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CRIMINAL PROFILING AS A TOOL SUPPORTING CRIME DETECTION: INSIGHTS AND ASSESSMENT FROM EXPERT

ABSTRACT

This article provides a critical examination of criminal profiling as an auxiliary investigative tool, drawing on qualitative data derived from structured interviews with experienced Polish profilers. The article aims to the epistemological and practical dimensions of profiling, assess its evidentiary value within the investigative process, and identify factors influencing its reliability and applicability in criminal casework.

Criminal profiling is conceptualized as an interdisciplinary investigative technique that assists law enforcement agencies in constructing psychological and behavioral representations of unidentified offenders. This process draws upon crime scene evidence, victimology, and contextual data to guide investigative strategies. While profiling serves as a valuable mechanism for narrowing the suspect pool and generating testable hypotheses, it does not yield definitive identification of individual perpetrators.

The findings suggest that profiling is most frequently employed in homicide investigations, offering substantial auxiliary support in directing investigative efforts. However, its effectiveness is contingent upon the expertise, interdisciplinary competence, and analytical rigor of the professionals involved. Based on a qualitative analysis of expert interviews, the study identifies key determinants of profiling utility, elucidates its methodological strengths and inherent limitations, and positions profiling as a complementary – rather than conclusive – instrument within the broader framework of modern investigative practices.

KEYWORDS: *criminal profiling, crime detection, offender psychological profile, crime, experts, profiler, criminal investigation*

INTRODUCTION

Crimes and criminal acts are an inseparable part of social reality. Contemporary law enforcement agencies, operating in a rapidly changing social and technological environment, increasingly turn to tools that support the process of identifying perpetrators. One such tool is criminal profiling – a method based on the analysis of the offender's behavior, modus operandi, traces left at the crime scene, and the context of the crime. It allows for narrowing down the pool of suspects and formulating effective investigative hypotheses.

Although profiling gained popularity primarily due to the work of the FBI and the successes of profilers in serial crime cases, it has gradually been adapted in Europe, including Poland. In the face of increasing complexity of

criminogenic phenomena, evolving forms of crime, and societal pressure for effective investigations, profiling is becoming an increasingly utilized tool by law enforcement. In Poland, it is mainly used in cases of violent crimes, repetitive offense patterns, or crimes particularly difficult to solve with traditional investigative methods.

It is important to note that profiling does not aim to identify a perpetrator by name, but to guide operational activities, reduce investigative time and costs, and increase the effectiveness of investigations. Interest in this method is growing not only among law enforcement officers but also in the fields of forensic psychology, criminology, and forensic science. The popularity of profiling also stems from the authority of its practitioners – both American (John Douglas, Robert Ressler, Ann Wolbert Burgess) and Polish (Józef Gierowski, Maciej Szaszkiewicz, Jan Gołębiowski, Dariusz Piotrowicz, Łukasz Wroński, Justyna Poznańska). Thanks to their expertise, investigations gain an interdisciplinary dimension, and perpetrators – even those long evading justice – can eventually be identified and apprehended.

While criminal profiling is often simplified in pop culture, it is grounded in solid theoretical foundations: psychological, forensic, and sociological. Today, it is one of the analytical tools that support the activities of law enforcement agencies.

The aim of this article is to analyze the process of creating a criminal offender profile and to demonstrate the significance of profiling in criminal investigations – with particular emphasis on its possibilities, limitations, and the experiences of expert practitioners in the field.

DEFINITION AND NATURE OF CRIMINAL PROFILING

The term *criminal profiling* may appear terminologically ambiguous due to the diversity of related expressions: *criminal profiling*, *forensic profiling*, *psychological profiling*, *profiling of unknown offenders*, etc. In academic discourse, the most appropriate terms are forensic profiling or criminal profiling. While often used interchangeably, they may differ slightly in scope. Criminal profiling refers to the general process of inferring characteristics of the perpetrator

based on behavioral analysis. Forensic profiling, on the other hand, focuses more specifically on the use of forensic evidence to construct a profile.

In practice, both approaches often overlap and refer to the creation of an offender's psychological profile. While forensic profiling emphasizes evidence-based analysis, criminal profiling encompasses broader aspects such as offender behavior, motivation, and personality traits. Numerous definitions of profiling exist in the literature, each emphasizing different dimensions – trace analysis, personality traits, behavioral reconstruction, etc. One of the most accurate definitions is attributed to Bogdan Lach ^[1], the first Polish profiler officially collaborating with the Police (Table 1).

