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2 UCLA Professors Believe 'The Devil's Staircase' Could Explain Serial Killers' Behavior

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LOS ANGELES (CBS) — UCLA professor Vwami Roychowdhury and researcher Michal Simkin suggest that serial killers follow a strict and predictable pattern of attacks. This pattern is driven by neurons fired by the brain in a similar way to the neurons in the brains of epileptics.

“If the brain operates similar to a seizure, waxes and wanes ebbs and flows when it goes beyond a threshold, the urge becomes ‘Okay, I’ve got to do something,’” Roychowdhury told KCAL9’s Serene Branson.

Rowchowdhury is not a psychologist or neurologist, but a mathematician. His new study – currently under review – argues a serial killer’s pattern of murders seems to conform to a strict mathematical formula known as “The Devil’s Staircase.” The formula shows that killers are more likely to strike directly after a murder and the murder probability falls during long quiet periods.

They studied Russian killer Andrei Chikaltio who murdered 53 people and Jack the Ripper whose slayings were broken up by long lulls. “If a murder happens, chances of another shortly thereafter are high. If it goes cold, it doesn’t mean the person is cured,” Simkin said.

The neural impulse to kill overwhelms the murderer even after the

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sedative effect of a killing, leading to a surge of murderous activity. "Once that person gets a fix, he is sedated for a while but then the urge comes back."

The implications of the study could give police insight into a killer's habits and mind from this point forward. In addition to predicting the murderous streaks of serial killers, the professors say they are also looking into applying "The Devil's Staircase" formula to [stock market](#) fluctuations.

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