Criminal Behaviour Patterns of a Serial Robbery Perpetrator: A Case Study

[1]**Valentina Baić**[1], [1]**Zvonimir Ivanović**[2], [2]**Davor Cvetković**[3]

[1] *University of Criminal Investigation and Police Studies, Belgrade, Serbia*

[2]*Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade, Serbia*

Abstract: This paper examines a series of 24 robberies committed by a single offender, using the data obtained from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, specifically the Police Directorate of the City of Belgrade. Through qualitative analysis of the offender's criminal history and modus operandi, as well as frequency analysis and temporal-spatial distribution, the study provides a comprehensive insight into patterns of criminal behaviour. The findings reveal distinct preferences regarding the time of offense (evening hours between 7 PM and 11 PM) and specific months (February and April), as well as geographical clusters of activity concentrated within certain Belgrade municipalities and streets. The analysis of the modus operandi highlights a consistent use of both planned and opportunistic strategies aimed at minimizing risk and maximizing gain. The results contribute to a deeper understanding of serial criminal behaviour patterns, offering both theoretical and practical frameworks for the development of targeted preventive and operational strategies in policing practice.

Keywords: robbery, criminal behaviour patterns, serial offender, modus operandi, case study.

INTRODUCTION

Robbery is one of the most common and severe forms of violent property crime, characterized by the unlawful taking of another person's movable property through the use of force, threats, or coercion (Osterburg & Ward, 2019). This type of criminal behaviour is not solely driven by material gain; it often involves complex psychological and social factors that influence both the decision to commit the offense and the choice of modus operandi (Raine et al., 1997; Felson & Boba, 2010; Agnew, 2001). Within the scope of criminalistic and criminological analysis, serial robbery offenders represent a particularly significant category, as their ongoing criminal activity reflects deeper issues related to recidivism, antisocial behavioural patterns, and failed resocialization (DeLisi & Piquero, 2011; Baglivio et al., 2017; Moffitt, 2018).

1 sonovanja@gmail.com • https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3932-4593

2 Corresponding author: zvonimir.ivanović@kpu.edu.rs • https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1101-6169 • Phone: +381 64 61 02 78 3

3 davor.cvetkoovic@mup.gov.rs

Robbery, as a form of criminal behaviour, can be examined through various theoretical perspectives that offer insights into offenders' motives, decision-making processes, and behavioural patterns. The rational choice theory (Cornish & Clarke, 1986) is based on the assumption that offenders make conscious decisions by evaluating the potential benefits and risks of the criminal act, choosing targets and methods that provide the greatest reward with the lowest likelihood of detection (Grigoryeva & Matsueda, 2018; Piquero & Tibbets, 2002; Krstić, 2020). In contrast, social learning theory (Akers & Jennings, 2017) suggests that criminal behaviour, including robbery, is shaped through interactions with peers and environments that promote delinquent norms and values (Akers, 2017). Additionally, neutralization theory (Sykes & Matza, 1957) explains how offenders justify their actions by downplaying the harm caused, shifting responsibility onto the victim, or rationalizing the crime as a response to life circumstances (Maruna & Copes, 2005; Topalli, 2005). These theoretical perspectives provide a deeper understanding of robbery not only as a rational decision but also as a consequence of learned behaviour and moral adaptation within a deviant social context.

Empirical research indicates that serial robbery offenders often exhibit characteristics that distinguish them from occasional offenders, both in terms of personality traits and the social environments that shape their behaviour. The psychological profiles of such individuals frequently include pronounced features of antisocial personality, impulsivity, sensation-seeking tendencies, low frustration tolerance, and diminished empathy toward victims (Walsh & Ellis, 2007; DeLisi & Vaughn, 2014; Oljača et al., 2021). Some authors link these traits to dimensions within the so-called "Dark Tetrad" of personality, particularly psychopathy and sadism (Sadiković et al., 2019), which are more commonly observed among perpetrators of violent robberies (Paulhus, 2014; Jones & Neria, 2015). Simultaneously, social factors such as growing up in dysfunctional families, exposure to violence during childhood, neglect, and poor educational attainment are recognized as risk factors for early criminal involvement and the development of a persistent criminal career (Moffitt, 1993; Loeber et al., 2008). Conditions of social exclusion — such as poverty, unemployment, and marginalization — further sustain criminal behaviour, especially when combined with affiliation to peer groups that reinforce delinquent norms and values (Farrington, 2003; Agnew, 2005; Sulejmanović, 2024). These findings suggest that robbery, in the case of repeat offenders, results from a complex interplay between individual predispositions and adverse social conditions.

