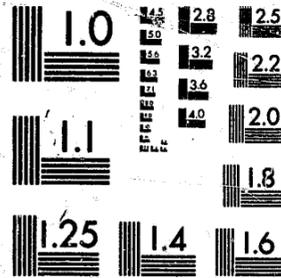


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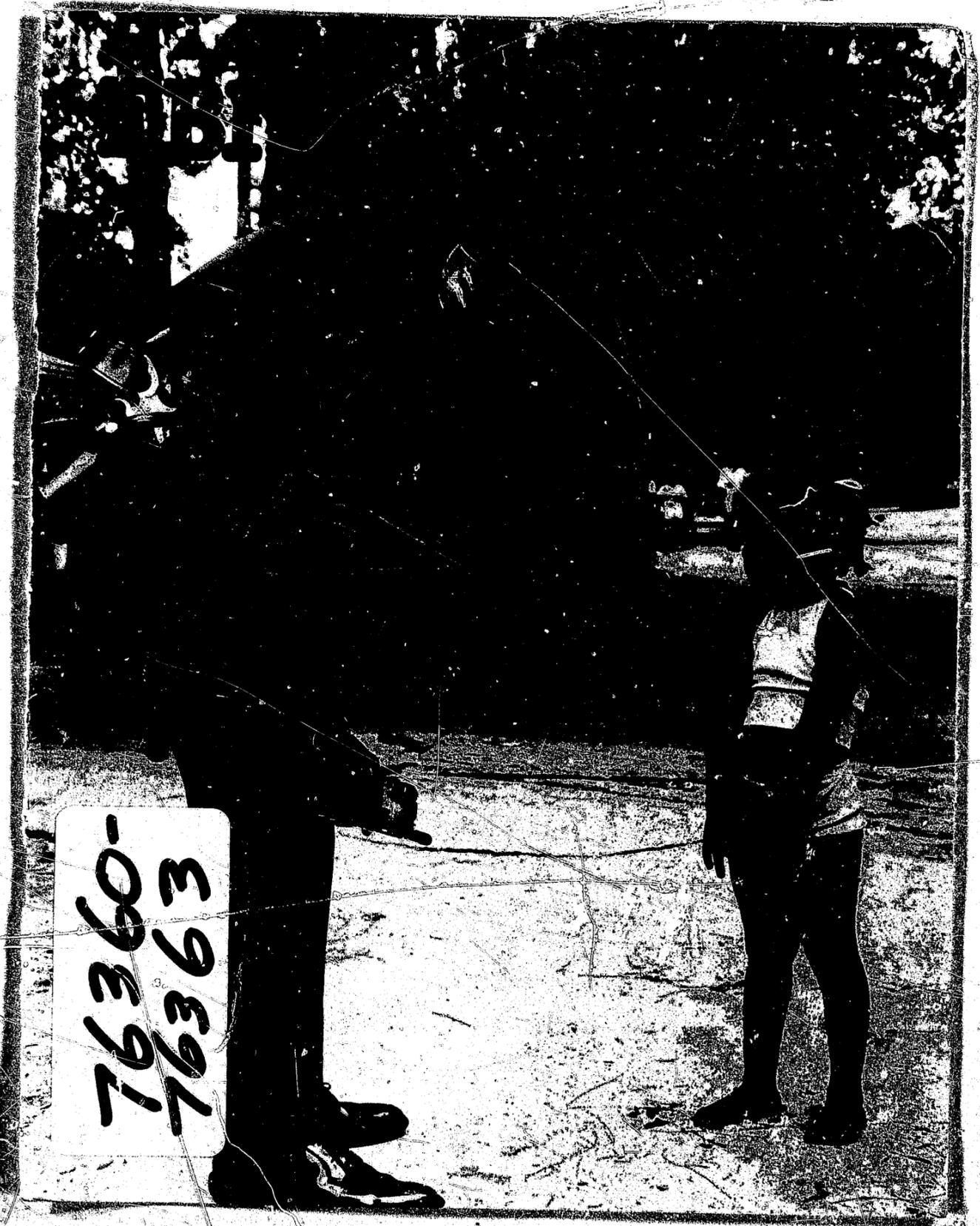
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**Contents**

EMG

- Training 1** "Shoot—Don't Shoot": A Realistic Firearms Course  
By Dep. Chief Charles F. Hinman and Kathryn Lea Washburn, Police Department, Newport News, Va. 76360
- Crime Problems 6** **The Firesetter: A Psychological Profile (Part 2)**  
By Anthony Olen Rider, Special Agent, Behavioral Science Unit, FBI Academy, Quantico, Va. 76361
- Police-Community Relations 18** "Police and You": A Public Relations Program  
By Officer Jorune Jonikas, Police Department, Carmel, Calif.
- Management 22** **Occupational Stress and Compensation in Law Enforcement**  
By John A. Leonard, Research and Planning, Dept. of Public Safety, Meriden, Conn., and G. Patrick Tully, Commanding Officer, Training Section, Division of State Police, Dept. of Public Safety, Meriden, Conn. 76362
- The Legal Digest 27** **Documentary Search Warrants—A Problem of Particularity**  
By Larry E. Rissler, Special Agent, Legal Counsel Division, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Washington, D.C. 76363
- 32** **Wanted by the FBI**



The Cover: Providing assistance to both young and old, a Jacksonville police officer comes to the aid of a damsel in distress. (Photo courtesy of Frank Smith, Florida Times-Union, Jacksonville, Fla.)

