Criminal Profiling and its Use in Crime Solving. Applicable for Malta?

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Abstract:

The aim of this study was to set forth an impartial presentation of the academic situation that prevails in the field of criminology on the subject of criminal profiling. Through an analysis discussion, and interpretation of the main objective of this study research inquiry which is ‘Criminal profiling and its use in crime solving’, this study will explore on the arguments pertaining to the claim of whether or not, criminal profiling can be of assistance in crime solving. Since there is dearth of exploration of this subject in the Maltese context, some recommendations will be suggested. Desk-based approach was used as for this research study. The utilised literature is the work of different authoritative authors involved in the study of criminal profiling and the result of their extensive research and experience in the same field of study. By carrying out a critical analysis, the study discusses and presents the existing disparity that prevails on the argument regards the validity, utility, and effectiveness of using criminal profiling techniques in crime investigations. Moreover, the research opines on the fact that criminal profiling is a valuable investigative tool, that needs to be utilised in conjunction with other valid scientific investigative methods so as to increase the reliability and success rate of crime solving and offender apprehension. For this reason, it is recommended that more studies are required on this topic from a Maltese perspective.

Keywords: Criminal Profiling, Profiling techniques, Law enforcement, Crime solving, Offender apprehension, Criminal investigation.

Introduction

As an area of criminological study, criminal profiling has been drawing academic and practitioner attention for the past decades. Criminal profiling has presented itself as a subject of much heated scholarly debate, consumed by antagonism and argumentative opposition over its effectiveness, validity, and utility vis-à-vis its practices or approaches when implemented by law enforcement agencies as part of their criminal investigative repertory.
comes to criminal profiling, its assistance to law enforcement, and its future ahead.

Methodology
According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2001, p. 270), research design is often based on the notion of “fitness for purpose”, but still, one has to identify and address several issues to ensure that the investigation is sustainable, practicable, and feasible. The main process for data collection in this study was ‘desk research’. Desk research is a study that focuses on using data or information that can be retrieved from previous studies, articles, reports, or scholarly reviews that were published under different formats in academic journals and books.

Desk research is a type of exploration through which the researcher(s) collects and utilises already existing data. Hence “secondary data is every dataset not obtained by the author, or the analysis of data gathered by someone else” (Martins, Cunha, & Serra, 2018, p. 1). As Vartanian claimed, there are valid arguments for using desk research and secondary data amongst which the researcher gains “access to large amounts of information” while covering “a broad range of individuals or other entities” (2011, p. 13).

The Research Questions
After having revised the utilised secondary data, a set of research questions were identified in an attempt to understand, analyse, and discuss the aims of this study. The main research questions are:

1. What is criminal profiling within the field of criminology and crime solving?
2. Who is the profiler?
3. Which are the prevalent criminal profiling techniques or methodologies?
4. Can criminal profiling be of assistance in crime solving?

These research questions will help to keep within the context of this study.

Desk Research and Secondary Data
With the rapid growth of technology and the internet, an endless amount of data covering almost any imaginable topic in question has become easily accessible and available to anyone (Johnston, 2014). Such is the case for desk-based research that makes use of secondary data which can be applied to give sense to other issues other than those the original data was collected for. Such use of desk-based research and the application of secondary data, gives the possibility for subsequent researchers to save precious time which is often scarce and limited. Moreover, desk research and the use of secondary data open the doorway to a vast amount of available research data which is the fruit of various researchers.

Instead of painstakingly collecting first-hand information and scrupulously processing the raw data itself, the researcher would be able to channel and focus such energy on carrying out a meticulous, in-depth analysis of the research question at hand. Without such secondary data, the exploration itself would create a financial strain on the researcher and obviously would take much more time to prepare and finally complete. Furthermore, Johnston states that the “utilisation of this existing data provides a viable option for researchers who may have limited time and resources” (2014, p. 619)

Validity and Reliability of Desk Research and Secondary Data
There exists a multitude of methods of how to conduct the necessary research projects. Certainly, the main method is for an academic to seek the original raw data to answer a research question.