The analysis of serial robbery offenders is of crucial importance for the advancement of criminal investigation strategies and the operational work of the police. Understanding the behavioural patterns of these offenders contributes to more accurate criminal profiling, the identification of risk factors, and the assessment of the likelihood of recidivism. Robbery offenders often exhibit consistency in their choice of location, time, weapon, and method of committing the crime, making their modus operandi a valuable indicator in criminal investigations (Canter & Youngs, 2009; Bennell et al., 2012). Such patterns can significantly aid in the development of predictive behavioural models and direct investigations toward a narrower circle of suspects, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of police work (Rossmo, 1999; Alison et al., 2010). In the context of repeat robberies — especially those with violent components — the integration of offender profiling and modus operandi analysis can facilitate the rapid linking of cases and the prevention of further offenses (Baić & Lajić, 2017).

Building upon the aforementioned theoretical and empirical frameworks, this case study aimed to provide a deeper insight into the criminal career of a serial robbery offender by analysing the modus operandi, motivations, and the evolution of criminal behaviour. The research examined the time, location, and method of execution of a total of 24 robbery offenses committed by the same individual. Given that the offender is a recidivist, particular attention was devoted to his prior criminal history in order to identify the patterns of recidivism and the factors contributing to the repetition of criminal acts.

METHOD

This research is based on the analysis of secondary data obtained from the official records of the Belgrade Police Department. The analysed information includes criminal reports filed against a single serial offender responsible for a total of 24 robberies. Access to the data was granted following an officially approved request submitted to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, thereby ensuring the lawful and ethically grounded use of information for scientific purposes.

The study was designed as a case study of one serial offender, with the analysed data covering the temporal and spatial context of the offenses, methods of execution, types of stolen property, and other relevant information.

A combined methodological approach was employed. Qualitative analysis of the modus operandi was used to identify behavioural patterns through descriptive coding of specific elements of each individual offense. Quantitative (frequency) analysis enabled the systematization and comparison of behavioural characteristics by occurrence. The analysed variables were classified into categories according to relevant features (e.g., method of execution, time of day, location), and the results were presented descriptively in order to identify dominant patterns and potential regularities in the offender's behaviour. The coding of variables was carried out by the authors of the article (due to the small volume of data), acting as independent researchers with relevant research experience. Predefined categories, grounded in relevant literature and standard research procedures, were employed. The coding process was conducted systematically, with mutual verification and alignment to ensure the consistency and reliability of the data.

The research was conducted in full compliance with ethical guidelines, including the protection of the offender's identity and the confidentiality of all analysed data.

RESULTS

Biographical Data

The subject is a male born in 1978, which means that at the time of committing the series of robberies in 2018, he was 40 years old. According to the available data, he completed only primary education, indicating a relatively low level of formal education — one of the factors often associated with an increased risk of criminal behaviour (Farrington, 2003). At the time of the offenses, he was unemployed, representing an additional factor of social

and economic insecurity, which is frequently linked to the commission of criminal acts, particularly property-related crimes (Moffitt, 1993). The subject is married and has a prior criminal record, which suggests the presence of earlier legal issues and a potentially persistent pattern of criminal behaviour.

CRIMINAL HISTORY

The subject's criminal biography includes a series of convictions related to violent offenses, indicating a pronounced tendency toward violent behaviour. His first conviction occurred in 2000, when he was sentenced to five years in prison for committing the criminal offense of robbery (Article 168 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Serbia –previous version). This event marked the beginning of his criminal activity in the domain of property-related crimes, which recurred several times throughout his criminal career.