Table 1. *Selected Definitions of Criminal Profiling in the Literature*

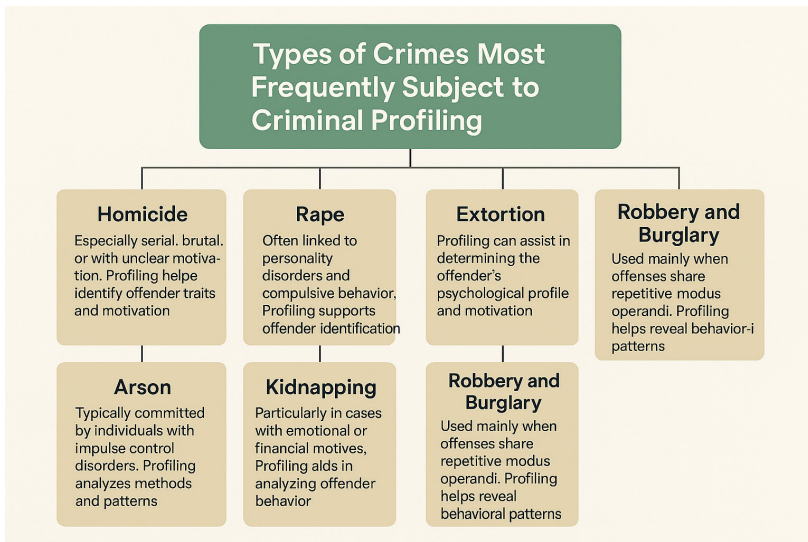
Author	Definition
Bogdan Lach	A set of activities related to the analysis of forensic traces found at the crime scene, the behavior of the perpetrator and the victim, the collection of victimological data, their classification and verification, ultimately aimed at constructing a logical, coherent, and concise offender profile (Lach, 2014).
Jan Gołębiowski	Profiling is the creation of a specific description of an offender that includes their characteristic traits. The profile should indicate possible personality, social, demographic, and physical features, and answer questions regarding the offender's relationship with the victim, motivation, disorders, and predicted behavior (Gołębiowski, 2021, p.37).
Monika Wasiak	Drawing inferences about the offender's characteristics based on behavioral traces observed at the crime scene (Wasiak, 2016, p. 84–104).
Brent E. Turvey	Profiling is understood as Behavioral Evidence Analysis, based on physical traces, documents, and witness statements, aimed at reconstructing the event and identifying motives (Turvey, 2002).
John E. Douglas	Profiling is a behavioral composite description of an unknown offender, derived from the analysis of evidence collected at the crime scene (Douglas et al., 1986, p. 406).
Karolina Olszak-Häußler	Criminal profiling, also known as offender profiling, psychological profiling, or personality profiling, involves inferring offender characteristics based on the nature of the crime committed (Olszak-Häußler, 2015, p. 140–162).

Source: author's own compilation.

Criminal profiling in Poland, as in other parts of the world, is based on solid scientific foundations and interdisciplinary knowledge. Individuals engaged in profiling must possess a wide range of competencies that go beyond mere familiarity with investigative procedures.

When characterizing criminal profiling, it is important to note that it is based on knowledge from psychology, criminology, forensic science, victimology, and forensic medicine. It can take the form of psychological, criminalistic, or behavioral profiling and is most commonly applied in cases of murder, rape, abduction, arson, extortion, robbery, and serial offenses (Gruza, Goc, Moszczyński, 2020, p. 48).

Figure 1. *Types of Crimes Most Frequently Subject to Criminal Profiling*



Source: author's own compilation based on Jankowska et al. (2023).

Profiling is therefore a process that involves examining data related to a crime and determining, based on this data, the characteristic traits of the offender – namely, psychological profiling. *Criminal profiling refers to a set of actions undertaken during criminal proceedings aimed at creating a description of the offender – determining their characteristics based on the analysis of data collected from the crime scene* (Alison, Smith, Morgan, 2003, p. 185). It is worth noting that some authors in the subject literature distinguish between psychological profiling and criminalistic profiling, emphasizing that these are activities differing in both effectiveness and their impact on

ongoing proceedings (Jankowska et al., 2023, p. 94). Therefore, criminal profiling is a broader concept than psychological profiling (Łodzińska-Piekarska, Dąbrowolski, 2023, p. 126), as it includes not only psychological traits but also physical, personality-related, social, and demographic characteristics. In such a case, profiling becomes an effective tool for accurately identifying the offender and combating crime (Gołębiowski, Grochowska, 2014, p. 9).