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# The Firesetter

## A Psychological Profile (Part 2)

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A profile is defined generally as a "concise biographical sketch depicting a personality by vivid outlining and sharp contrast." Its purpose is to provide a distinctive and narrative portrait of an individual.

A psychological profile, more precisely, is a description of the salient psychological and behavioral characteristics of a person. It portrays the individual psychodynamically by identifying personality and behavioral traits or patterns (trait clusters) that uniquely classify and distinguish him from members of the general population.

Behavioral scientists, including psychiatrists and clinical psychologists, have long used profiling techniques in their diagnostic assessment and empirical study of psychopathology. Profiles drawn from such studies have often aided in the understanding and treatment of mental illness, emotional distress, and personality maladjustment. Criminologists have also applied profiling strategies to their study and classification of known offenders.

Psychological profiling appears to have legitimate and practical application to selective criminal investigations. Its employment in matters of this nature, however, is often predicated on a need to identify an unknown subject who has demonstrated some form of psychopathology in his crime—sadistic torture in sexual assaults, evisceration and post mortem slashing and cutting in homicides, and motiveless firesetting. The projected profile of the offender in these instances serves to support the investigative process by aiding in the identification and apprehension of the offender.

The propriety of criminal psychological profiling pivots on three critical issues.

First, it must be determined whether the crime suitably lends itself to psychological analysis. Crimes against the person appear to be best suited for criminal psychological profiling.

Second, psychological profiling should be applied only to those cases in which the unknown subject demonstrates some form of mental, emotional, or behavioral disturbance in the crime. Unless there is perceptible psychopathology present in the crime, a profile cannot be rendered on an unknown subject.

The third factor to be considered concerns the potential value of the profile in aiding law enforcement in its identification of unknown subjects. If only vague generalizations can be drawn from the crime scene about the subject's behavioral style, then the efficacy of the psychological profile is considerably diminished. For this technique to be an effective tool, it must assist the investigator in focusing his investigation.

The purpose of criminal psychological profiling, then, is to provide the investigator with a personality composite of the unknown subject that will aid in his swift and judicious apprehension.

### Profiling the Firesetter

David Berkowitz, the confessed "Son of Sam" mass murderer who terrorized New York City during 1976 and 1977 by killing five young women and a man and wounding seven other young people, also reportedly informed his attorneys that he set over 2000 fires and made 137 false alarms in New York City from 1974 through 1977. On almost every occasion, he reportedly called in the fires to the police as the "Phantom of the Bronx."<sup>49</sup>

According to a newspaper account, Berkowitz claimed that he set these fires in cars, rubbish, brush, and vacant and unoccupied stores. Allegedly, he set 11 of these fires on a single day and two less than a month prior to his last killing just a block away from the future murder site.

The newspaper further reported that "childhood friends of Berkowitz recalled . . . that they would frequently 'buff' fires in a car outfitted with a fire radio and that Berkowitz—who dreamed of becoming a fireman—would sit in the 'navigator's' seat and log the blazes in detail."<sup>50</sup>

Note pads seized by the authorities, allegedly bearing the handprinted notes of Berkowitz, gave detailed information on 1411 fires for the years of 1974, 1975, and 1977, including the date and time of the fire, street, borough, weather, number of the fire box, and the fire department code indicating the type of responding apparatus and building or property burned.

The question arises as to whether Berkowitz typifies the firesetter.

Are arsonists homicidal? Are they frustrated would-be firemen? Do they keep meticulous diaries of their fire-setting activities? Do they tend to report their fires to the authorities? What are the precursory factors of incendiarism? What are the primary psychological and behavioral characteristics of the firesetter? Are they uniquely different from one another and from other offenders? Do they always leave evidence of their personality at the fire scene?

These questions certainly have intrigued behavioral scientists and investigators for centuries. In fact, the psychological and psychiatric literature is replete with clinical case studies and empirical research concerning pathological firesetting. Significant insight into such behavior has been obtained,

but much still remains speculative or only partially substantiated. Consequently, precise answers to the above questions remain uncertain. More vital and detailed information concerning the psychological and behavioral aspects of firesetting must be collected and assessed if we are to classify and profile more accurately the arsonist and significantly impact his firesetting. Understanding his behavior preceding, during, and after his firesetting experience will greatly enhance the investigative process and possibly accelerate identification and apprehension.

#### Common Characteristics of the Firesetter

According to Jesse James in his article, "Psychological Motives for Arson,"

"Neither sex, age, education, intellectual level nor economic status in any way limits the possibility of any individual to engage in arson. On the other hand, from a study of large samples, it does appear that, statistically, persons of certain ages and with certain characteristics are more apt to set fires than are others."<sup>51</sup>

#### Age

Studies have consistently found that firesetters tend to be young, with a high rate of incidence around 17 years of age. Macdonald reports that the highest frequency of pathological firesetters is between ages 15 and 20.<sup>52</sup> According to figures available in the *FBI Uniform Crime Reports (UCR)*, arrested arsonists ages 20 and under comprise 65.8 percent of the total arson arrestees and those 13 to 19 years of age account for 42.8 percent.<sup>53</sup>

#### Sex

The overwhelming majority of known firesetters are male. This has been supported in clinical and empirical research studies of known arsonist populations and demonstrated in the statistical incidence of arrests for arsonists.