In 2005, he was sentenced to three years in prison for the criminal offense of rape, suggesting a propensity for violent acts, including violence against victims in the context of sexual assault. In 2011, he was again sentenced to three years in prison for committing robbery (Article 206, Paragraph 1 of the CCRS). This conviction, along with the previous ones, confirms the existence of a consistent criminal pattern, indicating that the offender is prone to recidivism involving similar offenses.

In 2016, he was sentenced to two years and eleven months in prison for assaulting an official during the performance of official duties (Article 323, Paragraph 2, Item 1 of the CCRS), along with an additional six months for the criminal offense of coercion (Article 135, Paragraph 2, Item 1 of the CCRS). Interestingly, the series of robberies examined in this study was committed after the offender escaped from a correctional facility, demonstrating his capacity to continue engaging in criminal activity even after being formally deprived of liberty.

This aspect may indicate a specific type of deviant motivation that drives him to reoffend despite previous sanctions. Such persistence in delinquent behaviour may be linked to traits of antisocial personality, including impulsivity, low frustration tolerance, sensation seeking, and diminished empathy toward victims – the factors that further hinder his integration into normative patterns of behaviour.

ANALYSIS OF THE TEMPORAL DISTRIBUTION OF ROBBERIES

In order to analyse the temporal distribution of the robberies, we grouped the cases according to time frames – months of the year, days of the week, and parts of the day (morning, evening, night) – with the aim of identifying potential patterns in the temporal occurrence of these criminal acts.

All the robberies examined in this study were committed within a single calendar year, specifically during 2018. Therefore, the analysis of monthly distribution seeks to highlight the dynamics and intensity of the offender's activity within that year. This approach enables a deeper understanding of changes in his criminal behaviour, including possible phases of increased or decreased activity, as well as the impact of his arrest on the termination of the robbery series.

Table 1. *Distribution of Committed Robberies by Month of the Year*

Month	f	%
February	7	29.1
March	6	25
April	7	29.1
May	4	16.7
Total	24	100

The results show that the majority of robberies were committed in February (29.1%) and April (29.1%), while a slightly lower number of offenses was recorded in March (25%), and the lowest number of incidents occurred in May (16.7%) (Table 1). The offender evidently exhibited phases of heightened activity (February and April), whereas the activity decreased in March and May.

After analysing the monthly distribution of robberies, an analysis by days of the week was also conducted to determine whether certain days carry a higher risk of these crimes being committed and to identify any patterns in their temporal distribution.

Table 2. *Distribution of Robberies by Day of the Week*

Day of the Week	f	%
Sunday	8	33.3
Monday	5	20.8
Friday	3	12.5
Tuesday	3	12.5
Saturday	2	8.3
Wednesday	2	8.3
Thursday	1	4.2
Total	24	100

The results indicate that the robberies were most frequently committed on Sundays (33.3%) and Mondays (20.8%) (Table 2). Although it is not possible to establish a definitive connection between specific days of the week and the increased frequency of these offenses, it can be observed that the offender operated during weekends and at the beginning of the workweek. This pattern may suggest a deliberate choice of timing that was most convenient for the offender, possibly due to reduced presence of potential witnesses.

The third analysis focused on the parts of the day during which the robberies were most commonly carried out, aiming to identify patterns concerning the time of day (morning, evening, night) when these crimes most frequently occurred.

Table 3. *Distribution of Robberies by Time of Day*

Time of Day	f	%
Morning (05:00 – 08:00)	8	33.3
Evening (19:00 – 00:00)	15	62.5
Night (00:00 – 06:00)	1	4.2
Total	24	100

The results show that the majority of robberies were committed during the evening hours, between 19:00 and 23:00 (Table 3), suggesting that the offender chose times when the premises were still open but foot traffic was lower, thereby reducing the risk of potential witnesses. In other words, these findings indicate an opportunistic selection of timing when the likelihood of bystander presence is minimized. The analysis of the frequency and intervals between attacks reveals that the shortest interval between two attacks was 15 minutes (on February 18, 2018 – two attacks at 21:20 and 21:35), while the longest interval was 10 days (between May 08, 2018 and May 18, 2018). This pattern also includes serial attacks occurring on the same day: February 18, 2018 (3 attacks), April 16, 2018 (3 attacks), and May 08, 2018 (2 attacks).

