcher cites the data obtained during a study in Belarus, according to which 67% of victims refuse to testify as a result of pressure from a criminal. Thus, intimidation and psychological pressure on the victim should be considered a characteristic feature of sex offenders, allowing them to commit repeated offences.

Thus, based on the analysis of the relationship of different patterns with each other, two relatively limited styles of strategies of sex offenders were identified: the first is characterised by a sudden attack with or without harassment, the use of physical force, and the predominant motivation to satisfy sexual needs. The second one is characterised by planning a crime, using manipulations and threats, and choosing private premises as a crime scene. Some criminals combined different types of strategies. Beauregard et al. (2007) describe 6 strategies based on Rossmo's typology of hunting strategies and offenders, based on an analysis of violent strategies. The most common of these are a raptor or stalker who hunt in the open air and make a surprise attack (22.16%); an ambusher who chooses victims in certain familiar locations (26.87%), and an ambusher who commits an attack in the victim's territory (16.34%), the rest are other combinations of crimes. These types of strategies are similar to those found in the current study. Ramirez et al. (2022), when comparing samples of serial and one-time rapists, concluded that there are differences in their modus operandi that have a fairly high predictive value. Serial criminals have more defiant behaviour, commit crimes during daylight hours and in crowded places, and use less violence to control the victim. This is due to greater confidence and criminal skill, which allows them to avoid punishment for a while. In the presented study, threats (52%) were the most characteristic way to come into contact with the victim, while direct physical coercion was immediately used by 20% of criminals. In addition, the majority of convicts inflicted bodily harm of mild and moderate severity as a result of committing a crime (46% overall), while fewer used torture (32%).

Thus, the study identified a number of characteristic behavioural patterns that tend to one of the two strategies for committing sexual crimes. The research needs to be continued, in particular, an in-depth study of the personality of criminals is of great interest, which requires interviews directly with convicts. This can help to understand better the motivation for actions, provide a better model and predict relevant criminal patterns.



## CONCLUSIONS

According to the results of the study, the main groups of crimes in the field of sexual violence are identified, including repeated rape, repeated sexual violence, and coercion to enter into a sexual intercourse. Socio-demographic analysis showed that the majority of criminals were male, unmarried, with basic general secondary or special technical education, and a significant part were unemployed. 26% of the accused had a previous criminal record.

When analysing the process of committing a crime, seven separate aspects were examined, which related to the type of attack, the method of committing the crime, the choice of the crime scene and the victim. The analysis reveals that the individuals involved in the criminal cases exhibit three attack types: those who favour surprise attacks, those who engage in stalking, and those who prepare ambushes. The most frequent method for satisfying sexual needs was through natural means. The analysis indicates that criminals equally selected both public and private locations familiar to either the victim or the perpetrator. Attackers most commonly targeted victims based on gender and age. In approximately 60% of the cases, the victims were strangers to the offenders, while in about 30% of the cases, the victims had some form of acquaintance with the perpetrator. This suggests that the choice of crime location and victim characteristics play significant roles in the offenders' decision-making processes. The most common method of coercion of the victim is the use of force and threats, which was often accompanied by the infliction of bodily injuries of varying degrees of severity. Two distinct crime patterns emerge: the first is a surprise attack, often occurring in public places, where physical force is used to quickly subdue the victim in an impulsive and spontaneous manner. The second pattern involves initial contact with the victim, frequently characterized by seduction, deception, or intimidation before the crime is committed. This type of crime involves more deliberate planning and less impulsive actions.

The study focuses on the features of the modus operandi of serial criminals, established based on criminal cases. Further criminological research, including interviews with those convicted of similar crimes, is required to clarify and deepen the understanding of the typical modus operandi and motivation for the crimes.

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