#### Race

According to statistical evidence, arrested arsonists are predominately caucasian. However, there is no evidence that race is a correlate to arson.

#### Intelligence

A large number of studies have indicated that firesetters tend to be mentally deficient or of below-average intelligence. Yet, it has been suggested that possibly it is the mentally deficient firesetter or at least the less intelligent one who is most often identified or studied. The more intelligent arsonists may avoid detection. Although a large number of studies have identified intellectual difficulties among firesetters, they have not conclusively demonstrated that intellectual impairment or low basic intelligence is a precursor to firesetting.

#### Academic Performance

Studies of firesetters have consistently found histories of poor academic achievement, severe scholastic retardation, and significant grade failures among arsonists. This may be due not necessarily to intellectual impairment but to social and personal maladjustment. Environmental stress, lack of parental attention, and anxiety may produce learning difficulties. Whatever the reason, firesetting children tend to have problems in school.

#### Rearing Environments

Firesetters appear to come from disruptive, frustrating, harsh, broken, or unstable home environments. Often their families are large and within the lower socioeconomic level, and it is not uncommon to find one or both parents frequently absent. Some studies have noted that repetitive child firesetters are often middle children; whereas, adult arsonists are likely to have been the first born, last born, or an only child. It has been frequently noted that firesetting children come from father-absent and mother-dominated (over-protective, rejecting, or abusive) environments.

#### Social Relationships

Firesetters typically experience difficulties in social relationships, especially with women. Because their rearing environments have not fostered normal social development, they generally lack the basic social skills necessary for good interpersonal relations. They have been generally described as socially maladjusted and social isolates.

#### Marital Ties

Numerous studies have reflected that firesetters typically experience poor marital adjustment. Few are known, in fact, to have marital ties. This possibly stems from their difficulties in developing and maintaining close interpersonal relationships and being reared in mother-dominated environments. Many have also expressed a hatred or fear of women, as well as sexual inadequacy.

#### Employment History

Poor occupational adjustment is another common characteristic of the firesetter. His work habits are poor, and he frequently changes jobs, has difficulty with supervisors, and demonstrates little interest in advancement. He is often unemployed or employed in an unskilled position.

#### Emotional-Psychiatric Disturbance

Firesetters have been typically described as psychiatrically disturbed and emotionally distressed and maladjusted. They also appear to lack self-control and self-confidence and experience significant stress and tension. Frequently, they manifest psychopathic, neurotic, and psychotic disorders.

#### Sexual Disturbance

Firesetting has been universally associated with sexual perversion. Researchers who are psychoanalytically oriented have postulated that "firesetting functions as a sexual substitute. . . ."<sup>54</sup>

The pyromaniac has even been alleged by some investigators to receive sexual excitement in setting and watching his fires. Arsonists as a group have been reported to experience sexual maladjustment and to have an urethral-erotic trait. However, the actual extent of sexual deviance in firesetting is unknown.

#### Physical Deformities and Defects

The exact relationship of physical disabilities to firesetting is unknown, although researchers have detected a high incidence of physical abnormalities or deformities in study samples. Vreeland and Waller speculate that physical abnormalities, ". . . while not likely to directly predispose an individual to criminal activity, may be a factor in producing a stressful environment which sets the occasion for activities such as firesetting."<sup>55</sup>

#### Enuresis

Enuresis is the involuntary emission of urine, often identified as bed-wetting. According to researchers who follow the psychoanalytic viewpoint, enuresis is associated with hate, parental rejection, fantasies of destruction, violent aggression, and sexual symbolism. Michaels and Steinberg have noted that delinquent males who demonstrate a history of persistent enuresis frequently show tendencies toward pyromania.<sup>56</sup> In fact, a number of researchers have found a history of childhood enuresis in firesetters, as well as in delinquents of many types.

#### Alcoholism

Excessive alcohol consumption has been consistently related to adult firesetters. In fact, a number of studies have found that a large portion of arsonists are intoxicated at the time of their firesetting act. Drinking prior to the act may be an important contributing component in firesetting behavior in that it may loosen inhibitions.

#### Sadistic-Aggressive Tendencies

Sadistic and aggressive tendencies are also thought to be common among firesetters. However, the arsonist is believed to have difficulty in expressing or externalizing his aggression. When his impulses are thwarted, he has the tendency to react by perpetrating crimes against property instead of people.

#### Motive

The motives for firesetting are multiple, though revenge seems to run like a thread throughout all malicious incendiarism. Firesetting has been found to be the result of impulsive behavior, as well as premeditation. What specifically stimulates the firesetting act remains unanswered. Rejection, stress, failure, excitement-seeking, revenge, and sexual inadequacy have been credited as motivating factors in pathological firesetting. However, there is little evidence that an urethral-erotic trait activates the desire to set fires. Though the act of firesetting appears to be abnormal and disproportionate to the motive, it may not be from the firesetter's perspective. Typically, it represents his way of coping with rejection and stress.

