

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319575476>

Serial crime as occupation: Parallels between occupational analysis and psychological profiling

Article in Journal of Occupational Science · September 2017
DOI: 10.1080/14427591.2017.1366930

CITATIONS
0

READS
39

2 authors, including:



Karen Barney
Saint Louis University
24 PUBLICATIONS 32 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:



women and sexuality [View project](#)



Textbook [View project](#)



Serial crime as occupation: Parallels between occupational analysis and psychological profiling

Chetna Sethi & Karen F. Barney

To cite this article: Chetna Sethi & Karen F. Barney (2017): Serial crime as occupation: Parallels between occupational analysis and psychological profiling, Journal of Occupational Science, DOI: [10.1080/14427591.2017.1366930](https://doi.org/10.1080/14427591.2017.1366930)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14427591.2017.1366930>



Published online: 06 Sep 2017.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 28



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



COMMENT



Serial crime as occupation: Parallels between occupational analysis and psychological profiling

Chetna Sethi^a & Karen F. Barney^b

^aAssistant Professor, Towson University, Department of Occupational Therapy and Occupational Science, Towson, Maryland, USA; ^bProfessor Emerita, Department of Occupational Science & Occupational Therapy; Founder, Transformative Justice Initiative, Doisy College of Health Sciences, Saint Louis University, St. Louis, USA

ABSTRACT

This preliminary discussion suggests a process for studying serial crime as an occupation. To date, no investigation of the occupational components of crime has been undertaken by disciplines that historically contribute to forensic science, nor by occupational scientists, although studies have addressed occupational deprivation issues in prisons and how incarcerated individuals establish or restore healthy patterns of occupations as they reintegrate into society. The discussion centers on the processes involved in the occupational profiling of persons who engage in such occupations. Relevant occupational science constructs include the form, function and meaning of criminal occupations, as well as the skills, capabilities, motivations, and contexts of the offender. An occupational perspective might assist with identification of the nature, structure and characteristics of the occupations that comprise offenders' lives, as well as the subjective experience, process, and outcomes of the occupational performance of serial crimes in innovative ways. Such analysis would complement psychological profiling, which includes collecting crime scene information, arranging this information into meaningful patterns, analyzing victim and offender risk, and reconstructing the crime and the offender motivation, to create a specific description of the law violator.

KEYWORDS

Serial offenders;
Psychological profiling;
Occupational science;
Occupational analysis

Investigation of the occupational components of crime has not been a focus by either occupational scientists or forensic experts. The staggering crime rates in the United States (Uniform Crime Report, September 2016), however, make it evident that many individuals occupy their time with the commission of violent and non-violent criminal acts. Our proposal is that the constructs of occupational science might be applied to studying criminal acts as occupations, in and of themselves, as well as describing the time use patterns, routines, rituals and personal characteristics of people who engage in criminal acts. In this comment, we argue that occupational scientists, guided by

the principles of occupational analysis, could contribute valuable knowledge of the nature, form, function and meaning of criminal occupations. We further argue that such an analysis would complement psychological profiling, defined as collecting crime scene information, arranging this information into meaningful patterns, analyzing victim¹ and offender risk,² reconstructing the crime and the offender's motivation, and ultimately using this information to create a specific offender profile.

Occupational scientists have paid some attention to particular types of criminal or antisocial behaviors. For example, Russell's (2008) literature review of "deviant occupations" described

the form, function and meaning of tagging³ and Falardeau, Morin, and Bellemare (2015) studied the occupations of young prisoners. Violent crimes against people have also received some attention in the Journal of Occupational Science. Articles include the occupations that helped one man survive captivity and severe abuse throughout childhood and adolescence (Lentin, 2002), using physical occupations to overcome experiences of childhood abuse (Ratcliff, Farnworth, & Lentin, 2002), domestic violence against women with disabilities (Smith & Hilton, 2008), and Twinley's (2012) first-hand account of the occupational impact of woman-to-woman rape. Common across these accounts is the focus on the victim, rather than the perpetrator, of violent acts. Occupational scientists have also addressed some issues regarding occupational deprivation in prisons (Molineux & Whiteford, 1999; Whiteford, 1997). More recently, violence has been described as a "dark side of occupation" (Twinley & Addidle, 2012). Taken together, these articles challenge the assumption that occupation is always health-promoting, citing violence as an example of harmful, disruptive and antisocial occupation. In response, Aldrich and White (2012) argued that investigation of the *situations* in which violent occupations become occupational possibilities should be explored, suggesting that scholars direct their attention to both perpetrators and victims of violent occupations.

