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**Detecting Clues in Homicide Management**

A Homicide "Best Practices" Research Project

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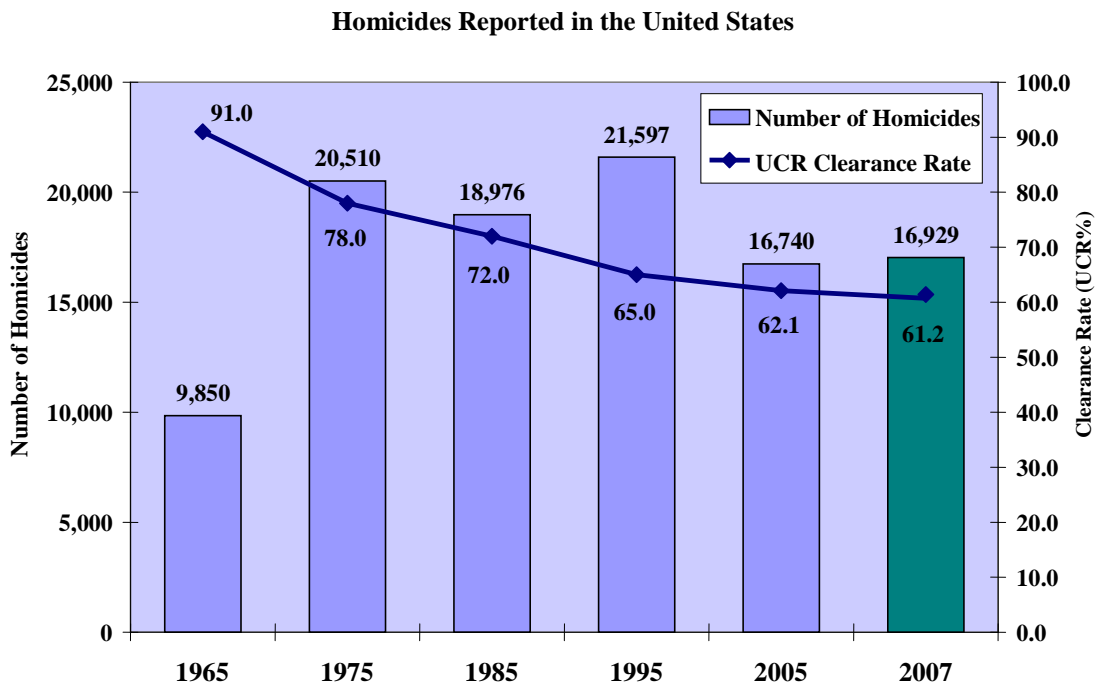
Introduction

Nationally, the number of homicides reported by police departments to the FBI and published in the 2007 Uniform Crime Report (UCR) is on the rise.<sup>1</sup> Equally disturbing is the fact that the clearance rate for those homicides continues to decline.<sup>2</sup> Law enforcement officials are increasingly concerned with those statistics and what they can do about them. Although most homicide supervisors are confident in their detectives' abilities to solve cases, they may be asking themselves, from a management perspective, if their current practices and procedures provide the best investigative environment to obtain the highest possible clearance rate.

To explore these issues, the author conducted a study of homicide units across the country. A questionnaire was developed that pertained to a variety of operational and management issues. The results were used to focus on how the well-performing units investigate homicides.<sup>3</sup> Departments chosen for this study met two criteria: 1) they have more than 25 homicides per year (HPY) over a five-year

average time period, and 2) they submit crime data for the UCR Program.<sup>4</sup> Eighty-one departments were contacted and questionnaires were sent out to each of these departments. A total of 55 departments (68% of the contacted departments) fully completed the questionnaire, and this study is based on those results.<sup>5</sup>

**CHART A**



Clearance Rate versus Conviction Rate

The standard of success for a homicide unit is traditionally measured by its clearance rate, which typically refers to the number of actual arrests and the charging of an offender. Others believe in utilizing a more meaningful measurement of success, referring to their *conviction* rate.

The clearance rate is an easily obtainable statistic and one that is more directly affected by the homicide unit. The conviction rate, if one can ascertain what that percentage actually is, is affected by many indirect non-homicide unit related factors, including jury selection, witness testimony, ability of the prosecutor to present a case to a jury, and the quantity and quality of evidence. While the ultimate goal for a homicide investigator is obtaining a rightful conviction, for the purposes of this research study the *clearance* rate was the gauge for comparing departmental performances.<sup>6</sup>

#### What Cases are Worked by a Homicide Unit?

All homicide units, regardless of size, work more than just homicides cases. Almost every unit in this study handled all police shootings and any death that occurred while someone was in police custody, regardless of the cause of death. In this study, in departments that experience more than 100 homicides per year, the more collateral duties they were tasked to perform, the lower clearance rate they generally experienced.