#### Solitary-Group Firesetting

A review of the literature consistently reveals that adult arsonists and children are most frequently solitary firesetters, whereas adolescents often set fires in peer groups or pairs.

### Prior Criminal History

Vreeland and Waller have reported that most of the studies of institutionalized (imprisoned and hospitalized) arsonists and nonarsonists as groups show both having extensive histories of criminal and antisocial behavior.<sup>57</sup> However, their particular patterns of criminality appear to be characteristically different. Arsonists as a group consistently perpetrate a significantly greater number of crimes against property and fewer crimes against persons than nonarsonists, though this pattern seems to change after mid-twenties. Lewis and Yarnell report that firesetters under 25 years of age indulge chiefly in property offenses. After age 25, they appear to become more inclined to engage in interpersonal violence.<sup>58</sup>

### Firesetting Targets

There has been little data collected on the types of structures which are generally high-risk targets for firesetters. A number of studies on adolescent-group firesetters indicate, however, that churches and schools are frequent targets. Although child, female, and psychotic firesetters tend to set fires at home, they are also known to start fires away from their premises.

Hurley and Monahan, for instance, found that psychiatric prisoners had most frequently targeted commercial property, with dwelling houses second.<sup>59</sup> Virkkenun noted that schizophrenic arsonists were far more likely to set fires in unoccupied structures than nonschizophrenic arsonists.<sup>60</sup> The revenge firesetter generally targets the property of his real or imagined enemy, and although the pyromaniac compulsively sets fires, he may be selective in his choice of property.

### The Typical Arrested Arsonist

In an effort to determine a profile of the average arrested arsonist by age, sex, and race, a review of the *Uniform Crime Reports* for 1969 through 1978 (10-year period) was conducted, which revealed that 89 percent of those arrested for arson were male and approximately 76 percent were white. However, it should be noted that race has not been demonstrated as a significant variable in predicting firesetting.

When arson arrests were examined by age, it was determined that 54.6 percent of arrestees were under 18 years of age. Almost 43 percent were 13 through 19 years old, and those 10 and under comprised 11 percent of the total arrest population. It was also found that the percentage of arrests for blacks was significantly higher for the 18-and-over category than for those under age 18. The antithesis was found for arrested white arsonists. Seventy-five percent of the total reported arrests for arson were 24 years of age and under.<sup>61</sup> According to this analysis, the typical arrested arsonist is a white male in his teens to early twenties. (See Tables 1 through 5 for details.)

Although the UCR provides data on age, sex, and race of the arrested arsonist, it does not describe his personality characteristics. Therefore, it cannot be determined from these figures whether or not the arrested arsonist is representative of the arsonist population. Since so few arsonists are ever identified, arrested, or prosecuted, they may not represent the typical arsonist. However, comparison of these arrest statistics with available data from case and empirical studies of known arsonists reflects that they are descriptively comparable at least by age, sex, and race.

There are few studies which have provided a comprehensive profile of the arsonist. In fact, there is some real question as to whether a "typical" arsonist actually exists. Rothstein, for instance, contends that individual differences in firesetters preclude the development of a typical profile.<sup>62</sup>

Nevertheless, some researchers have constructed profiles of firesetters based on common characteristics of selective populations. These profiles may not represent all arsonists, but they do appear to illustrate many of those who are commonly encountered in prisons and on parole.

### A Typical Incarcerated Adult Male Arsonist

In 1971, Michael R. Wolford announced the results of an experimental study involving all known incarcerated male arsonists in three Southeastern States. The purpose of the study was to ascertain if there were any significant differences between incarcerated arsonists and incarcerated nonarsonists. The sample population included 68 arson offenders and 57 nonarsonists.

The study revealed no significant differences between arsonists and nonarsonists in age, race, employment background, marital status, number of prior felony arrests, length of military service, or family stability. However, significant differences were noted for educational level, IQ score, rural-urban background, and number of crimes committed against property. The arsonists in this study were found to be less educated, to have lower IQ scores, to be reared in more rural settings, and to have committed more property offenses than did nonarsonists. They were also incarcerated as a group twice as often as nonarsonists. The study did not find any supporting evidence that arsonists are basically sociopathic (psychopathic or antisocial) in their personality structure. Instead, it was purported that incarcerated arsonists "exhibited personality characteristics more closely associated with persons undergoing psychic stress. . . ."<sup>63</sup>

The mean age of Wolford's incarcerated arsonist was 28, which is significantly older than the typical arrested arsonist according to UCR. In addition, only 47 percent of his arsonist population were white, as compared to 76 percent represented in UCR statistics. Coupled with this is the fact that Wolford's imprisoned arsonist had approximately two prior felony arrests and a mean number of four previous incarcerations. In light of these facts, it appears that his arsonist sample population reflected the recidivist and not the typical arson offender.

### A Typical Paroled Adult Arsonist

James A. Inciardi in his study of 138 convicted adult arsonists released on parole from New York State prisons from 1961 through 1966 found that his sample population fit into six behavioral categories based on their motivational patterns, namely, revenge firesetters, excitement firesetters, institutionalized firesetters, insurance-claim firesetters, vandalism firesetters, and firesetters who use arson to cover up another crime.

