

## **University of Roehampton International Summer School - 2026**

### **School of Psychology**

#### **Module Title: The Psychology of Murder**

#### **Module Code: PSY020N240H**

#### **Module Rationale**

This module provides a psychologically informed examination of homicide and other forms of extreme interpersonal violence. Understanding why individuals commit lethal acts represents a central concern within criminology, forensic psychology, and criminal justice practice. The module aims to develop students' critical understanding of the psychological mechanisms underlying homicidal behaviour.

The module begins by establishing foundational concepts, including definitions of violence and murder, theoretical perspectives on violent behaviour, and the role of psychological science in criminological explanation. It then progresses to examine individual-level risk factors such as psychopathology, personality traits, and developmental vulnerabilities associated with lethal offending. Building on this foundation, the module explores specialised forms of homicide, including sexual homicide, child homicide, serial and mass murder, and ideologically motivated violence such as terrorism.

Applied forensic topics are introduced to connect theory with practice. These include violence risk assessment, offender profiling, investigative psychology, and deception detection in homicide investigations. Experiential learning opportunities, including a guided visit to historically significant homicide locations in London, are used to contextualise theoretical knowledge within real-world criminological settings.

Overall, the module is designed to develop students' ability to critically evaluate psychological explanations of homicide, understand investigative and risk management practices, and engage with contemporary debates regarding responsibility, punishment, and prevention.

#### **Learning Outcomes**

At the end of the module students will have an understanding of:

- key psychological theories and concepts used to explain homicide and serious violence.
- individual, situational, and social risk factors associated with different forms of lethal offending, including serial, sexual, and ideologically motivated violence.
- psychological principles within forensic and investigative contexts, such as violence risk assessment, offender profiling, and deception detection.
- how to communicate informed psychological analyses of homicide cases through structured academic discussion and presentation

## **Assessment**

The assessment for this module will comprise of two components:

- A 2000-word case study of an actual murder case (80%)
- A class presentation of a case study (20%)

Indicative Module Schedule (Lecture and Seminar Sessions, 10:00–13:00)

Monday June 8	Introduction and Theoretical Perspectives on Violence
Tuesday June 9	Psychopathology in Murderers, Child Killers, and Stalkers Who Kill
Wednesday June 10	Toxic Personality Traits in Homicidal Behaviour: Psychopathy and Narcissism
Thursday June 11	Risk Assessment of Homicidal and Violent Offending
Monday June 15	Sexual Violence and Homicide
Tuesday June 16	Growing Issues with Terrorism
Wednesday June 17	London Visit*
Thursday June 18	Serial Killers and Mass Murderers, and Investigative Psychology
Monday June 22	Offender Profiling in Policing
Tuesday June 23	Homicide and the Psychology of Lie Detection
Wednesday June 24	Presentation Preparation
Thursday June 25	Group Presentations

\* Please note that the scheduled date of the London visit may be subject to change

## **Indicative Bibliography**

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Fox, J. A., & Levin, J. (1998). Multiple homicide: Patterns of serial and mass murder. *Crime and Justice*, 23, 407–455. <https://doi.org/10.1086/449274>

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- Laws, D. R., & O'Donohue, W. (2008). *Sexual deviance: Theory, assessment, and treatment (2nd ed.)*. Guilford Press.
- Newburn, T. (2017). *Criminology (3rd ed.)*. Routledge.
- Proulx, J., Beaugard, E., Cusson, M., & Nicole, A. (2005). *Sexual murderers: A comparative analysis and new perspectives*. Wiley.
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- Seto, M. C. (2018). *Pedophilia and sexual offending against children: Theory, assessment, and intervention (2nd ed.)*. American Psychological Association.
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