Profiling is especially useful in cases where the offender exhibits psychopathological behaviors. Such behaviors include torture, sexual acts, mutilation of victims' bodies, or the removal of their organs (Wroński, 2016, p. 200–201). In an interview with the Holistic portal, Maciej Szaszkiewicz ^[2] states that psychopaths – who make up a large proportion of serial killers – very often *play* with investigators and the media; they are excited by the fact that everyone is looking for them. *Those who are intellectually strong not only want to kill, but also to continue playing. Especially when they see that the case has come to a standstill. They plant false leads, manipulate the crime scene* (Mazurek, 2024). Profiling involves a thorough analysis of the causes of the incident, using knowledge about the psychological mechanisms that influenced both the perpetrator and the victim (Gołębiowski, Fugiel-Kuźmińska, 2023, p. 43). For profiling to be useful in law enforcement operations, it is necessary to go beyond a purely psychological approach limited to describing traits. One must also consider the perpetrator's personality traits, physical characteristics, social background, and even demographic information (Lebiedowicz, 2021, p. 88).

There are five main approaches to profiling: criminal-investigative analysis, clinical approach, geographic profiling, investigative psychology, and behavioral analysis (Gołębiowski, 2017, p.61). Criminal profiling is grounded in psychology as the study of human behavior and its underlying motivations. It infers characteristics based on a person's actions – not the other way around. It assumes that human behavior is guided in a predictable manner by an individual reasoning pattern. For this reason, an undisturbed crime scene can reveal elements that help determine the likely motives of the perpetrator, which in turn facilitates the characterization of their personality (Burgess, Constantine, 2021, p.78-79).

Here are some specific criminal investigations in Poland in which criminal profiling played a significant role (Table 2).

Table 2. *Examples of Criminal Cases in Poland Involving Profiling*

Case	Description
Murder of a woman "by the Białucha River" (1965)	A profile of the offender was created, which helped direct the investigation.
The case of Zdzisław Marchwicki, known as the "Vampire of Zagłębie" (1972)	Forensic and psychiatric opinions enabled the suspect to be identified with 79% accuracy in traits.
"Scorpion" investigation (1983)	A preliminary psychological profile questionnaire was used to develop the offender's characteristics
Murder of a woman in Dąbrowa Tarnowska (1986)	The first professional criminal profile in Poland was developed by the Institute of Forensic Research. The profile helped apprehend the perpetrator.
Murder of former Deputy Minister of Transport and Katowice Deputy Voivode Eugeniusz Wróbel (2010)	The perpetrator – the victim's son – attempted to mislead the investigation. Profiling helped uncover the true course of events. Available sources indicate that private investigator Arkadiusz Andała, a former police officer, played a key role by identifying the son as the suspect through crime scene analysis and behavioral observation. His findings, including blood traces detected under UV light, contributed to a breakthrough in the investigation.

Source: author's own compilation on Jankowska et al. (2023), Ruszczczyk, (2015), Wrocławski (2020), *Gazeta Śledcza*, (2010).

It should be noted that the *modus operandi* may be the subject or basis of a criminalistic hypothesis, understood – as B. Hołyst writes – as *a hypothetical assumption made by law enforcement regarding the nature of the event, its course, as well as the purpose and motives behind the actions* (Hołyst, 1993, p. 611).

B. Hołyst (2023b). regards criminal profiling as one of the tools of forensic psychology that supports the process of detecting and identifying offenders. He highlights the close relationship between forensic psychology and investigative practice, as well as the importance of knowledge about offender behavior in formulating investigative hypotheses. At the same time, he emphasizes that criminal profiling is not an evidentiary method and cannot replace traditional forensic investigative procedures. Its primary value lies in its heuristic function, enabling the formulation and verification of investigative hypotheses, the interpretation of collected evidence, and supporting law enforcement agencies in directing investigative activities.

Criminal profiling is considered an interdisciplinary method that supports law enforcement activities. It involves creating a psychophysical profile of the perpetrator based on available information, physical evidence, *modus operandi*, victim behavior, and the context of the crime. However, despite the thorough procedures carried out by specialists, it is not possible to definitively identify a specific person as the offender, as emphasized by Brent E. Turvey (2002, p.335).

As B. Lach points out, profiling allows for the formulation of probabilistic characteristics (2014, p.48) that can be applied to a group of individuals, thereby narrowing down the circle of potential suspects in a case.

Criminal profiling does not replace traditional investigative procedures; rather, it complements them. From B. Hołyst's perspective, the effectiveness of an investigation increases when profiling is used as an element of comprehensive forensic analysis supporting investigative and inquiry activities, rather than as a tool that independently determines the identity of the offender (Hołyst, 2023a, pp. 421–432).

OPERATIONAL PROFILING AND FORENSIC PROFILING

Operational profiling and forensic profiling (Turvey, 2002; Gołębiowski, 2021; Gierowski, 2009) are two distinct methods of criminal analysis. Although both focus on analyzing criminal behavior, they are used in different contexts and serve different purposes. While these terms are not always strictly or uniformly defined across jurisdictions or academic literature, key differences can be identified in terms of purpose, target audience, and application.