Irgens and McGillivray (2021) point out that this is not always the case especially when the researchers cannot collect their own data for various reasons such as difficulty in accessing the specific data niche of interest, monetary restraints or due to the sensitive nature of the data itself. Hence, “in situations like these, researchers may choose to conduct a research project using previously collected data” (Irgens & McGillivray, 2021, p. 18). Moreover, for
explicit reasons, researchers may rely on carrying out a desk research exploration since the data itself is already out there. All this secondary data eases the fatigue on the researcher's part to harvest it in the first place, while alleviating the researcher from the time-consuming burden of obtaining permissions from a participating, sampled population (Irgens & McGillivray, 2021). Thus, when considering these assertions and the nature of the study being carried forward, the best way forward was to conduct this research was by adopting the desk research approach.

**Why desk research for this study?**

Such a choice was due to the fact that there is an absence of the much-needed Maltese related criminal profiling literature and research. Subsequently, such a lack of research within the Maltese criminological scenario has generated a vacuum of precious analogous empirical data which could have supported the analysis of this study. In addition, such scarcity of criminal profiling research in Malta is resultant of the fact that such a field of study within the Maltese criminological scenario is still in its infancy. Hence, one such limitation of this exploration was that one could not create a compare and contrast discussion on the validity of criminal profiling within the Maltese law enforcement scene.

**Literature Review**

Within the last half century, since the field of criminal profiling was shaped, it has attracted a substantial amount of interest from researchers and practitioners alike (Douglas, Ressler, Burgess, & Hartman, 1986; Woodhams & Bennell, 2011; Fox & Farrington, 2018). Such interest developed into an abundance of literature in the form of books or book chapters, journal articles, reports and magazine articles that discussed the various aspects of criminal profiling (Dowden, Bennell, & Bloomfield, 2007), such as its efficacy in offender apprehension, the much-anticipated expectations and to a certain degree, its limitations too (Canter, 2003; Gregory, 2005; Davies & Woodhams, 2019).

**Criminal Profiling - The Beginning**

When tracing back the roots of criminal profiling application in criminal investigation, it can be credited to Thomas Bond, a British specialist in forensic medicine. In 1888, he “was the first to offer speculations about the psychology of the offender” (Hicks & Sales, 2006, p. 6) in the Whitechapel serial murders committed by the infamous serial killer nicknamed Jack the Ripper. However, it was not until 1956, under the American psychiatrist James A. Brussel, that the first successful profile of an offender was created for the New York police department in their Mad Bomber investigations (Hicks & Sales, 2006, p. 8).

In spite of previous attempts in applying profiling to crime investigation, it was during the 1970’s that the term criminal profiling was first coined, and its true potential became recognised. The Behavioural Science Unit (BSU) was developed under the auspice of the American Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agency in order to counteract and fight the ever-escalating number of serial murders in America. Through their Crime Classification Manual (1992), the FBI grouped serial murderers into typologies (Douglas et al., 2006) which depended on personality, demographics, and crime scene characteristics (Douglas et al., 1986) so as to create offender profiles by which they could define their investigative methodology which later became known as Criminal Investigative Analysis. In practice, as conducted by the FBI, profiling is applied in the investigation, apprehension, and prosecution phases of the criminal justice system.

Hence it is used to predict personality characteristics of an unknown offender and whether or not there exists a link between any other unsolved crimes likely committed by the same perpetrator, which could be indicative of an escalation in crime. Profiling is also employed to predict and determine where to look for an unknown culprit so as to be captured and later prosecuted with the aid of investigative expertise which is based on forensic evidence. Since its
early beginning, criminal investigative analysis has become an encompassing term which groups together a myriad of services supported by the FBI to assist law enforcement departments in their investigative processes (Scherer & Jarvis, 2017).

Criminal Profiling - Definition

Different definitions have been put forward by various academics belonging to the realm of criminology (Geberth 1981; Rossi, 1982; Palermo & Kocsis, 2005; Patherick, 2013). Generally, it is accepted that criminal profiling is understood to be a collection of techniques and skills employed by the respective investigating officers to narrow down the pool of suspects in order to apprehend the likely perpetrators of a crime (Fox & Farrington, 2018). According to Douglas et al. (1986), the purpose of criminal profiling is not to pinpoint to the particular identity of a criminal but rather to focus on the personality and behavioural characteristics of the type of person who would have likely committed the crime.