The overall analysis of the temporal distribution reveals a dynamic and variable pattern of the offender's criminal activities within a single year. Notably, the majority of the attacks were committed on Sundays and Mondays during evening hours, which may indicate his adaptability and ability to exploit time periods characterized by reduced presence of potential witnesses.

Analysis of the Spatial Distribution of Robberies

The analysis of the spatial distribution of robberies enables the identification of patterns in location selection. In this case, the focus is on the municipalities and streets within Belgrade, as all 24 offenses were committed within the city's territory. The first phase of the analysis involves identifying the Belgrade municipalities where the robberies occurred, aiming to determine whether there is spatial concentration of offenses and whether certain municipalities were targeted more frequently than others.

The results show that Voždovac, Savski Venac, Zvezdara, and Vračar are the most frequent municipalities where the robberies were committed (20 out of 24 cases), which may indicate a deliberate selection of locations. A smaller number of robberies occurred in the municipalities of Novi Beograd and Stari Grad, suggesting that the offender might have avoided the parts of the city with increased surveillance or more difficult-to-access targets (Table 4).

Table 4. *Distribution of Robberies by Municipalities in Belgrade*

Municipality	f	%
Voždovac	7	29.2
Savski venac	5	20.8
Zvezdara	4	16.7
Vračar	4	16.7
Čukarica	2	8.3
Novi Beograd	1	4.2
Stari grad	1	4.2
Total	24	100

The second phase of the analysis focuses on identifying the streets in Belgrade where the robberies took place, aiming to determine whether there is a concentration of offenses in specific areas of the city. This analysis provides insight into the particular locations to which the offender most frequently returned, which can be indicative of their strategy, as well as their familiarity with certain neighbourhoods and movement routes.

The results also indicate that the offender repeatedly committed robberies at certain locations. Specifically, four robberies were carried out on Bulevar Kralja Aleksandra, three on Bulevar Oslobođenja, and two on Ustanička Street (Table 5).

Table 5. *Distribution of Robberies by Streets in Belgrade*

Streets	f	%
Bulevar Kralja Aleksandra No. 231, 233, 72-74 and corner of Bulevar Kralja Aleksandra and Gospodara Vučića	4	16.6
Bulevar Oslobođenja No. 18 and corner of Bulevar Oslobođenja and Pasterova	3	12.5
Ustanička No. 79, 205	2	8.3
Corner of Gavrila Principa and Milovana Milovanovića streets	1	4.2
Blagoja Parovića No. 19A	1	4.2
Corner of Mileševska and Maksima Gorkog streets	1	4.2
Ratka Mitrovića No. 105	1	4.2
Kneza Miloša No. 65	1	4.2
Vojislava Ilića No. 151	1	4.2
Lazarevački Drum No. 1	1	4.2
Corner of Vojvode Stepe and Kapetana Zavišića streets	1	4.2
Paunova No. 83B	1	4.2

Jovana Raića No. 2	1	4.2
Corner of Marka Oreškovića and Dimitrija Tucovića streets	1	4.2
Corner of Tiršova and Deligradska streets	1	4.2
Bebelova (bb - no number)	1	4.2
Dimitrija Tucovića (no number)	1	4.2
Total	24	100

Based on the data analysis, several conclusions can be drawn: Firstly, most robberies occurred on busy thoroughfares and street corners, which may suggest that the offender targeted locations with quick escape routes. Secondly, it is possible that these locations were chosen more frequently due to the offender's familiarity with the area or the accessibility of the premises, meaning that the locations were strategically advantageous from the offender's perspective.