This paper focuses on serial crimes associated with an individual committing the same crime multiple times in different contexts. These crimes might be violent or non-violent. Through this preliminary exploration, we attempt to understand this type of occupation more fully by drawing parallels between the occupational performance of serial crimes and psychological profiling carried out by law enforcement personnel. We propose that the thorough analysis of the occupation of a serial crime, by breaking it down into its component parts, is in many ways analogous to the process of psychological profiling. Investigating criminal occupations from an occupational perspective, defined as "a way of looking at or thinking about human doing" (Njelesani, Tang, Jonsson, & Polatajko, 2014, p. 233), may ultimately assist law enforcement in narrowing a suspect pool and identifying the offender. At

the very least, we propose that occupational science may generate better understanding of serial offences and offenders, contributing to prevention of such crimes.

Serial Crime as an Occupation

Occupation has been defined as things people do (Hocking, 2009), "everything that people do to occupy themselves" (CAOT, 2008, p. 24), things people do in their everyday life (Sundkvist & Zingmark, 2003), and "the ordinary and familiar things that people do every day" (American Occupational Therapy Association, 1995, p. 1015). These definitions suggest that occupations are best described as actions that individuals engage in to occupy their time. Given that serial crimes are actions carried out by an individual, or sometimes a group of individuals, these definitions can be applied to fit crime as an occupation.

Bringing an occupational lens to the study of crimes challenges typical conceptualizations of occupation, which have emphasized the construct to be health promoting and as having a positive influence on well-being. There are perhaps many "things that people do to occupy themselves" that do not fit neatly into the description of being health promoting. Kiepek and Magalhães (2011), for example, theorized certain addiction and impulse-control disorders as occupations, including sexual addiction, substance abuse and eating disorders. Similarly, serial crimes can be viewed as occupations simply because these individually undertaken acts are employing people's time, and the offender/s are fully engaged in the act.

Occupations have also been described as being named in the lexicon of culture (Yerxa et al., 1990) and, variously, as culturally and personally meaningful (Jackson, Carlson, Mandel, Zemke, & Clark, 1998), giving "meaning and purpose to life" and being "publicly valued by the society in which people live" (Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists, 2008, p. 24). According to the rational choice perspective, serial crimes are intentional, internally motivated actions, which are acted upon by choice (Beauregard, Rossmo, & Proulx, 2007). This implies that they are in some way meaningful to people who engage in them. Further, although they are not

socially or culturally condoned behaviors, delinquent acts have been named and studied extensively as a concrete aspect of our social and cultural existence. For example, the influences of neighborhood businesses on crime rates (Schofield & Denson, 2013), the relationship between crime and unemployment (Andresen, 2012), prevention of alcohol related crimes (Jayaraj et al., 2013) are just some of the issues that have been studied. Finally, it can be argued that criminal action is not only an individual act, but rather a dynamic process involving the offender, his/her cultural belief system, and the social implication of the crime. The physical and temporal environments of a crime are equally relevant when trying to understand the offense. This perspective is consistent with the understanding of occupations as transactional in nature (Dickie, Cutchin, & Humphry, 2006), further illustrating that serial crimes can be considered as occupations.

Occupational scientists have engaged in many different ways of studying occupations, including direct observation, understanding the perspectives of the individuals or groups engaging in occupations, and examining established social and cultural understandings of a named occupation. Hocking (2009) suggested that an in-depth understanding of an occupation must encompass the requisite capacities, knowledge and skills, and attitudes associated with participating in it. She further asserted that the temporal aspects of the occupation, including but not limited to how long the activity/action takes, the steps involved including their sequence and repetition, and the pace or tempo of the performance must also be considered. Stated another way, occupations can be studied by deconstructing them, then understood better by being made whole again. Such an understanding can be applied to any and all occupations, including serial crime. In the field of occupational science, this process is referred to as occupational analysis; in the field of law enforcement, a similar process is called psychological or criminal profiling.

What is Psychological Profiling?