The median age of the paroled arsonist in Inciardi's study is comparable to the age of Wolford's incarcerated firesetter, but again is much older than the typical arrested arsonist. The profiles depicted by Wolford and Inciardi also appear comparable in IQ level, rearing environments, marital status, and criminal histories. However, Inciardi's study does not provide adequate criminological data on which to base a definite conclusion about the personalities of his subjects.

### The Adult Revenge Firesetter

Revenge appears to be one of the more significant motivational factors in arson. Some researchers believe that it is the undertone in most, if not in all, destructive firesetting. Inciardi found that the revenge motive was represented in 58 percent of his sample population. However, Nolan D. C. Lewis and Helen Yarnell in their study of 1145 pathological male arsonists determined that only approximately 15 percent of their sample expressed revenge as a primary motive for firesetting.

Table 1

### Total Arson Arrests by Age Group 1969-1978\*

Age Groups	Total Arson Arrests 1969-1978	Percent of Total Arrests
Grand Total All Ages	125,513	100.0 <sup>1</sup>
Total Under 18 Years of Age	68,507	54.6
10 and under	13,766	11.0
11-12	11,323	9.0
13-14	18,950	15.1
15	9,849	7.8
16	8,009	6.4
17	6,610	5.3
Total 18 Years of Age and Over	57,006	45.4
18	5,549	4.4
19	4,712	3.8
20	3,871	3.1
21	3,345	2.7
22	2,972	2.4
23	2,833	2.3
24	2,572	2.0
25-29	9,375	7.5
30-34	6,483	5.2
35-39	4,700	3.7
40-44	3,665	2.9
45-49	2,718	2.2
50-54	1,848	1.5
55-59	1,098	0.9
60-64	600	0.5
65 and over	581	0.5
Unknown Age	84	( <sup>2</sup> )

<sup>1</sup> Percentages do not add to 100.0 percent, due to rounding.

<sup>2</sup> Less than one-tenth of one percent.

\*Source: U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States*, Annual. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969-1978.

Although the Inciardi and Lewis and Yarnell studies vary on the age factor, their revenge offenders are significantly comparable in many aspects. In brief, they are characteristically male; white; of below-average intelligence; unmarried; personally, socially, and sexually maladjusted; of pathological rearing backgrounds; alcoholic; nomadic; unskilled laborers; and have a hostile and assaultive outlook on life. Their fires are set against persons whom they believe have offended them or whom they imagine have abused them.

**The Jealousy Motivated Adult Male Firesetter**

"Immediate retribution is the goal of firesetters incited by wounded vanity and jealous rage."<sup>64</sup> Jealousy is central to this type firesetting, and Lewis and Yarnell found this category to represent approximately 8 percent of their adult male sample.

**The Would-Be Hero (Attention-Seeking) Male Arsonist**

This type of arsonist resorts to firesetting to attract attention to himself. Lewis and Yarnell describe them as "the men with grandiose social ambitions whose natural equipment dooms them to insignificance."<sup>65</sup> Examples have included watchmen, fire and police "buffs," volunteer firemen, and an occasional policeman. "Police-men, or men who want to become policemen, will set fires so that they can demonstrate how clever they are. . . ."<sup>66</sup> They found this type arsonist (excluding volunteer firemen and fire "buffs") to represent approximately 6 percent of their adult male sample.

**The Volunteer Fireman Solitary Firesetter**

This category also represents an inadequate, attention-seeking male. Lewis and Yarnell identified 51 cases (4 percent) fitting this description within their adult male sample population. Although this group appears to be relatively small in number, it has the propensity for serious destructiveness.

**The Fire "Buff" Firesetter**

The fire "buff," like the police "buff," is an enthusiastic "hanger-on." He generally represents a frustrated would-be fireman or would-be policeman. Although many buffs are civic-minded and constructive in their associations with the police and fire service, others are characteristically immature, inadequate, and underachievers. The fire buff who sets fires is seeking attention and attempting in a pathological way to win praise and social recognition for his alertness and heroism in reporting fires and giving assistance in fighting them.

**The Pyromaniac**

The pyromaniac differs characteristically from the other arsonists in that he lacks conscious motivation for his firesetting. In fact, he is considered by many to be motiveless. Pyromaniacs have been described as:

" . . . offenders who said they set their fires for no practical reason and received no material profit from the act, their only motive being to obtain some sort of sensual satisfaction."<sup>67</sup>

Lewis and Yarnell in their study found that the pyromaniac represented 60 percent of their sample population. Of this number, 241 expressed receiving some sort of satisfaction from the fire. The remaining 447 offenders "offered no special reason or persistent interest beyond the fact that something within them forced them to set fires."<sup>68</sup>

This urge to set fires has been referred to as the "irresistible impulse." However, authorities should be cautioned on accepting this explanation.

