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Book Reviews: Technical Books Section

...HEARTILY RECOMMENDED TO ALL PROFESSIONALS ...This is an honest and sincere attempt at analyzing a problem that has not had much work done on it, leave alone anything written about it. This book tries to look at one of the most difficult aspect of human behavior and does a neat job at that. In spite of all the limitations of the study, the author has done a pretty decent job of bringing out the basic psychology of the criminal and the ways of how best that can be tackled...

Juvenile Sexual Homicide, by Wade C. Myers. Hardcover, 10.0 x 7.7 x 0.6".
Academic Press, Harcourt Place, 32 Jamestown Road, London NW1 7BY, UK. Publication Date 2002. 300 pages, ISBN 0125123035. Price £53.95

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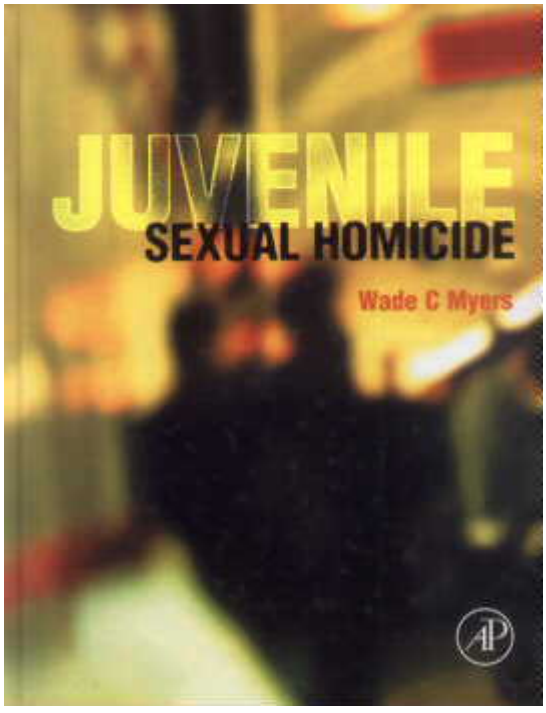

Sexual assault is the worst form of injury that can be inflicted on a female. That is not only due to the physical nature of the crime but the psychological and social trauma that the lady has to undergo because of such assault. The reason why people indulge in such assaults is not clearly

understood. It is even more intriguing when a juvenile does such an act. Why did he do that? What was going through his mind when he did that? Did he do it after complete planning or in a fit of rage? Was the crime preventable? Will he do it again if he gets a chance? These and other such questions are the ones that the authors have tried to answer in this book. Such questions are some of the most difficult questions to answer as they involve the interpretation of the human psychology, that too of a person who has every reason in the world to conceal the facts. So the author should be congratulated for even thinking about such an enterprise and going on to complete it successfully.

The biggest quality that a person can have is to know his shortcomings, accept them and try to rectify them. This is also the quality of the book. The author has not tried to hide the fact that the sample size was small and not representative of the population at large. Instead he has repeatedly mentioned about this fact and said that further research is needed to apply the findings to the whole population. He has mentioned this fact both at the start of the book and in almost all the chapters indicating that he is aware of the problems inherent in a research project in which the sample size is going to be small.

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The book has been written in an easy and free flow language making it easy to understand. The written data has been adequately supplemented by the inclusion of tables and graphs to help in better understanding of the subject. Also included are the photographs found near the perpetrator of crime or drawn by them. That goes a long way in helping to understand what goes in the mind of a person who has committed such a crime. All these features make the book more presentable, readable and understandable.

The case history described in chapter 3 deserves special mention. The author has mentioned that this chapter has been taken as a representative of the psychology of an adult sexual murderer. He has further gone on to describe the crime, the psychology of that person and his feelings at the time of incident and later. He has also mentioned how he was destined to be a sadistic and criminal due to both the intra uterine and childhood experiences, and also those in his early adulthood. Although one can say that it is a good example that has been cited and explained, a better option, in our view, could have been to give an example of a juvenile sexual murderer. A better option could have been to give two examples, one similar to the one that has been described and the other of a person who did not have such a troubled past and still went on to be a sadistic murderer. That could have given a better view of the psychology of such criminals. This was a typical case of a person going on to be a criminal because of the circumstances. Another one or two examples of people who went on to become criminals in spite of not having such a troubled past could have made a better understanding of the psychology of such criminals.

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In the discussion section of chapter 7, the author has mentioned about the various limitations of the study. That is an important aspect of the book as it gives an idea about the way the future research has to take. It gives the direction to the future researchers on how to plan further studies and minimize these limitations. It will also help in improving the methods that can help in understanding these criminals and help in preventing further crimes.

The PCL-R and SNAP score have been described in detail. But what has been quite intriguing is that the criminals for whom these scales have been developed do not fit into these scales. Although these scales have been developed to get an insight into the minds of the criminals, these findings suggest that they are not as good as they are made to be. In fact the findings of the authors suggest that to get a high score on these scales (an indication of criminal behavior) one has to be somewhat totally out of this world. This means that these scales should be used with caution and better scales should be developed, a finding that has been accepted by the author also.

There has been a use of a lot of statistics in the book. This is to be expected as it is based on the findings of a study. Also there can't be a study without statistics. So the inclusion of all those statistical figures is both necessary and justified. But there is a minor problem with that. The problem is that going through all those figures makes one feel whether he is reading a book on homicide or statistics. We being already aware of the uses and requirements of figures could understand the value of them all. But some other people may not be as accommodating and understanding. So for them there could have been a better method of presenting these figures. That could have included the use of graphs, bar charts and other forms of pictorial depiction, the biggest advantage of which being that the person can flip through it if he is not interested in reading it. This minor adjustment may have gone a long way in improving the overall outlook of the book.

In the end we would like to say that this is an honest and sincere attempt at analyzing a problem that has not had much work done on it, leave alone anything written about it. This book tries to look at one of the most difficult aspect of human behavior and does a neat job at that. In spite of all the limitations of the study, the most notable of which being the small sample size, the author has done a pretty decent job of bringing out the basic psychology of the criminal and the ways of how best that can be tackled. The book is heartily recommended to all professionals interested in this fascinating area of human behavior.

-Puneet Setia[1] and Avneesh Gupta[2]

1. Department of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology,
Postgraduate Institute Of Medical Education And Research (PGIMER),
Chandigarh
India

2. Department of Pathology
Metro Health Medical Center
Cleveland, OH
USA



Dr. Puneet Setia is working as a senior resident in the department of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology at Postgraduate Institute Of Medical Education And Research (PGIMER), Chandigarh. He did his graduation from Maulana Azad Medical College (MAMC), New Delhi. His research interests include Forensic Radiology, especially the use of radiology in demonstrating coronary narrowing at the post-mortem examination. He is associated with Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology as a writer and book reviewer. He can be contacted at puneetsetia@rediffmail.com



Dr. Avneesh Gupta qualified as a forensic pathologist from India with honors and is now working at the Department of Pathology, Metro Health Medical Center, Cleveland, Ohio. He has to his credit a number of publications in leading journals around the world. His landmark thesis on "Cranial Cerebral Damage In Fatal Road Traffic Accidents With Special Reference to Circle Of Willis" can be accessed by clicking here. He is associated with Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology as a journal associate, writer and book reviewer. He can be contacted at avneeshgupta2000@yahoo.com. During his spare time, he enjoys meeting friends and traveling.

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