Rossi (1982) characterised criminal profiling as a series or collection of investigative clues or as an intelligent pursue in an attempt to shed light on possible, particular details that could lead to a specific type of suspects who have committed the same type of crime. On the same line of thought, Geberth (1995) described criminal profiling as a type of constructed biographical description that highlights the particular behavioural trends or tendencies exhibited by an offender. In addition, Bartol and Bartol (1993) pointed out that criminal profiling is a process which also takes into consideration the existing demographic variables at play in conjunction with the characteristics of the crime in question.

According to Homant and Kennedy (1998), profiling is vested with different terms which include criminal profiling, criminal investigative analysis, behavioural profiling, psychological profiling, offender profiling, criminality personality profiling, and geographical profiling. Likewise, Jackson and Bekerian (1997) argued that since there exist different schools of thought with a wealth of published literature proposing a variety of methodological approaches to criminal profiling, it would be obvious that there will not be a unanimous understanding on the matter. Furthermore, Jackson and Bekerian (1997), explained that such approaches or strategies include the deductive/inductive technique, the intuitive or investigative psychological model which relies on the clinical, environmental, social, and cognitive psychological fundamentals, forensic psychiatry, and the law enforcement precept.

In spite of these existing theoretical and methodological differences, criminal profiling can be described as “interpreting crime scene behaviour in order to devise an offender profile covering gender, age, race, intelligence, interpersonal relationships, employment and location” (Gregory, 2005, p. 29). Most definitions of criminal profiling, rather than contradicting each other, complement each other by refining and strengthening what defines criminal profiling.

Criminal Profiling - Applied as an Investigative Tool

According to Kocsis (2006, p. 2) “criminal profiling represents a process whereby behaviours and/or actions exhibited in a crime are assessed and interpreted to form predictions concerning the characteristics of the probable perpetrator(s) of the crime.” In addition, such predicted offender traits then are compiled in what is referred to as a criminal profile of the likely unknown criminal, with the sole scope to aid law enforcement agents in their investigations. Moreover, Kocsis (2006) drew a distinct line between what is a criminal profile from what is typically referred to as a psychological or personality profile, which refers to the study or diagnosis of a present individual who is the patient. In stark contrast, criminal profiling relates to the investigation of a crime scene in an attempt to understand the acting behaviour behind the crime committed. In doing so, the investigators try to create a profile of the possible unknown suspect who has manifested such behaviour.

Furthermore, research points out that the above-mentioned criminal profiles by themselves cannot be seen as the one and only solution for
solving particular crimes but rather as part of the repertoire of investigative techniques at the disposal of law enforcement (Pinizzotto, 1984). Criminal profiling is to be seen as a tool that narrows down and refines the suspect list in a given crime and thus helps investigators to focus their human resources when carrying out their duty and not as a replacing alternative to the traditional investigative methods that are normally used by the police (Douglas & Olshaker, 1997). Kocsis (2006), stressed the fact that even though advances are being made in the field of criminal profiling, it will be highly unlikely that it shall reach a level of accuracy to pinpoint and foresee the exact identity of a criminal offender. Despite the efforts carried out in criminal profiling, there will always be a “margin of speculation and error” (Kocsis, 2006, p. 9).

It is evident, that a one fits all, straightforward description on the scope or applicability of criminal profiling as an investigative tool is not that easy as one might expect it to be. Such a hurdle emanates from the trendy use of the nomenclature itself and the multitude of associations that criminal profiling has attained within the different law enforcement and criminal justice systems. Furthermore, different scholars, academics and their respective schools of thought have promoted divergent explanations to what actually criminal profiling is and can do with its applicable techniques (Patherick, 2013). In spite such academic discrepancy and uncertainty on what constitutes criminal profiling, consent is evident on its scope and aim. That is, to assist an ongoing investigation by providing it with the possible predicted information needed on those tenacious, unsolvable crimes.

Criminal Profiling - The Profiler

When discussing criminal investigation, crime scene profiling can be described as that segment of expertise that closely scrutinises a crime scene for possible clues and indications about the culprit’s behaviour, cognitive reasoning, and likely demographic characteristics (Gregory, 2005). It is something which police officers and other concerned law enforcement agents have been engaged doing in their line of duty. However, with the recruitment of trained profilers, a crime scene can be inspected with the objective of gaining that subtle psychological and behavioural understanding about the perpetrator. Such insight would help to tweak the investigative process and to provide additional support to any crime investigation.

