

The Action System Model: A Typology of Spanish Homicides

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Abstract

The Action System model offers a scientific foundation to the differentiation and classification of crimes, based on behavioral indicators, allowing the establishment of relationships between the actions carried out by the offender on the crime scene and their characteristics. Although it was originally developed for application to fires, its utility has been tested in distinct criminal typologies, with few studies having considered homicides. The objective of this study was to examine the effectiveness and validity of the Action System model to differentiate thematically between the structure of the homicides and to create a typology of simple homicides in Spain, based on the relationships between the modus operandi, characteristics of the victims and characteristics of the offenders. The sample consisted of 448 homicides. Four homicide typologies were identified: Expressive, Adaptive, Integrative and Conservative, which represent 87.5% of the studied cases. Expressive homicides are impulsive, with offenders having criminal records and previously knowing their victims. Adaptive homicides are linked to robberies and sexual aggressions, in which the victim and offender are strangers. Integrative homicides take place in the family environment, specifically female offenders and femicides. Conservative homicides are very well planned, highlighting the presence of post mortem actions. The findings of this work suggest that the Action System model is a useful theoretical framework for the identification of variations in criminal behavior and understanding of the psychological processes underlying the homicides. These results have practical implications in the academic setting, since they offer a global perspective as to how simple homicides in Spain may be differentiated, also within the framework of criminal profiling, specifically, suspect prioritization.

Author keywords

action system

cluster analysis

crime scene behavior

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investigative psychology

multidimensional scaling