Serial crimes can include a wide variety of offenses such as murder, arson, burglary, rape or sexual sadism, as well as some white-collar

crimes, including money laundering and fraud. To apprehend serial criminals, law enforcement officials employ many techniques, including psychological profiling, the process by which trained professionals identify the characteristics of possible suspects (Yonge & Jacquin, 2010). Douglas, Ressler, Burgess, and Hartman (1986) described a six stage profiling process. The first stage, profiling input, involves collection of crime scene information including all forensic evidence, examining preliminary police reports and reviewing crime scene photographs. Next, during the decision process stage, the profiler attempts to arrange the collected information into meaningful patterns. This includes determining the type of crime committed, the motivation or intention of the perpetrator, the choice of victim, assessment of offender risk, and the time and location factors involved in the crime. In the third stage, crime assessment, the motivation and intention of the perpetrator is more deeply examined and the crime is reconstructed, keeping in mind this motivation. Stage four, criminal profiling, focuses on describing the most likely characteristics possessed by the individual(s) who committed the crime. In the fifth stage, law enforcement officials use this profile to narrow down a suspect pool. Their investigation and subsequent arrest of the most likely suspect is the last (apprehension) stage.

The basic premise of profiling is that an individual's personality is generally consistent across situations (Schlesinger, 2009). This implies that by closely analyzing a crime scene many personality traits of the perpetrator can be discovered. For example, an individual who has a compulsive personality is likely to commit a crime in a compulsive manner, leaving everything at the crime scene neat and orderly just the way his life may be organized – neat, orderly and somewhat rigid. Crime scenes can reveal much about the individual's personality and behavioral patterns, thus narrowing down a suspect pool. In other words, psychological profiling not only aims to describe the what, where and who of the crime, but also the why and how.

Relationship to Occupational Science

A parallel can be drawn between psychological profiling and the process of studying a particular

occupation by dismembering and then rearticulating it with a higher level of understanding of the process of the occupation, together with the implications of the enlightened understanding. One aspect of studying occupations is understanding people's need for and capacity to engage in and orchestrate daily occupations in the environment over the lifespan (Yerxa et al., 1990). One of the key aspects of this definition is the declaration that humans need to engage in occupations and need the capacities to do so (Molineux, 2010). Occupational analysis addresses the variety of skills involved in the performance of a given occupation, the various cultural meanings ascribed to it (Crepeau, 2003), the individual's interests, abilities and contexts, and the demands of the occupation itself (American Occupational Therapy Association, 2014). By applying the principles of occupational analysis to the performance of a serial crime, an occupation can be studied in its entirety, while also bringing to light the interests, abilities, limitations, contexts, intrinsic elements, and aspects of the criminal's identity.

Occupational analysis from a psychological profiling perspective

Traditionally, mental health professionals and law enforcement agents have used the technique of profiling. While mental health clinicians seek to explain the personality and actions of a criminal through psychiatric concepts, law enforcement agents are tasked with determining the behavioral patterns of a suspect through investigative concepts (Douglas et al., 1986). Where psychiatrists usually study a person and make reasonable predictions about how that person may react to a specific situation and what he or she may do in the future, psychological profiling is the reverse of this process. By studying an individual's actions, profilers deduce what kind of a person might have engaged in such actions (Brussel, 1968). Accordingly, since psychological profiling exists to better understand the characteristics of the people who participate in criminal occupations, occupational analysis can assist in focusing the detailed components of that occupation.

Occupation-based activity analysis has been described as the examination of the person's actual occupational engagement within a specific

context, which includes the physical, social and cultural environments, as well as personal aspects, such as age, gender, motivation, and stage in the life cycle. The goal of occupational analysis is to understand as much as possible about the occupation (Crepeau, 2003). One of the challenges of applying occupational analysis to criminal acts is that observation of people performing them is unlikely. A strategy to study crime as an occupation might be to follow a process paralleling psychological profiling. In fact, applying the process of the occupational analysis in a reverse order as described below may also aid in creating an occupational profile of the offender, studying the occupation of crime in and of itself, as well as understanding the subjective experience of the doer.

Fidler (1999) described occupations as encompassing five elements: form or structure, properties, action processes, outcomes, and realistic and symbolic meaning. Figure 1 depicts the alignment between the steps of criminal profiling and the elements of occupations as identified by Fidler. The decision-process model, or arranging the crime scene information into meaningful patterns, parallels the form and structure of occupation, as well as attributing actual and symbolic meaning to the act. The steps related to analyzing victim and offender risk and crime assessment, or reconstructing the crime and offender motivation similarly correspond to action processes and personal factors involved with committing a crime. The crime scene can be considered as the outcome of a performed occupation (or series of occupations, especially if pre-meditated). Furthermore, ascribing meaning to the commission of certain acts during the performance of the crime may help frame potential personal attributes such as gender, motivation and stage in the life cycle of the perpetrator. Similar to the goals of psychological profiling, applying this process could not only highlight the where, what and who of the crime, but perhaps also the why and how.