It is widely acknowledged that criminal profiling is applied and practised as an investigative tool, in one way or another, by the different law enforcement agencies around the world (Fox & Farrington, 2018). According to Snook et al. (2007a), many police officers in the United Kingdom pointed out the fact that criminal profiling, at some point, was essential in their investigations, especially when violent crimes and repetitive offenders were involved. Snook et al., argued that proof of such a statement lies in the abundance of “published accounts which testify to the prolific growth in the utilisation of CP techniques” (2007a, p. 438) and its documentation in different countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, The Netherlands, and Australia (Snook et al., 2007a).

Since criminal profiling is a multi-faceted discipline, so are the profilers who practice it, due to the fact that they stem from different academic backgrounds with their own knowledge, expertise, and skills. Thus, there is some degree of discord amongst practitioners and scholars as regards who qualifies as a profiler. This is due to the fact that any experts can technically present themselves as profilers, apart from those who are literally trained and certified as profilers by a recognised organisation such as the International Criminal Investigative Analysis Fellowship (ICIAF, 2016). According to Gudjonsson and Copson, profiling cannot be “associated with the expertise of any one profession” and law enforcement officers find it difficult to “recognise the validity of profilers’ claims of relevant expertise” (1997, p.68).

Meanwhile, other academics, such as O’Toole (2012), counter argued against such claims regarding profiling as not being considered as a profession. She stated that accreditation for
pursuing a professional career as an agent profiler does exist within the Behavioural Agency Unit under the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Furthermore, O'Toole stressed the fact that it takes years of experience and rigorous training before any aspiring individual might become a fully functioning FBI Profiler (O'Toole, 2012). Meanwhile, through his study and research, Messer (2008) acknowledged criminal profiling as a profession but stated that for it to become a proper professional career, it needs to achieve a level of professionalism which can be comparable to other professions. Messer (2008) remarked that criminal profiling needs to strive hard to obtain such recognisable professional qualities and characteristics, which nonetheless can be gained through standardisation and autonomy.

Criminal Profiling - Debate on its Validity and Impact as an Investigative Tool

When analysing published reviews on criminal profiling, it can be noted that within this area of criminological study there exists a varying degree of animosity between the different schools of thought and their respective academics. Such a disagreement rests on the premise of what is accepted to be best practice to undertake a correct profiling process. According to Rainbow (2014), this divergence is the result of existing cultural, political, legal, scientific, and experiential differences. Rainbow stated that it would be “naive and simplistic to believe that all analysts and behavioural investigative advisers operate in the same way throughout the world as it is to believe that their police colleagues follow universally accepted processes and procedures” (2014, p. 174).

Furthermore, Fox and Farrington (2018, p. 3) claimed that such variation on what is considered as a criminal profiling process depended on different factors such as “who is conducting it, the methodology and approach that is used, the findings that are achieved, as well as where and how the results are presented”. Meanwhile, Dowden, Bennell, and Bloomfield (2007) remarked that regardless of all the publicity and exhaustive literature covering criminal profiling, little is scientifically known on its current state, development, and findings vis a vis its efficacy and validity as an investigative tool.

Criticism of the different criminal profiling approaches does not fall short either. The British behavioural investigative psychologist, David Canter stated that the FBI agency, through the fancy use of terminology, coined up the term offender profiling in order to substantiate their investigative practices. In doing so, they projected the belief that profiling was a sort of an infallible and flawless formula which was waiting to be simply put into action. Canter pointed out that such an FBI profiling approach was just a “mixture of craft, experience and intellectual energy” which was already part and parcel of their investigative repertoire that was already employed by their own investigators and fellow policemen (2015, p. 18).

Other researchers such as Alison, West, and Goodwill (2004), argued that the future of criminal profiling should focus more on a multidisciplinary approach that relies on the relationship between the academic and the practitioner. Such an approach brings about the best use of the particular abilities that each investigative field has to offer. Namely, an amalgamation of the theoretical and methodological skills of the researcher or academic with the practical knowledge and experience of the practitioner or the law enforcement officer. All this would lead to a “statistically sophisticated research that has some real-world value” (Dowden, Bennell, & Bloomfield, 2007, p. 52).