Analysis of the Modus Operandi in Robberies

The results indicate that in all incidents the offender used a firearm threat, suggesting that the application of violence and intimidation was a key element in the commission of these crimes. The majority of attacks occurred through direct threats to employees at kiosks or stores, most often approaching from the front of the kiosk or through open doors, which points to premeditation and familiarity with the crime scene. In several cases, the offender demanded cash from the employees' daily takings, while in some instances (such as on February 18, 2018), a mobile phone was also requested. In the case of March 15, 2018, the offender initially requested a pack of cigarettes, followed by money, which may indicate a spontaneous nature of the act or an initial phase before revealing the true intent (to obtain money). On several occasions, the offender asked for cigarette packs and SIM cards, which could suggest an attempt to conceal true motives (misuse of consumer goods); however, the predominant objective was a quick financial gain. In some cases, such as on April 16, 2018, the offender even entered the store and, by threatening with a firearm, forced the employee to hand over money.

LIMITATIONS

When relying exclusively on the data from police documentation, there are certain advantages as well as inherent limitations that may affect the comprehensiveness of the analysis. On the one hand, the data from these sources are often objective and based on facts and evidence. On the other hand, case studies describe individual situations and do not necessarily allow for the generalization of results to a broader population or to other similar circumstances.

The limitation regarding the generalizability of the results is not directly related to the methodology of data collection (e.g., the use of secondary data from police sources), but

rather represents a typical constraint of all case studies – whether criminological, forensic, clinical, or otherwise.

Moreover, in this study, the data on the offender's place of residence during the commission of the crimes were not available, which constitutes an additional limitation for the spatial-temporal analysis. This lack of information affects the accuracy of geographic profiling and the understanding of the offender's movements during the period in which the robberies were committed.

CONCLUSION

The results of this analysis indicate clearly defined and consistent patterns of violent behaviour exhibited by the offender, who intensified criminal activities following his escape from prison. His modus operandi is specific and involves the use of a firearm to control and intimidate victims, with robberies most frequently carried out at low-risk locations such as kiosks and retail shops during evening hours. These patterns suggest a high level of planning and awareness aimed at avoiding potential witnesses.

The analysis of the temporal distribution of robberies revealed that the criminal acts were most frequently committed in February and April, with distinct phases of intensified activity. Furthermore, the majority of attacks occurred on Sundays and Mondays during the evening hours, suggesting that the offender selected time periods characterized by reduced public presence and fewer potential witnesses. This indicates a high level of adaptability and strategic thinking. These temporal patterns further corroborate the opportunistic nature of the offenses and the offender's ability to effectively exploit situational conditions for the commission of the crimes.

The application of Canter's investigative psychology model (Canter & Youngs, 2009) enabled the identification of key offender characteristics: consistency in the method of committing offenses, opportunistic target selection, and thorough knowledge of the local area, as evidenced by the concentration of robberies in familiar city municipalities (Kocsis, 2006). Occasional demands for additional items, such as cigarettes or phones, may indicate psychological manipulation of victims or an attempt to create the illusion of varying motives for the crimes (Ainsworth, 2001).

Based on the results, it can be concluded that the offender's behaviour is planned rather than impulsive, following a developed criminal scenario (Cornish & Clarke, 1986). This behavioural pattern points to a high risk of recidivism, as it demonstrates the offender's ability to adapt and progressively develop destructive patterns (Bonta & Andrews, 2007).

The application of rational choice theory could be beneficial in preventive and proactive policing strategies (Cornish & Clarke, 1986). Anticipating the possible presence of police patrols during specific time frames and locations, as well as enhancing video surveillance systems in the most frequented areas, could significantly contribute to reducing the occurrence of similar crimes (Felson & Clarke, 1998). Considering the offender's characteristics, theoretical frameworks such as social learning theory and techniques of neutralization may aid in a broader understanding of social factors influencing his motives and behavioural patterns (Akers, 2017), although practical implementation of these insights in operational work may be challenging.

Future research should focus on analysing behavioural patterns of serial offenders in different contexts, both in other urban environments and in relation to related forms of violent property crime, such as armed robberies. Comparative approaches could contribute to a deeper understanding of factors influencing the formation, stability, and changes in criminal behaviour patterns, thereby strengthening the development of more effective profiling strategies and preventive interventions.

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