Profiling and Occupational Science

In an attempt to explore the skill set required to create effective profiles, the content of profiles created by professional profilers, police officers, psychologists, college students and self-

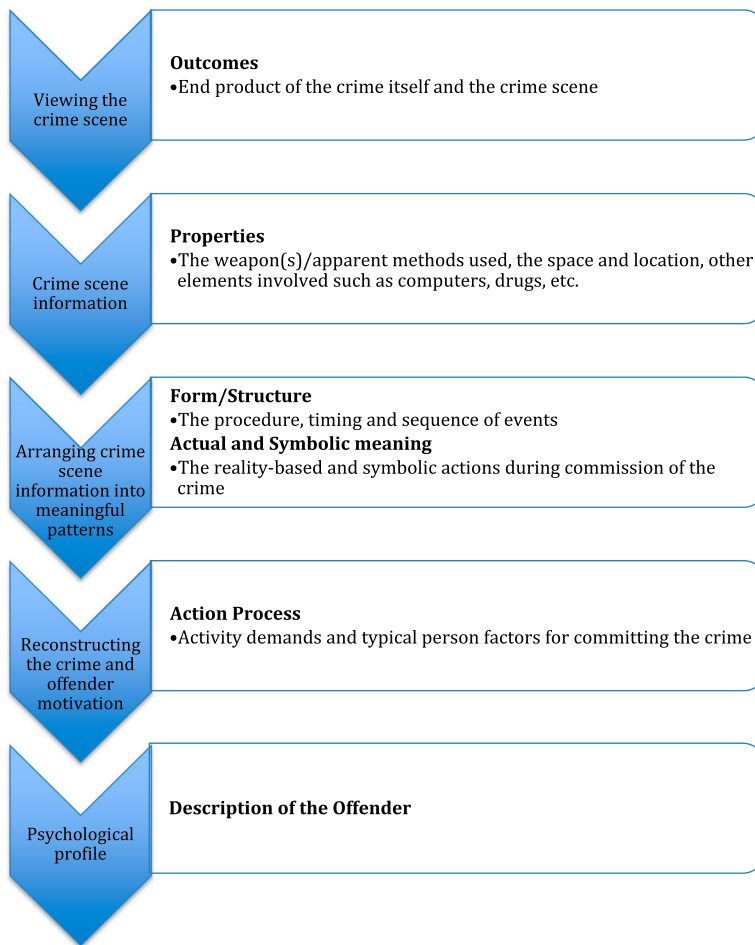


Figure 1. Parallels between psychological profiling and the occupational analysis process

proclaimed psychics has been examined and compared. Analysis revealed that profilers tend to write profiles containing more information about the non-physical attributes of the offender and his/her behavior before, during and after the crime than did the non-profilers (Kocsis, 2003; Kocsis, Irwin, Hayes, & Nunn, 2000). Key attributes that lead to successful profiling include an appreciation of the cognitive processes leading to criminal acts, investigative experience, the ability to think objectively and logically, and intuition (Hazelwood, 2001; Hazelwood, Ressler, Depue, & Douglas, 1995; Holmes & Holmes, 1996), along with a background in behavioral sciences.

It may be a leap to suggest that occupational scientists are equipped to be effective criminal

profilers. Nonetheless, proficiency in understanding humans as occupational beings and the capacity to logically and objectively analyze a situation indicate that applying the principles of psychological profiling to the occupational analysis of serial crimes may be within occupational scientists' skill set. Additionally, a range of occupational science concepts may also prove useful to studying crime. For example, by applying the Person-Environment-Occupation (PEO) model (Law et al., 1996), the performance of the occupation (crime) can be assessed or analyzed at the person (offender) level and the environment (context of crime including physical, social, cultural, and virtual) level. Consideration of the manner in which the social, cultural and physical aspects of a

crime influence performance of the crime is also reflective of certain ways of conceptualizing occupations as transactional in nature (Dickie et al., 2006).

Conclusion

We contend that studying serial crimes as occupations may add to the occupational science knowledge base, revealing how engagement in specific crimes relates to the health status, quality of life, and identity of people who commit crimes. It might also promote development of a process for investigating a completed occupation to discern how it was conducted and the capacities required of participants, along with interdisciplinary collaboration for crime prevention. We have argued that occupational analysis is in some ways analogous to the stages of psychological profiling, and that crime scenes can be considered as the outcome of a performed occupation. Reconstruction of a criminal act in a step-by-step manner might then be considered a reversed process of occupational analysis, which suggests that applying profiling concepts to occupational analysis warrants further consideration. Future research might include phenomenological studies of individuals who commit serial crimes, to enhance understandings of the time use patterns, personal attributes and cultural beliefs of these individuals through their lifespan and potentially provide a foundation for crime prevention.