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is evident that the application of criminal profiling in investigating different types of crimes has constantly developed within the last four decades. Regrettably, such a steady growth in criminal profiling has taken place in the “absence of a well-defined framework and compelling empirical support” (Eastwood et al., 2006, p. 118). Many researchers, through their published scholarly works, have genuinely contributed to the field of criminal profiling with the intent and attempt to earn it the level that a scientific field of study merits. Whereby,
hypothesis testing, and empirical evidence are to rely on sound theoretical logic while doing away with the fictional view of criminal profiling which is based on fantasy.

Analysis
Introduction
This section will examine what is understood by criminal profiling as an investigative tool in crime solving. An analysis will be presented in regards who and what makes a criminal profiler and the prevalent criminal profiling techniques that are applied for crime solving. Furthermore, a critical study which aims to explore the claim in lieu the efficacy of criminal profiling as an investigative tool which can assist law enforcement officers in solving crimes will be analysed.

What is Criminal Profiling Within the Field of Criminology and Crime Solving?

When interpreting the available literature on criminal profiling, it is evident that there exists a divergence between academics on achieving a unanimous understanding on what defines this field of study (Palermo & Kocsis, 2005; Jackson & Bekerian, 1997; Patherick, 2013). It can be described as forming part of the investigative repertoire adopted by different international law enforcement agencies in their rational pursuit (Rossi, 1982) to tighten on the circle of suspects, apprehend and ultimately prosecute the implicated offender (Kocsis, 2006; Fox & Farrington, 2018). From a criminological perspective, criminal profiling is considered to be one of its subcategories which focuses on the biological, psychological, and social study of criminals and the presumable influence posed on them by their surrounding environment and its demography (Bartol & Bartol, 1993; Gregory, 2005). Undeniably, criminal profiling has been, and still is widely applied in criminological studies, research and crime solving (Pinizzotto, 1984; Davies & Woodhams, 2019) but despite all this, its techniques are continuously criticised (Canter, 2003; Snook et al., 2008). Criminal profiling has been a subject of much debate amongst criminologists, academics, and law enforcement professionals (Snook et al., 2007a; Canter 2015).

Though criminal profiling methodology has evolved into different areas of expertise with their own respective procedures (Homant & Kennedy, 1998), it still can be interpreted as a technique that relies on gathering information pertaining to a particular crime (Jackson & Bekerian, 1997). The aim of criminal profiling is to obtain, process and provide vital information on the dynamics of the crime, the crime scene, the involved victim, and eventual identification of the likely unknown offender (Gregory, 2005; Chifflet, 2015). This is important when clues are necessary when an unknown offender is involved especially regards one’s probable personality characteristics, behavioural patterns, background, victim selection, and motivation to commit the crime ((Van Hasselt & Bourke, 2018). According to different academics and practitioners, criminal profiling can be perceived as an essential investigative tool that helps in understanding the mindset and actions of criminal offenders (Geberth, 1995).

Criminal profiling is usually adopted to aid investigations which involve serial and complex crimes. These can range from theft, arson, assault, kidnap, murder, or cybercrime (Homant & Kennedy, 1998; Nykodym; Taylor & Vilela, 2005) and typically involve unknown offenders (Alison, Goodwill, Almond, Van Den Heuvel & Winter, 2010). One of the core functions of criminal profiling is to accurately scrutinise and study all details pertaining to the relevant crime scene (Van Hasselt & Bourke, 2018). All this effort is carried forward in a quest for constructing a profile which can help in uncovering the perpetrator’s identity (Messer, 2008). This would include the offender’s psychological and emotional state of mind at the time when the crime was executed. Moreover, another key aspect of criminal profiling is the analysis of the involved victim’s demeanour and backdrop. This is done in an attempt to understand the crime scenario, its dynamics and reasons that could have contributed or provoked the offender to select the victim, the place, and the commitment of the crime in question (Petherick & Brooks, 2020).
Though criminal profiling is not understood by all academia as an empirical field of study (Alison et al., 2010; Turvey, 2011), still if applied correctly and integrated with other investigative techniques, it could prove to be useful and effective (Petherick & Brooks, 2020). Heretofore, by means of providing important information, which otherwise might have passed unnoticed by the traditional investigative methods, criminal profiling can be instrumental in providing the necessary information (Dowden, Bennell & Bloomfield, 2007).

