



## Serial Murderers' Spatial Decisions: Factors that Influence Crime Location Choice

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### Summary

This study uses a sample of German Serial Murderers from 1929 to 1999. Researchers examine various factors that they believe will influence the home-to-crime distance. The study analyzes how the age of the serial murderer, duration of the killing series, marital status of the murderer, IQ of the murderer, motives, and modes of transportation affect the distance between a serial murderer's home and the location that police discover the victim's body. The study finds that although serial murderers generally have a small home-to-crime distance, this distance can be affected based on the IQ, age, and mode of transportation of the serial murderer.

### Methods

This study included a sample of 53 German serial murderers who committed a total of 247 murders between 1929 and 1999. All information on these serial murderers was gathered directly from the police. Both the location of the murderer's residence during the killings and the location of each body were recorded. Body recovery sites were sequentially marked. The duration of the killing series, the age of the serial murderer at the time of his first and last killings, IQ scores, marital status, motives, and modes of transportation were recorded.

### Results

The study found overall that victims were usually recovered a small distance from the murderer's home with a large majority being discovered within 30 kilometers of the murderer's home. Significant findings were found in the various factors researched. They found that as the age of the murderer increased, the home-to-crime distance decreased. Additionally, the home-to-crime distance also increased as the IQ of the murderer increased. There was also a difference in the home-to-crime distance between the three modes of transportation (car, public transportation, and walking). There were no significant findings based on series chronology, marital status, employment status, or motive types.

### Implications

Because serial murderers commit crimes near their homes, researchers on this study claim that geographic profiling is a useful tool to use while investigating serial murders. They conclude that if investigators know the murderer's age, IQ, or mode of transportation they can draw meaningful conclusions about the home location of the serial murderer. This research also debunks the idea that first crime scenes are significant in terms of spatial analysis.

For more information, see Snook, B., Cullen, R. M., Mokros, A., & Harbort, S. (2005). Serial murderers' spatial decisions: Factors that influence crime location choice. *Journal of Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling*, 2(3), 147-164.