Endnotes

1. Victim risk is the level of possibility of harm that criminal profilers perceive for a given victim based on factors such as age, occupation, lifestyle, physical stature, resistance ability, and location of the victim. Victim risk is typically classified as high, moderate, or low.
2. Offender risk is the risk the offender was taking to commit the crime.
3. Tagging is similar to graffiti. Tagging is signing your name or other representation of yourself anywhere in public (walls, bus stops, alleyways, paved streets, etc.).

Acknowledgement

Select content from this paper was presented at the Poster Session of the SSO-USA Annual Conference in October 2011.

References

- Aldrich, R. M., & White, N. (2012). Reconsidering violence: A response to Twinley and Addiddle (2012) and Morris (2012). *British Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 75(11), 527–529. doi:10.4276/030802212X13522194760057
- American Occupational Therapy Association. (1995). Position paper: Occupation. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 49(10), 1015–1018. doi:10.5014/ajot.49.10.1015
- American Occupational Therapy Association. (2014). Occupational therapy practice framework: Domain and process (3rd ed.). *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 68(Suppl.1), S1–S48. doi:10.5014/ajot.2014.682006
- Andresen, M. A. (2012). Unemployment and crime: A neighborhood level panel data approach. *Social Science Research*, 41(6), 1615–1628. doi:10.1016/j.ssresearch.2012.07.003
- Beauregard, E., Rossmo, D. K., & Proulx, J. (2007). A descriptive model of the hunting process of serial sex offenders: A rational choice perspective. *Journal of Family Violence*, 22(6), 449–463. doi:10.1007/s10896-007-9101-3
- Brussel, J. S. (1968). *Casebook of a crime psychiatrist*. New York, NY: Grove.
- Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists. (2008). CAOT position statement: Occupations and health. *Occupational Therapy Now*, 11(1), 24–26.
- Crepeau, E. (2003). Analyzing occupation and activity: A way of thinking about occupational performance. In E. Crepeau, E. Cohn, & B. B. Schell (Eds.), *Willard and Spackman's occupational therapy* (10th ed., pp. 189–198). Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.
- Dickie, V., Cutchin, M. P., & Humphry, R. (2006). Occupation as transactional experience: A critique of individualism in occupational science. *Journal of Occupational Science*, 13(1), 83–93. doi:10.1080/14427591.2006.9686573
- Douglas, J. E., Ressler, R. K., Burgess, A. W., & Hartman, C. R. (1986). Criminal profiling from crime scene analysis. *Behavioral Sciences and Law*, 4(4), 401–421. doi:10.1002/bsl.2370040405
- Falardeau, M., Morin, J., & Bellemare, J. (2015). The perspective of young prisoners on their occupations. *Journal of Occupational Science*, 22(3), 334–344. doi:10.1080/14427591.2014.915000
- Fidler, G. S. (1999). Deciphering the message: The activity analysis. In G. S. Fidler & B. P. Velde (Eds.), *Activities: Reality and symbol* (pp. 47–58). Thorofare, NJ: Slack.
- Hazelwood, R. R. (2001). Analyzing the rape and profiling the offender. In R. R. Hazelwood & A. W. Burgess (Eds.), *Practical aspects of rape investigation: A multi-disciplinary approach* (3rd ed., pp. 133–164). Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press.
- Hazelwood, R. R., Ressler, R. K., Depue, R. L., & Douglas, J. C. (1995). Criminal investigative analysis: An overview. In R. R. Hazelwood & A. W. Burgess (Eds.),