**Who is the profiler?**

The work of a profiler is to assess the crime scene and the involved victim diligently and objectively in order to impartially recreate from the available retrieved evidence, the likely profile which best reflects the personality characteristics of the offender (Gregory, 2005). In order to achieve such an objective, the profiler, by applying one’s criminological expertise and profound theoretical knowledge on behaviour and psychology, fuses together all this information with that originating from the crime scene so as to construct an offender profile. Hence, the scope of the profiler is to supply the police or involved investigators (Kocsis et al., 2000) with the necessary data that might help to build a stratagem in tandem with other investigative techniques through which an offender can be apprehended in order to solve a crime which otherwise might have turned cold (Snook et al., 2007a).

Profiling as a profession involves individuals that are well versed and trained in criminal investigation, forensics, criminology, behavioural sciences, sociology, and psychology (Kocsis et al., 2000; Messer, 2008; Turvey, 2011). When creating a profile, they apply this knowledge to that of the crime scene in order to generate the necessary information about a suspect, such as gender, age, ethnicity, level of education, type of work, habitat, behavioural or personality characteristics and one’s emotional status and social functioning (Oleson, 1996). In addition, through an analysis of the evidence, the crime scene and nature of the crime, the profiler can infer on the motivation that induced an offender to commit the crime and the individual’s respective psychological condition (Kocsis et al., 2000; Gregory, 2005).

Since the creation of a profile is the sole interpretative fruit of the work of one individual profiler, critics of criminal profiling state that role of a profiler is unreliable and open or prone to subjectivity, bias, prejudice, and misinterpretation (Kocsis, 2004; Snook et al., 2008). Subsequently, all this would eventually lead to a deceitful interpretation of events as a result of an inaccurate profile that would obviously misguide investigative efforts, resources, and the conviction of innocents (Eastwood et al., 2006). Moreover, critics of criminal profiling elucidate the fact that such profiles are merely intuitive, the result of an educated guesswork and are based on anecdotal evidence (Kocsis, Heller & Try 2003; Jackson, Wilson & Rana, 2011) that could erroneously hint or point to a particular ethnic, gender, or even religious group (Snook et al., 2008).

Though there were successful profiling accounts, according to such critics, profilers should not work in isolation but should be part of an all-inclusive, integrated, investigative approach that includes forensics, crime scene investigation, interviewing and investigation (Petherick & Brooks, 2020). Indeed, when profilers have worked in such a comprehensive investigative ambient, profiling has provided its fair share of crime solving and has been instrumental in solving different high profile serial crimes (Snook et al., 2007b; Turvey, 2011). The role played by a profiler is a complicated one since it is difficult to assess its level of efficacy and to determine its limitations. As a profession (O’Toole, 2012), it needs the necessary scientific, empirical validation against which its profiling methods can be measured and inspected for flaws or inaccuracies that could undermine its reliability and the reality of its usefulness in crime solving (Messer, 2008).

**Which are the Prevalent Criminal Profiling Techniques or Methodologies?**

The field of criminal profiling is equipped with different techniques that are utilised by law enforcement agencies around the world (Kocsis,
Over the past decades, there was an emergence in the development and progress of such investigative techniques, each with its own history, strengths, and weaknesses. What is common all throughout the different criminal profiling approaches is their investigative objective, which is that of creating a likely profile by attempting to infer the traits of the unknown offender in relation to a specific type of crime (Turvey, 2015). On the other hand, the same criminal profiling techniques differ in their investigative practice or approach, that is, whether applying a psychological, behavioural, sociological, analytical, or geographical methodology towards achieving and compiling the requested suspect’s profile (Patherick, 2013; Turvey, 2015).

From a criminological perspective when studying crime and criminals, the commonly applied criminal profiling methods can be classified for clarity, as being either nomothetic (inductive) or idiographic (deductive) in their approach towards investigation (Turvey, 2015). Nomothetic profiling approaches study the hypothetical, abstract, and universal characteristics by observing or examining groups of convicted offenders in order to generate, establish and apply general parallels or comparisons to the actual category of crimes in order to understand and explain their nature. Meanwhile, idiographic profiling techniques concentrate on the study of the concrete facts, the evidence pertaining to a distinct case and the unique characteristics or behavioural functioning of the specific individual offender responsible for a particular crime.