Some researchers have postulated that this behavior is the release of sexual tension. Gold agrees that sexual tension may be a motivational factor in some incendiarism but rejects it as a major causative factor,<sup>69</sup> and Lewis and Yarnell found only a very small percentage who claimed to have received some sort of sexual gratification from their firesetting.<sup>70</sup>

**The Excitement Firesetter**

According to J. H. Magee, the excited firesetter is allegedly prompted to set fires because of a craving for excitement. His satisfaction comes not from seeing the flames but from mingling in the crowd which has gathered at the scene of the fire.<sup>71</sup> According to Inciardi, however, the incentive inducing this type of firesetter is the need to experience the fire and to watch the operations of the firemen and their fire equipment. Some authorities have interpreted Inciardi's "excitement firesetter" to closely resemble that of the pyromaniac; however, because of insufficient descriptive data on Inciardi's sample, a definite conclusion cannot be supported.

**A Typical Female Firesetter**

The female arsonist appears to direct most of her firesetting against her own property, possessions, or premises and rarely against her employer or neighbor. Her motives are similar to that of the male's, with the exception that she seems to have more self-destructive tendencies.

Lewis and Yarnell studied 201 female firesetters. This figure represented only 15 percent of the total adult sample population. The majority were found to be mentally defective and approximately 32 percent demonstrated evidence of psychosis, primarily schizophrenic reactions. They were described generally as older women who were lonely, unhappy, and in despair.

**The Child Firesetter**

Authorities on firesetting behavior believe that repetitive or chronic firesetting by children represents a severe behavioral symptom and an observable symptom of psychological disturbance. For the disturbed child, firesetting becomes an instrument or outlet for vengeful-hostile reaction, resentment, and defiance of authority.

Yarnell in her study of 60 cases of child firesetters determined that 60 percent were between 6 and 8 years of age. This group demonstrated the following characteristics:

- 1) They set fires with associated fantasies to burn some member of the family who had withheld love or was a serious rival for parental attention.
- 2) Most fires were started in the home or within the immediate vicinity.
- 3) The fires, usually symbolic, caused generally little damage and were often extinguished by the child.
- 4) Prior to the firesetting, the child often had terrible dreams and fantasies of the devil and ghosts.
- 5) They suffered acute anxiety over these dreams and fantasies, as well as their sexual preoccupations.
- 6) All experienced sexual conflicts. Most actively engaged in masturbation and some participated in mutual masturbation, sodomy, and fellatio.
- 7) Boys who were enuretic also frequently demonstrated passive traits.
- 8) Many experienced learning disabilities.
- 9) Some had physical handicaps.
- 10) They also demonstrated other forms of asocial behavior in addition to firesetting, i.e., truancy, stealing, running away, hyperkinesis, and aggressive behavior.
- 11) Some were orphans and institutionalized children.
- 12) Their rearing environments were pathological or broken. It was not uncommon for them to come from father-absent or ineffective-father homes.
- 13) They also lacked a sense of security, love, and attention.<sup>72</sup>

Table 2

Total Arson Arrests by Sex*		
Sex	Total Arrests 1969-1978	Percent Distribution
Male	112,052	89.3
Female	13,461	10.7
Total	125,513	100.0

**The Adolescent Firesetter**

There have been extensive studies on youthful or adolescent firesetting. In 1951, Lewis and Yarnell studied a large population of adolescent male firesetters. This study demonstrated that home-centered firesetting increasingly diminished with the age of the firesetter. As he got older, his firesetting shifted from the home to schools, churches, factories, and homes of strangers. These targets were frequently selected by youths 12 through 16 years of age. The highest incidence of firesetting at schools involved the 12-14 age group. Fires directed at schools were generally associated with school problems and motivated by revenge. This type of firesetting was often preceded by theft, vandalism, and harassment of the teacher. Defective intelligence was not found to be a factor in adolescent firesetting until the youth reached age 16. After age 16, the evidence of fires set by mentally defective youths showed a marked increase.<sup>73</sup>

Common characteristics of the adolescent firesetter include: A history of delinquency, disruptive rearing environment, pathological personality development, sexual immaturity, aggressive or destructive behavior, poor social adjustment and emotional disturbance, and poor academic achievement.

(Continued on page 16)

Table 3

Total Arson Arrests by Race*		
Race	Total Arrests 1969-1978	Percent Distribution
White	90,555	75.8
Black	26,978	22.6
Other	1,923	1.6
Total	119,456	100.0

Table 4

Total Arson Arrests by Race Under Age 18*		
Sex	Total Arrests 1969-1978	Percent Distribution
White	51,929	80.0
Black	12,072	18.6
Other	921	1.4
Total	64,922	100.0

Table 5

Total Arson Arrests by Race 18 and Over*		
Race	Total Arrests 1969-1978	Percent Distribution
White	37,513	70.8
Black	14,492	27.3
Other	993	1.9
Total	52,998	100.0

\*Source: U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States*, Annual. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969-1978.

Moll, as well as Lewis and Yarnell, has purported that adolescent firesetting is generally committed for excitement rather than for destructive reasons.<sup>74</sup>

Yet, whatever the specific motive, vandalism fires appear to represent 80 percent of juvenile firesetting.<sup>75</sup> The adolescent firesetter generally works in pairs or groups, since this provides support for his behavior and encourages the act. These pairs or groups generally consist of one boy who assumes a dominant role and others who accept a submissive role.<sup>76</sup>

### The Schizophrenic Male Firesetter

Psychosis is generally defined as a severe form of personality decomposition characterized by marked impairment of contact with reality and personal and social functioning. Delusions, hallucinations, emotional blunting, and bizarre behavior may also be present in varying degrees.