The primary goal of operational profiling (Olszak-Häußler, 2015, p. 140–162; Holmes R., Holmes S., 2008) also referred to as investigative, behavioral, or psychological profiling in the context of investigations) is to support law enforcement agencies (such as the police and prosecution) during ongoing investigations. It aims to provide information that helps to: a) Narrow down the pool of suspects – by identifying demographic, behavioral, and psychological traits of the potential offender; b) Guide investigative efforts – by suggesting where to look for the perpetrator, what methods to use during interviews, and which types of evidence may be important; c) Understand the *modus operandi* – by analyzing behavioral patterns, motivations, and potential mental disorders; d) Link crimes – by aiding in the identification of serial offenders.

Operational profiling is a tactical, auxiliary tool that provides hypotheses and investigative leads primarily for police officers, prosecutors, and detectives. It is not considered legal evidence and does not directly determine a specific individual's guilt. It is based on the analysis of crime scene evidence,

victimology, and data from similar cases. It can rely on the profiler's experience (clinical approach) or statistical analysis (statistical approach). Operational profiling is typically used in the early stages of an investigation, especially when the offender is unknown.

In contrast, forensic profiling (Gierowski, 2009; Gołębiowski, Grochowska, 2014 – also referred to as psychological or psychiatric expert assessment for court purposes) is primarily intended to provide the court (or other judicial authorities) with expert knowledge regarding the mental state, personality, motivation, or credibility of individuals involved in the legal process (defendants, witnesses, victims). It may involve: a) Assessing the criminal responsibility of the accused – determining whether they were capable of understanding their actions and controlling their behavior at the time of the offense; b) Evaluating intellectual and emotional development – important in cases involving juvenile offenders or victims; c) Assessing the credibility of witness or victim testimonies – based on psychological analysis of their predispositions; d) Evaluating the risk of recidivism – useful for determining sentencing or conditions for parole; e) Conducting psychological analyses in family court cases.

Forensic profiling takes the form of an expert opinion provided during the pre-trial or trial phase as legal evidence for the court, prosecutor, or defense attorneys. It must meet rigorous formal and methodological standards. The expert bases their opinion on direct examination of the individual (interviews, psychological tests, case file analysis) rather than solely on evidence from the crime scene.

Forensic profiling is usually applied at later stages of criminal proceedings or during trial, once a specific suspect or defendant has been identified, and the objective is to assess their mental condition or other psychological/psychiatric factors relevant to the case.

In summary, operational and forensic profiling are complementary methods of criminal analysis. They differ in context and purpose but both play a crucial role in understanding criminal behavior and serving the justice system. J. Gołębiowski and K. Grochowska (2014, p. 120) note that in court cases, we most often encounter the phrasing 'creation of a psychological profile of the perpetrator.' In turn, procedural documents feature the following: 'creation of a psychophysical silhouette of an unknown perpetrator' or 'creation of

a psychosocial silhouette. Operational profiling supports investigators in identifying unknown perpetrators, while forensic profiling provides expert evaluations of psychological or psychiatric aspects of individuals involved in the judicial process. Brent E. Turvey (2002), one of the leading American profilers, emphasizes that operational profiling should always be based on physical evidence rather than intuition, and that it serves primarily an orientational rather than a decisive function. In contrast, forensic profiling must meet high methodological and ethical standards, as its findings are submitted directly to the court and can influence legal decisions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Given the subject and the aim of the study, the main research problem was formulated as follows: To what extent is criminal profiling, as a tool supporting the process of crime detection, effective from the perspective of expert practitioners, and what are its main capabilities and limitations in investigative practice?

The following main hypothesis was adopted: Criminal profiling constitutes a valuable support in the process of crime detection by narrowing down the circle of suspects and generating new investigative hypotheses. However, its effectiveness is limited by the subjectivity of analysis and the lack of unified standards and legal regulations.

The research sample was selected purposefully and included three well-known Polish profilers: Jan Gołębiowski, Łukasz Wroński, and Justyna Poznańska. The selection criterion was their professional experience in offender profiling and participation in real criminal investigations.

The study was based on the expert opinion method using targeted online interviews and document analysis – including interviews published in mass media with selected experts and other well-known Polish profilers, including Bogdan Lach. A qualitative content analysis of the interviews provided in-depth insights into the experts' subjective experiences and evaluations, and allowed for the identification of key conclusions regarding the application, effectiveness, limitations, and practical aspects of profiling. The study was conducted in 2024.

The limitations of the study stem from its qualitative nature and the small research sample. Therefore, the findings are exploratory and have limited generalizability. They reflect the subjective views of experts, which may not always correspond with the actual outcomes of profiling in broader investigative contexts.