Indicative of collateral duties, less than half of the departments who responded (41.8%) also worked non-fatal shootings, and 40% also handled serious assault cases. The remaining departments reported that these calls were handled by district or station detectives (41.8%), some type of central detective squad (30.9%), or were simply handled by uniform patrol officers (32.0%).

#### The Selection of a Homicide Detective

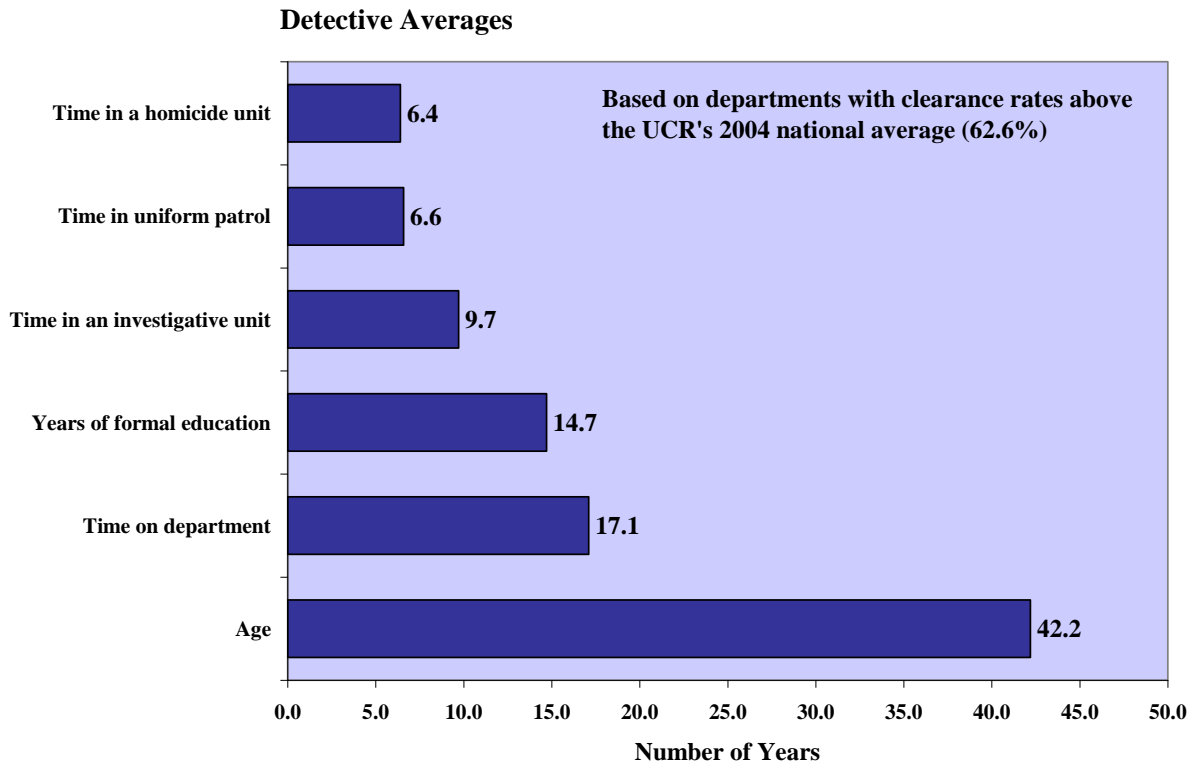
The process for selecting a person to be a homicide detective varies from department to department and often is

determined by departmental policies and union rules. When asked how detectives are selected, a majority of departments chose both the formal oral interview and the requests of the homicide supervisor as the preferred methods of selection. Formal oral interviews allow homicide personnel to observe how candidates will react to a stressful situation, how innovative they may be and how well they think on their feet. The homicide supervisor will be able to look at their personnel jackets and evaluate areas such as discipline, medical, use of force, and discourtesy complaints and such, helping them determine if candidates might be the right fit for their unit.