Hence, nomothetic profiling studies groups to collect general, classic, and typical tell-tale signs of offender traits so as to accumulate knowledge and formulate what is theoretically possible or probable in regard to the generic categories of crime. Meanwhile, idiographic profiling techniques are case specific, concrete and focus on the individual by studying the accumulated knowledge on a particular case or a series of linked cases performed by the same offender. Through such process, profilers try to figure out and comprehend the interrelated driving forces behind an actual crime so as to understand the relationship that might exist between the crime scene, the victim, and the offender (Turvey, 2011).

Though criminal profiling is on a continuous evolutionary journey as an investigative tool, from the existing, present academic literature one can identify five main, commonly applied methods of modern profiling techniques (Turvey, 2011; Patherick, 2013). In no order of merit or importance, the first four methods can be classified as nomothetic techniques of profiling namely, the Criminal Investigative Analysis, Diagnostic Evaluation, Investigative Psychology and Geographic Profiling. Meanwhile the fifth method of criminal profiling, labelled as Behavioural Evidence Analysis can be classified as idiographic in its approach of investigation (Turvey, 2011).

In spite of all the existing divergencies and the different techniques used by profilers in criminal profiling, their unequivocal effort is always that of finding the best approach in effectively creating a categorical criminal profile. Indeed, criminal profiling is a multifaceted area of investigative study which focuses on the understanding of crime through a theoretical standpoint applied in conjunction with the respective law enforcement’s investigative experience, expertise in forensics and the scientific collection and analysis of evidence (Ainsworth, 2013).

Can Criminal Profiling be of Assistance in Crime Solving?

Criminal profiling encompasses different methodologies of investigation that are adopted at an international plane, to a varying degree and level by different law enforcement agencies and justice systems (Snook et al., 2007). Within the last four decades, the process of criminal profiling itself has achieved great attention both in terms of praise and criticism from scholars and practitioners in regard to its rate of success in crime solving (Alison et al., 2004). This meant that as a field of criminological study, criminal profiling has been and still is a contentious subject shrouded by much academic debate over its claim that it is of assistance to the police investigators. Hence, such disagreement is
especially evident when trying to come to terms and to prove or disprove the effectiveness, validity, utility, and limitations of criminal profiling (Chifflet, 2015).

When reviewing the literature in regards the value, merit or credit played by criminal profiling as an investigative tool, it is evident that its history is marked with cases of success. Amongst such examples one can refer to the apprehension of George Metesky nicknamed the Mad Bomber, Gary Ridgway known as the Green River Killer, Wayne Williams in the Atlanta Child murders, Samuel McDowell known as Samuel Little and David Berkowitz who called himself Son of Sam (FBI, 2020). These cases all involved serial crimes carried out on American soil and are evidence of the contribution that criminal profiling can give to the investigative process.

Moreover, just to mention a few, from a global standpoint, countries such as Britain, Ireland, Canada, Australia, Spain, Italy, Germany (Snook et al., 2007b; Kocsis, 2007; Snook et al., 2008), Sweden, Finland, New Zealand, South Africa, Russia (Eastwood et al., 2006) and Japan (Takamura, 2007; Yokota et al., 2017) have resorted to the use of criminal profiling techniques as tools of assistance by their respective law enforcement agencies. Hence, over the years, such an increase in criminal profiling application can be understood to be a positive sign of the significant role that criminal profiling can play in aiding criminal investigations and in tracking down offenders.

In addition, there were different studies carried out amongst law enforcement agents, investigators, and police officers from different countries regarding the utility of criminal profiling (Yokota et al., 2017; Greiwe & Khoshnood, 2022). From the different results obtained it is evident that the application of criminal profiling is considered to be operationally useful in crime investigations. Thus, such techniques are viewed to have helped in a variety of cases by providing an increase in case understanding especially when considering insight and predictions (Snook et al., 2007b). Hence, law enforcement agencies highly estimate the value of criminal profiling and the related techniques as effective investigative tools, notably when unknown offenders are involved (Yokota et al., 2017; Greiwe & Khoshnood, 2022).

On the other hand, critics of criminal profiling argue on the fact that such investigative techniques are fraught with uncertainties and limitations which in turn cast dubious questions in regards the issue of usefulness and reliability (Snook et al., 2008). Some also consider criminal profiling as being non-scientific (Devery, 2010) in its approach or rather as mere common sense transformed into calculated guesswork (Jackson et al., 2011). Others opine on the fact that such criminal profiling success is highly rated and inflated due to what is referred to as the criminal profiling illusion (Snook et al., 2008; Greiwe & Khoshnood, 2022). Such a belief of efficiency and success is wrongfully perceived by the public when exposed to the media’s portrayed version of criminal profiling (Jackson et al., 2011).