- Practical aspects of rape investigation: A multidisciplinary approach* (pp. 115–126). Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press.
- Hocking, C. (2009). The challenge of occupation: Describing the things people do. *Journal of Occupational Science*, 16(3), 140–150. doi:10.1080/14427591.2009.9686655
- Holmes, R. M., & Holmes, S. T. (1996). *Profiling violent crimes: An investigative tool* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Jackson, J., Carlson, M., Mandel, D., Zemke, R., & Clark, F. (1998). Occupation in lifestyle redesign: The well elderly study occupational therapy program. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 52(5), 326–336. doi:10.5014/ajot.52.5.326
- Jayaraj, R., Whitty, M., Thomas, M., Kavangh, D., Palmer, D., Thomson, V., ... & Nagel, T. (2013). Prevention of alcohol-related crime and trauma (PACT): Brief interventions in routine care pathway – a study protocol. *BMC Public Health*, 13(49), 1–5. doi:10.1186/1471-2458-13-49
- Kiepek, N., & Magalhães, L. (2011). Addictions and impulse-control disorders as occupation: A selected literature review and synthesis. *Journal of Occupational Science*, 18(3), 254–276. doi:10.1080/14427591.2011.581628
- Kocsis, R. N. (2003). An empirical assessment of content in criminal psychological profiles. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 47(1), 37–46. doi:10.1177/0306624X0239273
- Kocsis, R. N., Irwin, H. J., Hayes, A. F., & Nunn, R. (2000). Expertise in psychological profiling: A comparative assessment. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 15(3), 311–331. doi:10.1177/088626000015003006
- Law, M., Cooper, B., Strong, S., Stewart, D., Rigby, P., & Letts, L. (1996). The person-environment-occupation model: A transactive approach to occupational performance. *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 63(1), 9–23.
- Lentin, P. (2002). The human spirit and occupation: Surviving and creating a life. *Journal of Occupational Science*, 9(3), 143–152. doi:10.1080/14427591.2002.9686502
- Molineux, M. (2010). Occupational science and occupational therapy: Occupation at center stage. In C. H. Christiansen & E. A. Townsend (Eds.), *Introduction to occupation, the art and science of living* (2nd ed., pp. 359–383). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
- Molineux, M. L., & Whiteford, G. E. (1999). Prisons: From occupational deprivation to occupational enrichment. *Journal of Occupational Science*, 6(3), 124–130. doi:10.1080/14427591.1999.9686457
- Njelesani, J., Tang, A., Jonsson, H., & Polatajko, H. (2014). Articulating an occupational perspective. *Journal of Occupational Science*, 21(2), 226–235. doi:10.1080/14427591.2012.717500
- Ratcliff, E., Farnworth, L., & Lentin, P. (2002). Journey to wholeness: The experience of engaging in physical occupation for women survivors of childhood abuse. *Journal of Occupational Science*, 9(2), 65–71. doi:10.1080/14427591.2002.9686494
- Russell, E. (2008). Writing on the wall: The form, function and meaning of tagging. *Journal of Occupational Science*, 15(2), 87–97. doi:10.1080/14427591.2008.9686614
- Schlesinger, L. B. (2009). Psychological profiling: Investigative implications from crime scene analysis. *Journal of Psychiatry and Law*, 37(1), 73–84.
- Schofield, T. P., & Denson, T. F. (2013). Alcohol outlet business hours and violent crime in New York State. *Alcohol and Alcoholism*, 48(3), 363–369. doi:10.1093/alcalc/agt003
- Smith, D. L., & Hilton, C. L. (2008). An occupational justice perspective of domestic violence against women with disabilities. *Journal of Occupational Science*, 15(3), 166–172. doi:10.1080/14427591.2008.9686626
- Sundkvist, Y., & Zingmark, K. (2003). Leading from intermediary positions: First-line administrators' experiences of their occupational role situation. *Scandinavian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 10(1), 40–46. doi:10.1080/11038120310004448
- Twinley, R. (2012). Occupational profile: An interview with 'Lucy': A survivor of woman-to-woman rape. *Journal of Occupational Science*, 19(2), 191–195. doi:10.1080/14427591.2011.607793
- Twinley, R., & Addidle, G. (2012). Considering violence: The dark side of occupation. *British Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 75(4), 202–204. doi:10.4276/030802212X13336366278257
- Uniform Crime Report. (2016). *Crime in the United States 2015*. U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation.
- Whiteford, G. (1997). Occupational deprivation and incarceration. *Journal of Occupational Science: Australia*, 4(3), 126–130. doi:10.1080/14427591.1997.9686429
- Yerxa, E., Clark, F., Jackson, J., Parham, D., Pierce, D., ... Zemke, R. (1990). An introduction to occupational science, a foundation for occupational therapy in the 21st century. *Occupational Therapy in Health Care*, 6(4), 1–17. doi:10.1080/J003v06n04_04
- Yonge, K. C., & Jacquin, K. M. (2010). Criminal profile accuracy following training in inductive and deductive approaches. *American Journal of Forensic Psychology*, 28(3), 5–24.