EXPERTS' PROFILES

Jan Gołębiowski is a criminal profiler, forensic psychologist, and court expert. He is considered one of Poland's leading specialists in profiling unknown perpetrators of crimes (SWPS, n.d.; *Inspiracje psychologiczne*,²⁰¹⁵). He trained under Brent Turvey, Director of the Forensic Criminology Institute in the USA. He worked at the Warsaw Metropolitan Police Headquarters as a police psychologist and later in a forensic psychiatric unit. He has been listed as a court expert at the Warsaw District Court and has been professionally involved in profiling since 2005. He has prepared over 1,100 criminal profiles and consultations for the justice system and law enforcement. In 2010, he founded the Center for Criminal Psychology, where he organizes and conducts training in profiling, investigative, and forensic psychology. He is the author of numerous publications, including the first Polish monograph on criminal profiling: *Profilowanie kryminalne. Wprowadzenie do sporządzania charakterystyki psychologicznej nieznanymi sprawców przestępstw* (2008), *Umysł przestępcy. Tajniki profilowania psychologicznego* (2021) and *Urodzeni mordercy? Nieznane kulisy pracy profilerów* (2023, co-authored with Małgorzata Fugiel-Kuźmińska).

Justyna Poznańska is a forensic psychologist, court expert, and experienced profiler specializing in forensic and investigative psychology. From 2007 to 2017, she worked within the Polish Police structures – first as a police psychologist, later as a psychological identification specialist in the Investigative Division of the Provincial Police Headquarters in Gdańsk. From 2016 to 2017, she served at the National Police Headquarters as the coordinator of applied police psychology. Since 2010, she has served as a court expert in forensic psychology and has supported investigations in over 450 cases, including murders, suicides, rapes, arson, robbery, theft, acts of pedophilia,

disappearances, kidnappings for ransom, and drug-related crimes. She collaborates with experts in forensic polygraphy and evaluates the psychological credibility of witness statements and suspect testimonies. She is the author of Poland's first publication on the *Death Row Syndrome* in U.S. law (2015) and of the book *Forensic Sexology* (WCPŚ, n.d.). She currently serves as Director of the Warsaw Center for Forensic and Investigative Psychology.

Łukasz Wroński is a forensic psychologist and sexologist specializing in forensic, investigative, and clinical psychology. He works in the psychiatric ward of the Mazovian Specialist Health Center named after Jan Mazurkiewicz and is a board member of the Forensic Psychology Section of the Polish Society of Clinical Psychology. His work involves psychological diagnostics and assessments, as well as consultations in profiling offenders, especially in sexually motivated homicides. He is the author of *Serial and Multiple Murderers: Psychological and Geographical Profiling* (2015) and *Inside the Mind of a Murderer: The Shadow of the Beast* (2019). He also provides training in investigative psychology.

RESULTS AND EXPERT ASSESSMENTS

According to expert opinion, a criminal profile does not indicate a single direction or provide a definitive psychological description of a homicide perpetrator. Jan Gołębiowski admitted that he had once been criticized for producing a profile that, instead of narrowing down, actually expanded the circle of suspects. In response, he stated that anyone holding such a view fundamentally misunderstands the essence of profiling. A psychological profile of an alleged offender is only useful as an investigative tool if it is created based on information collected during evidentiary procedures in the pre-trial phase and in accordance with knowledge of human behavior mechanisms. Profiling can assist in formulating new investigative hypotheses, verifying existing ones, narrowing down the pool of suspects, and deciding whether specialized forensic analyses are warranted. However, it must be emphasized that anyone expecting profiling to name a suspect is likely to be disappointed.

Bogdan Lach, a retired Police Chief Inspector and a profiling specialist in violent crimes, argues: *There is no formal profession of 'profiler' in Poland. Those involved in this field are usually investigative psychologists. Criminal profiling in Poland began in 1996, with the establishment of police psychologist positions. [...] A profiler is someone who supports investigative efforts. This role often overlaps with that of a court expert. I proposed the term 'expert profiler' in the literature, and it has been accepted by the academic community. It refers to a person who, based on case materials, victimology data, and other evidence such as crime scene traces and behavioral indicators, infers characteristics of the offender that are unique and rare in the population. These activities are aimed at narrowing the group of individuals of interest to law enforcement* (from an interview with *Gazeta Śledcza*, Ruszczyk, 2015).

According to the experts interviewed, becoming a profiler requires a background in psychology. In Poland, criminal profiling is primarily conducted by police psychologists. While becoming a police officer is not strictly necessary, many police psychologists with master's degrees are full-time officers. There are exceptions in the form of civilian professionals. Approximately 200 individuals currently serve as police psychologists in Poland, working within designated units in regional police headquarters as well as in the Warsaw Metropolitan Police and National Police Headquarters.