The most serious of all psychotic disorders is schizophrenia, which has been defined as "a group of psychotic disorders characterized by gross distortions of reality, withdrawal from social interaction, and disorganization and fragmentation of perception, thought and emotion."<sup>77</sup> According to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-III), schizophrenia includes several specific subtypes, each of which has specific symptomatology which uniquely characterizes and distinguishes it from other forms.

Lewis and Yarnell in their study of 1145 male firesetters found that 154 of them could be diagnostically classified as psychotic. This represented 13.4 percent of their total sample population—a small fraction of the total incidence of male firesetters.<sup>78</sup>

In describing the psychotic firesetter, Lewis and Yarnell noted that "they seemed distinctive, in that their fires were set for suicidal purposes, their motives were apparently delusional in character or they manifested bizarre behavior either during or immediately after the firesetting."<sup>79</sup>

Though the psychotic appeared distinctive in that his firesetting was suicidal and delusional, he was found to fall naturally within other firesetter categories, i.e., revenge firesetters and pyromaniacs. Consequently, Lewis and Yarnell included the majority of psychotic firesetters in other subgroups rather than devising a special classification for them. Eight percent of these psychotics were classified as pyromaniacs, and approximately 90 percent of the male psychotics were diagnosed as schizophrenics.<sup>80</sup>

Virkkunen's study of 30 schizophrenic and nonschizophrenic firesetters revealed that both groups were characteristically motivated by hate. The schizophrenic subjects typically set fires against outsiders or the community in general. Their target selection was often an unoccupied structure. The nonschizophrenics tended to direct their firesetting against relatives or acquaintances and set fires to residential houses. The nonschizophrenics were likely to be under the influence of alcohol when setting fires, whereas the schizophrenics tended to set fires as a result of delusions and hallucinations.<sup>81</sup>

### A Review

The section on "Profiling the Firesetter" briefly discussed many of the common and salient characteristics associated with pathological firesetting. In addition, reference was made to a number of specific firesetter profiles in an effort to provide the reader with a better understanding of the various types of arsonists and their etiological, psychological, and sociological bases, as well as their distinguishing characteristics.

It is interesting to note that pathological arsonists frequently manifest the following cluster characteristics:

- 1) Under 25 years of age,
- 2) Victims of pathological and distressed rearing environments,
- 3) Come from father-absent homes,
- 4) Mother-dominated,

- 5) Academically retarded,
- 6) Slightly below-average intelligence,
- 7) Emotionally and psychologically disturbed,
- 8) Socially and sexually maladjusted,
- 9) Unmarried,
- 10) Psychologically inadequate and insecure, and
- 11) Cowardly.

Their firesetting is often immediately preceded by a precipitating stressful situation or experience.

Although pathological firesetters share many common characteristics, a "typical" firesetter just does not exist. Each appears to be unique and motivated by a multiplicity of factors.

These types of arsonists do not appear to be representative of those engaged in arson-for-profit schemes, although they cannot be totally eliminated in all cases.

In preparing a psychological profile of a firesetter, the following variables should also be analyzed:

- 1) The structure (type of structure burned, location, fire history, ownership, and recent structure history);
- 2) Time factors (date and time of fire);
- 3) Identity of reporting person (resident, neighbor, unknown caller, law enforcement officer, etc.);
- 4) Use or lack of devices or accelerants;
- 5) Type of devices and accelerants;
- 6) Style of fire (hastily or methodically set);
- 7) Occupancy factors (occupied or unoccupied at time of fire and description of occupants—elderly, women, mental patients, etc.);
- 8) Burn pattern and points of origin, (number of points of origin, exact location of points of origin, and burn pattern);
- 9) Modus operandi;
- 10) Evidence of forced entry;
- 11) Evidence of preparation of structure for burning;
- 12) Presence of other crimes; and
- 13) Evidence of similar fires in the community (structures, time variance, and similarities and differences in those fires)

In next month's issue of the *Law Enforcement Bulletin*, arson-for-profit, the hired-torch, and his conspirators will be explored. Hopefully, the profiles provided in this and the next section will assist the investigator in effectively targeting arson in his community. It must be remembered, however, that the profile serves as a tool for narrowing the investigative process. It is not a magical answer to either the prevention or solution to incendiarism. **FBI**

### Footnotes

<sup>74</sup> Webster's Third New International Dictionary, unabridged (Springfield, Mass.: G. & C. Merriam Company, 1971) s.v. "profile."

<sup>75</sup> Robert Lane and Martin Gottlieb, "He Bares Himself as Pyro Champ," *Nassau Suffolk Daily News*, final ed. May 9, 1978, p. 3:2.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Jesse James, "Psychological Motives for Arson," *Popular Government*, March 1965, p. 24.

<sup>78</sup> John M. Macdonald, "Many Motivations are Behind Acts of the Arsonist," *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, vol. 29, No. 7, July 1960, p. 4.

<sup>79</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States*, annual. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969-1978).