Prior generations believed that a formal written test administered by Civil Service was the best way to evaluate a candidate. In this study, however, the written test was the least frequent form of selection. While over 80% of the departments did not consider an appointment to the homicide unit as a promotion, over 70% did consider it an elevated position. In examining a particular candidate for a homicide assignment, 64% of the departments *expected* that person to have prior investigative experience in some other unit, and 55% at least *preferred* that the candidate have prior investigative experience.

Traits listed by current homicide detectives as assets for a homicide detective overwhelmingly consisted of interview and interrogation skills, followed in order by dedication, experience, patience, common sense, tenacity, persistence, and organizational skills.

**CHART B**

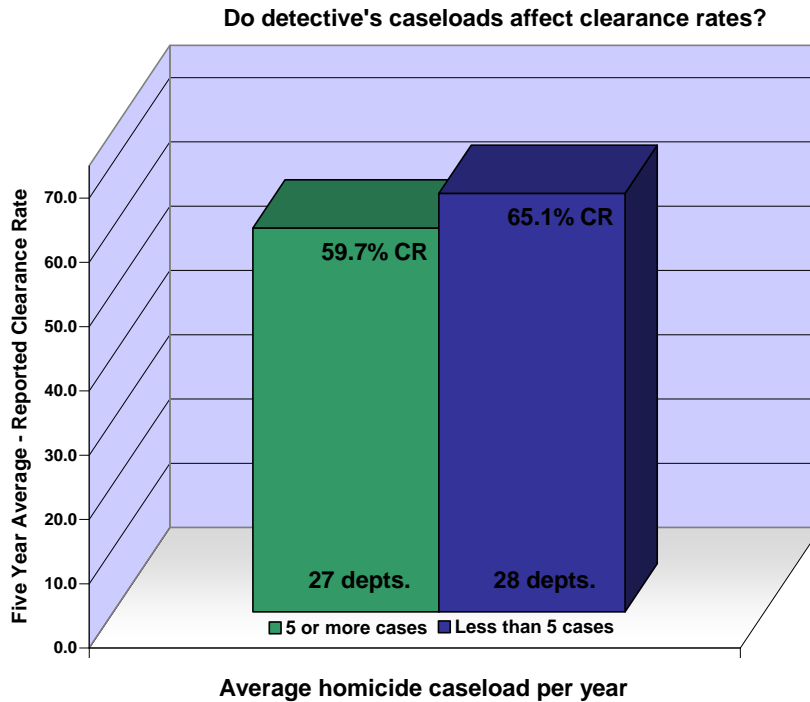


Does Detective Caseload Affect Clearance Rates?

One of the primary questions in this study concerned caseload. Almost every homicide supervisor would like to have more detectives to lighten individual caseloads, thereby allowing more time to effectively investigate each case. Fighting for limited resources and demonstrating the need for additional detectives are difficult without some accepted standard of what should comprise a homicide detective's annual caseload. This study indicated that the average homicide caseload for a detective to handle as the

**primary** investigator was **five cases annually**. Departments with detectives who handled fewer than five cases per year as a primary had a clearance rate that was **5.4 percentage points higher** than those departments whose detectives had higher case loads (see Chart C). Specifically, in departments with less than 49 homicides per year (HPY), the homicide detective should have no more than **four** homicide cases per year as the primary. In departments that experience between 50 and 99 HPY, a detective should have no more than **five** homicide cases per year as the primary, and in those departments with over 100 HPY, a detective should have no more than **six** homicide cases per year as the primary.<sup>7</sup>

**CHART C**



### Do More Indoor Homicides Translate to Higher Clearance Rates versus Outdoor Homicides?

This study examined the percentage of homicides that occurred inside a location, as opposed to outside locations. Overall, departments reported that 36.6% of their homicides occurred inside a location, and 63.2% happened outside. This study analyzed agencies reporting a majority of homicides that had occurred inside, and compared them with those who reporting that a majority of homicides occurring outside. Those with a majority of their homicides occurring inside had a clearance rate **10.2 percentage points higher** than those that did not.

### What Investigative Tools Increase Clearance Rates?

Upon examining what specialized tools were available to assist detectives in their investigations, results indicate that almost 93% of departments reported that the polygraph was available, while 34.5% also used the computer voice stress analyzer. Almost 90% utilized bloodstain pattern analysis; those departments had a clearance rate **4.8 percentage points higher** than those who did not. When asked if they utilized criminal investigative analysis (criminal profiling), half responded, "Yes", and half responded, "No". Those who responded "Yes" had an average clearance rate **5.7 percentage points higher** than those who did not. Only 16.4% of the departments reported utilizing statement analysis; however, these departments had a clearance rate **5.2 percentage points higher** than those who did not use such analysis.