In an interview about the role of psychologists in investigations, Jan Gołębiowski pointed out: *Police psychologists have many duties – from evaluating police applicants, providing psychological support for officers, and intervening in crises, to assisting in criminal investigations. Psychologists act as consultants, and I must say that police officers increasingly rely on professional support when solving cases* (Inspiracje psychologiczne, 2015).

Justyna Poznańska was the first specialist in psychological identification in the Investigative Division of the Provincial Police Headquarters in Gdańsk. Jan Gołębiowski also stresses that despite the lack of legal regulations or standardized procedures, it is essential to undergo training in profiling unknown offenders and initially work under supervision, which means consulting with an experienced profiler. *We are not clairvoyants. We work in a rational discipline based on logic*, Gołębiowski noted in an interview with *Dziennik Bałtycki* (Kachel, 2021). Experts agree that in this profession, one must be

familiar with the fundamentals of criminology, criminalistics, victimology, criminal law, sexology, and forensic medicine. Equally important are the skills of objectivity, analytical thinking, keen observation, creative problem-solving, and diligence – qualities crucial when analyzing case material. Gołębiowski listed his own strengths as a profiler: *I have an analytical mind, I can maintain emotional distance, which gives me an objective perspective. I have a good memory and an eye for detail. I've also acquired extensive knowledge in forensic science, forensic medicine, and criminology – I've gone beyond psychology* (Inspiracje psychologiczne, 2015). A criminal profiler, he says, *must have an open mind and not fall into stereotypes* (Kachel, 2021). These are considered the core competencies of a criminal profiler.

Criminal profilers most often create offender profiles in relation to homicide cases. When speaking about serial killers, Jan Gołębiowski emphasizes that *many of them were apprehended with the assistance of a profiler – often with very good results* (Kachel, 2021). He adds that, in his case, homicide-related cases account for approximately 45 to even 60 percent of all profiling cases. Less common are cases involving disappearances, ambiguous deaths, threats, robberies, rapes, and stalking (persistent harassment). Justyna Poznańska also points to ambiguous deaths and sexual assaults. She has also developed profiles related to the assessment of the credibility of witness testimonies and suspect explanations.

The most difficult aspect of creating a profile of a suspected offender, according to Justyna Poznańska, is collecting and analyzing case-specific data due to the time-consuming nature of this process and the risk of overlooking critical elements relevant to the profile. The expert emphasizes the importance of analytical skills in this demanding task. Łukasz Wroński agrees that it is hard to pinpoint a single most difficult element, yet he similarly identifies the time consumption – resulting from the volume of case files and the corresponding data to analyze – as a major challenge, which translates into a significant number of hours required to produce a forensic opinion. Jan Gołębiowski argues that the difficulty varies with each individual case. Challenges include insufficient information or poorly conducted and unreliable crime scene examinations (e.g., illegible handwriting in protocols). Another major difficulty is maintaining objectivity – the profile should not confirm the profiler's

assumptions about the perpetrator, but be based solely on objective analysis of investigative data. He warns against the risk of *confirmation bias*, where the profiler selectively interprets evidence to fit a pre-formed hypothesis. Moreover, defining the probability of particular characteristics in the profile and the categorical nature of conclusions poses another significant difficulty.

When asked about the most difficult profile they have created, Łukasz Wroński responded that every profile he worked on was challenging. Justyna Poznańska mentioned no single case but indicated that homicides motivated by sexual reasons and those with unclear motives are the most difficult to analyze. Similarly, Jan Gołębiowski admitted each profile has its challenges. He recalled struggling to review over 90 volumes of case files for a single investigation. He also noted that difficulty increases when there is limited information about the victim or the victim remains unidentified. The most demanding case he worked on required him to analyze 94 volumes of documentation.

When asked whether any of their profiles helped bring investigators closer to identifying the offender, the experts admitted they do not keep such statistics. However, it has happened in many cases. Łukasz Wroński explained that a profile does not directly identify the perpetrator; rather, it supports investigators by guiding them toward the right direction. In nearly every case he worked on, the offender was identified, but this was never solely due to the profile – rather, it was one of several investigative tools. Jan Gołębiowski emphasized that a legally binding court ruling is the only definitive confirmation of a solved case. Although profiles are developed primarily to support the investigative phase, ultimately, identifying and charging the perpetrator is a team effort. He does not claim that solving a case is solely thanks to his profile. Approximately 30% of the cases where he created profiles remain unsolved. Nonetheless, in about 10% of the cases, the profile clearly contributed to identifying the offender. In several cases, his analysis supported the hypothesis that the death was a suicide, which was later confirmed, and the investigation was closed accordingly.