<sup>80</sup> Nolan D. C. Lewis, "Pathological Firesetting and Sexual Motivation," in *Sexual Behavior and the Law*, Ralph Slovenico, ed. (Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, 1965), p. 627.

<sup>81</sup> Robert G. Vreeland and Marcus B. Waller, *The Psychology of Firesetting: A Review and Appraisal* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1979), p. 26.

<sup>82</sup> Joseph J. Michaels and A. Steinberg, "Persistent Enuresis and Juvenile Delinquency," *British Journal of Delinquency*, vol. 3, 1952, pp. 114-120; Sheldon Glueck and Eleanor T. Glueck, *Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency* (New York: Commonwealth Fund, 1950).

<sup>83</sup> Robert G. Vreeland and Marcus B. Waller, *supra*, p. 23; Michael R. Wolford, "Some Attitudinal, Psychological and Sociological Characteristics of Incarcerated Arsonists," presented at the 17th Annual Arson Detection and Investigation Seminar, Sarasota, Fla., August 4, 1971, p. 1.

<sup>84</sup> Nolan D. C. Lewis and Helen Yarnell, *Pathological Firesetting (pyromania)*, Nervous and Mental Disease Monographs, No. 82 (New York: Coolidge Foundation, 1951), p. 42.

<sup>85</sup> W. Hurlley and T. Monahan, "Arson: The Criminal and the Crime," *British Journal of Criminology*, vol. 9, 1969, pp. 4-21.

<sup>86</sup> M. Virkkunen, "On Arson Committed by Schizophrenics," *ACTA Psychiatrica Scandinavica*, vol. 50, 1974, pp. 152-160.

<sup>87</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States*, 1969-1978.

<sup>88</sup> R. Rothstein, "Explorations of Ego Structures of Firesetting Children," *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 1963, p. 247.

<sup>89</sup> Michael R. Wolford, *supra*, p. 8.

<sup>90</sup> Nolan D. C. Lewis and Helen Yarnell, *supra*, p. 46.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 228.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 240.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., pp. 228-242.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>95</sup> Louis H. Gold, "Psychiatric Profile of the Firesetter," *Journal of Forensic Science*, vol. 7, No. 4, October 1962, p. 407.

<sup>96</sup> Nolan D. C. Lewis and Helen Yarnell, *supra*, p. 118.

<sup>97</sup> J. H. Magee, "Pathological Arson," *Scientific Monthly*, vol. 37, 1933, p. 361.

<sup>98</sup> Helen Yarnell, "Firesetting in Children," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, vol. 10, 1940, pp. 262-286.

<sup>99</sup> Nolan D. C. Lewis and Helen Yarnell, *supra*, pp. 311-345.

<sup>100</sup> Kendall D. Moll, *Arson, Vandalism and Violence: Law Enforcement Problems Affecting Fire Departments* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice, Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, 1974), p. 13; Nolan D. C. Lewis and Helen Yarnell, *supra*, pp. 311-345.

<sup>101</sup> John G. Boudreau et al., *Arson and Arson Investigation: Survey and Assessment* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1977), p. 92.

<sup>102</sup> Bernard Levin, "Psychological Characteristics of Firesetters," *Fire Journal*, vol. 70, No. 2, March 1976, p. 27.

<sup>103</sup> James C. Coleman et al., *Abnormal Psychology and Modern Life*, 6th ed. (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1980), p. 395.

<sup>104</sup> Nolan D. C. Lewis and Helen Yarnell, *supra*, p. 428.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 375.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., pp. 377, 428.

<sup>107</sup> Virkkunen, *supra*.

# Crime Increase Continues

According to the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports preliminary annual statistics, the upswing in crime continued as Crime Index offenses soared 8 percent during 1979. All city and county population groups, areas, and regions of the United States shared in the increase.

Director William H. Webster noted that there has not been such a dramatic increase since the 1974 crime surge of 18 percent, followed by the 10 percent increase in 1975.

"The 1979 increase clearly indicates that crime remains one of our Nation's most serious problems," stated Mr. Webster. "It is, of course, troubling to the heart of every American should be troubled. Crime and all damaging threats across our free society. All of us—not just law enforcement—must do what we can to reduce crime."

The crime figures are based on the Crime Index offenses reported by law enforcement agencies around the country and include statistics on 14 violent crimes of murder, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault, and the property crimes of burglary, larceny-theft, and motor vehicle theft.

The greatest increase for the year was experienced in cities outside metropolitan areas where crime climbed 11 percent. Cities over 50,000 in population registered an 8-percent upturn, while in both the suburban and rural areas crime increased 9 percent.

Violent crimes rose 11 percent, with forcible rape and robbery each increasing 12 percent and murder and aggravated assault each rising 9 percent. The only reported decrease was a 2-percent decline in murder in rural areas.

Property crimes rose 8 percent as a whole, with gains in motor vehicle theft of 10 percent, in larceny-theft of 9 percent, and in burglary of 8 percent.

Geographically, all regions showed increases over 1978 figures. The South, the most populous region, experienced the greatest increase, 10 percent. The West, next, and the North Central region, reported increases of 9, 8, and 7 percent, respectively.

**END**