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

This research suggests that modern criminal profiling can be defined as a set of combined, systematic investigative processes that stem from diverse areas of criminological inquiry. If properly applied, this amalgamation of profiling techniques can be effective when utilised by those involved in the criminal justice system in their quest of closing in on possible suspects and their eventual sentencing.

Furthermore, since criminal profiling bases its efforts on the work of profilers, they should be professionally trained according to acceptable, internationally set standards. Moreover, to compile the requested profiles of the possible offenders, profilers are to rely on both the case specific forensic evidence and the application of theoretical knowledge and expertise. Criminal profiling should not depend on personal belief, simple intuition, or opinionated inferences, but rather should be based on statistics, empirical research, and scientific inquiry so as to avoid bias, subjectivity, and wrongful convictions.
Albeit all the controversial arguments vis a vis the use of criminal profiling within criminal investigations, many academics highlight the important contribution it can give to law enforcement agencies. Criminal profiling has given its fair share in serving justice and assisting law enforcement by providing valued information in different criminal cases where the necessary physical forensic evidence was unclear, scarce, or missing.

Moreover, most of the criticism towards criminal profiling has its roots germinating from misunderstood processes of investigation and how such techniques are applied through criminal profiling. In addition, critics of criminal profiling argue that such profiling methodologies are not empirical in their approach and therefore not being scientific nor logical in their procedure of investigating crime. In spite of the existing academic denunciation towards criminal profiling as a field of criminological study, it was observed that it is slowly orienting and focusing its investigative efforts to morph its practices to be more scientific, pragmatic, and built on academic, empirical and peer reviewed research.

In addition, from the Maltese context, this exploration suggests that in Malta there is a lack of research and applications when it comes to criminal profiling and the work of the profilers. This advises that authorities need to invest more both in theory and practice to use criminal profiling techniques as tools of assistance by Maltese law enforcement agencies as it is done in other countries in Europe and other continents.

**Further Research**

When considering the possibility of applying criminal profiling, as other countries did, within the Maltese ambient of law enforcement and criminal justice, the study recommends that such field of study can have its niche too. This can be achieved through further scholarly studies and research applied in tandem with the available recorded statistical criminal data kept by the Malta police pertaining to the committed offences and crimes. Moreover, such future research in criminal profiling could pave the way for a policing strategy and policy making process that stresses on problem-oriented policing. Such an approach strives to identify, analyse, and predict possible patterns of specific deviant behaviour, criminal activity, and the identification of existent crime hotspots. Ultimately, through scientific scrutiny, the application of criminal profiling techniques combined with meta-analysis research processes and quantitative data will give law enforcement the much-needed foresight in order to plan and establish practical anti-crime response policies and programmes.

**Concluding Reflections**

After reviewing and examining different peer reviewed literature covering the field of criminal profiling, it is evident that this area of study is laden with different theoretical assertions and contrasting procedural standpoints. Despite such academic contradiction and alternate theoretical perspectives on the subject matter, which is healthy and positive, criminal profiling continues to prove to be a versatile, resilient, multifaceted, and complex investigative discipline which is in a state of continuous development and progress. Though the available criminal profiling body of research data and longitudinal studies are limited in certain countries while absent in others, as in the Maltese criminal scenario, it is still slowly proving itself worthy. This research advocates that in the coming years, criminal profiling will transform into an investigative area of criminological study that enjoys greater acceptance from law enforcement, the criminal justice system and academics alike.

The scope of criminal profiling is to assist investigators by providing the necessary information for the sole purpose of prioritising and focusing their investigative efforts. Furthermore, to achieve a fruitful, solid investigation, law enforcement is to hinge on systematic and scientific profiling probabilities applied in conjunction with forensic evidence, rather than relying on the singular stroke of intuition or premonition. Typically, investigations start off with erratic bits of clues according to which the police must work to follow as many leads as possible, since most of
which would subsequently point to a dead end. Thus, the more comprehensive the investigation is, the likelier one of the leads can result in an arrest. Hence, the scope of this research was to highlight the potential that criminal profiling can offer in guiding investigations towards that lead which can yield positive, conclusive results.

References