Bogdan Lach stated: *In 67.7% of cases, the hypotheses generated during profiling led to the identification of the perpetrator. This is a fairly good result. The best outcomes are observed when multiple profilers collaborate, allowing for highly objective data. It is much harder to achieve this alone* (Ruszczyk, 2015).

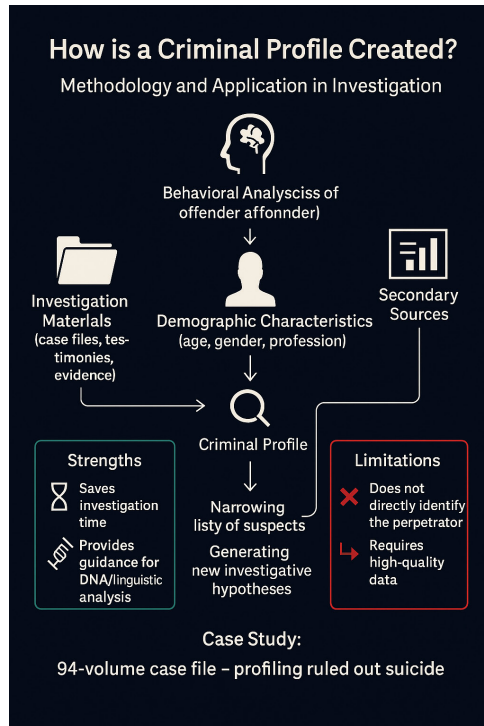
Experts identify several key strengths of criminal profiling, highlighting its effectiveness as a tool supporting investigative processes. Justyna Poznańska emphasized that profiling helps law enforcement focus on specific investigative hypotheses, narrow down the suspect pool, reduce the cost and duration of investigations, and provide valuable leads for further action. Jan Gołębiowski noted that profiling sheds new light on complex cases, indicating more precise motives than standard investigative assumptions. It also enables the construction of several versions of events, which can be particularly useful in difficult investigations.

As for limitations, most experts claim not to see significant weaknesses. Justyna Poznańska pointed to the passage of time since the incident as a potential limitation – due to evidence degradation, incomplete case files, and lack of access to essential data. In such cases, it may be possible to create a basic profile, but with limited detail, serving only as a supporting tool in the investigation. Jan Gołębiowski noted that a major drawback is that profiling does not provide direct or individual identification of the perpetrator and therefore carries less evidentiary weight compared to DNA testing or witness identification. He also emphasized that the profiler's competence plays a key role, making the human factor both a strength and a vulnerability in the process.

Furthermore, the lack of standardized procedures and quantitative effectiveness metrics raises questions about the consistency and reliability of profiling outcomes. The absence of systematic data on its comparative effectiveness against other investigative tools, such as forensic DNA analysis or digital forensics, makes it difficult to assess its unique contribution. Ethical concerns also arise, including the potential for reinforcing stereotypes or biases present in the data used for profiling, and the risk of misinterpreting psychological traits, which could lead to wrongful suspicion. Despite these acknowledged limitations, the experts interviewed generally view profiling as a valuable component of modern investigative practice.

Based on expert evaluations, a visual representation of the methodology and application of criminal profiling in investigations has been developed (Figure 2).

Figure 2. *A Map of Criminal Profile Construction Based on the Statements of Experts: Jan Gołębiowski, Justyna Poznańska, and Łukasz Wroński*



Source: author's own elaboration based on expert assessments.

Criminal profiling is predominantly applied in homicide investigations. Jan Gołębiowski, who specializes in unknown homicide offenders, states that in his experience, homicide cases account for up to 60% of all profiles he has developed – clearly the vast majority.

In homicide cases, criminal profiles make it possible to approximate the perpetrator's characteristics. Although the experts do not maintain exact statistics, they confirm that in many cases their profiles have supported the identification of the offender. They stress that profiling is not about taking credit, as solving a case is a collaborative effort. Despite the fact that many murder cases remain unsolved and offenders unidentified, it can be confidently

stated that criminal profiling has significantly contributed to solving a considerable number of homicide cases.

In summary, profilers most often prepare criminal profiles in relation to homicide cases. Jan Gołębiowski, who specializes in profiling unknown homicide offenders, emphasizes that in his case, murder cases account for up to 60 percent of all profiles he has created. This therefore constitutes a clear majority. In criminal homicide cases, it is possible to approximate the offender's characteristics based on the developed criminal profiles. The experts admit they do not keep formal statistics on this matter, yet affirm that profiling has proven helpful in many investigations. In their view, the profile serves as a tool to assist investigators in identifying the perpetrator, and even when it leads to an arrest or eventual conviction, they do not attribute the outcome solely to the profiles they developed, as such cases involve teamwork, and they are just one part of that team. Despite many cases still unsolved and offenders unidentified, it can be confidently stated that criminal profiling has contributed to identifying the perpetrators of numerous homicides.

CONCLUSION

Criminal profiling in Poland has evolved from a novel method into a recognized technique supporting criminal investigations. Thanks to scientific publications and the practical experience of experts, it has secured a place within the structures of law enforcement and the justice system.

Both operational profiling and forensic profiling serve as important tools in crime detection and the judicial process, although their functions, recipients, and objectives differ. Operational profiling supports investigative efforts by enabling the formulation of hypotheses about unknown offenders, identifying behavioral patterns, and guiding further operational procedures. In contrast, forensic profiling, as part of expert testimony, serves an evidentiary role and focuses on assessing the mental state and psychological characteristics of specific individuals involved in criminal proceedings.

As an analytical tool, criminal profiling does not provide definitive answers but helps narrow investigative focus and build working hypotheses.

The insights and experiences of Polish profilers – such as Jan Gołębiowski, Justyna Poznańska, Łukasz Wroński, and Bogdan Lach – confirm the practical value of profiling in investigative processes. While it is neither infallible nor sufficient on its own to determine guilt, it can significantly assist law enforcement in handling complex and challenging cases. Experts also emphasize the importance of professional training, multidisciplinary knowledge, and analytical thinking skills, alongside maintaining objectivity.

The professionalism of a criminal profiler plays a pivotal role in determining the quality and reliability of the profiling process. Through meticulous examination of case files, structured interviews with witnesses and potential suspects, and on-site analyses at crime scenes and other relevant locations, the profiler constructs a psychological portrait of the offender. This process allows the profiler to *enter the offender's mind* by reconstructing the psychological mechanisms and behavioral patterns that may have driven the criminal act. Importantly, criminal profiling is a logical and evidence-based analytical procedure rooted in psychology, criminology, and forensic science, and bears no relation to parapsychology or any form of extrasensory perception.

However, the effectiveness of profiling is not without limitations and criticism. The lack of comprehensive, standardized statistical data on its success rate and its comparative advantage over other investigative methods presents a significant gap. The potential for subjectivity, confirmation bias, and the absence of universal standards highlight the need for continued research, critical evaluation, and potentially stricter guidelines for its application. Ethical considerations, particularly concerning potential misuse or overreliance on psychological inferences, also warrant careful attention. Recognizing these limitations is crucial for the responsible and effective use of criminal profiling.

Criminal profiling is an interdisciplinary investigative method based on constructing a psychological portrait of an unknown offender. Although still treated as an auxiliary tool in Poland, it has gained recognition as a valuable element of investigative and judicial support. This makes it an indispensable part of modern criminal analysis, whose effectiveness has been documented in numerous cases. Experts stress that profiling is only useful when based on information gathered through evidentiary procedures during the preliminary investigation and aligned with knowledge about the mechanisms of human behavior.

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ENDNOTES

- [1] Dr. Bogdan Lach is a retired Police Sub-Inspector, psychologist, court expert in the field of profiling psychology, and a specialist in violent crime. As a criminal profiler, he has created over 400 psychological and forensic profiles in cases involving homicides, rapes, pedophilia, and arson. He participated in high-profile investigations such as those of the so-called Vampire of Sosnowiec (Piotr S.), the serial killer of sex workers Mariusz H., the multiple murderer from Katowice Leszek R., the serial rapist Tomasz K. operating in Katowice, and the final stage of the investigation into the murder of Krzysztof Olewnik. He was awarded the Gold Cross of Merit by the President of the Republic of Poland and the *Distinguished Police Officer* Badge. Dr. Lach is the author of numerous scientific publications, including *Imperfect Crime*, *Criminal Profiling*, and *Child Murderesses*. Since 1999, he has served as a police negotiation consultant. For many years, he has collaborated with national media as an expert and commentator on criminal cases. He is widely referred to by the media as *the father of psychological profiling in Poland*. Ruszczyk, A. (2015, August 31). Profiler o zbrodniach niedoskonałych. *Gazeta Śledcza*. <https://gazetasledcza.pl/2015/08/profiler-o-zbrodniach-niedoskonalych/> (accessed 15.07.2025).
- [2] Dr. Maciej Szaszkiewicz is a Polish forensic psychologist and criminal profiler, former assistant professor at the Institute of Forensic Research in Kraków. For over 30 years, he has been studying the minds of individuals who commit the most serious crimes. He is the author of numerous scientific publications in the field of criminal psychology.