### Does a 'Comstat-Style' Process Increase Clearance Rates?

Many departments today participate in some form of comstat or compstat process. Comstat is the process of collecting, analyzing, and mapping crime data and other essential police performance, and holding police managers accountable for their performance as measured by this data.<sup>8</sup> This study examined whether or not a department utilized a 'comstat style' process, and then compared their clearance rates. Of those that did (67%), they had a clearance rate **3.3 percentage points higher** than those who did not. Further, of those who did have a departmental comstat-style system, almost two-thirds sent a representative to the comstat meetings. Almost all (92%) sent the homicide commander, and 42% sent a homicide supervisor. Only 17% had the actual primary investigator attend.

### Does Utilizing a Computerized Case Management System Increase Clearances?

In today's computer-savvy world, many people assume that every modern homicide unit in the country has a computerized case management system (CCMS). This, however, is not the case. While the advantages with such a system are obvious, they can also be financially burdensome for some departments. In this study, 64% of all responding departments had a CCMS for their homicide unit, with 62% of those sharing this information with other criminal investigation units. In addition, computerized neighborhood canvass forms and computerized vehicle stop information was found to enhance investigations with potential leads.

Departments were further grouped by their frequency of homicides. In examining CCMS, a difference existed among



those departments in the 25-49 HPY group. Within this group, those with a CCMS showed a clearance rate **5.0 percentage points higher** than those who did not. Further, those departments with 100 or more HPY, that had a CCMS but also had a relational capacity to flag names from one case to another, had a rate **5.5 percentage points higher** than those who did not.

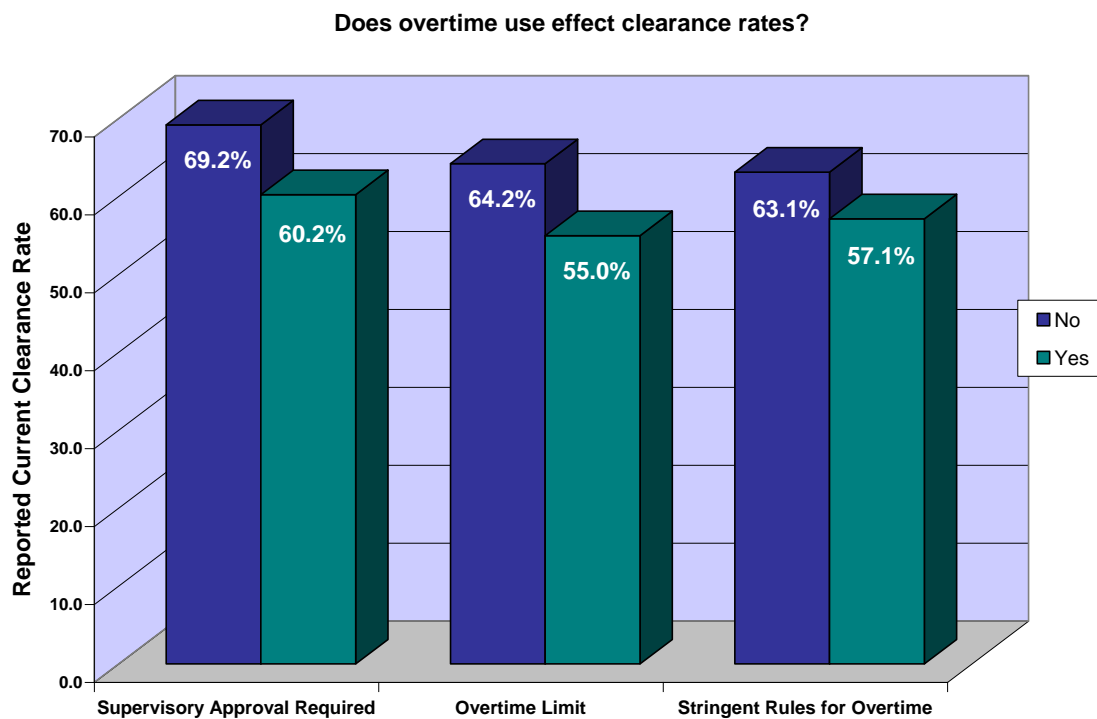
#### Does Overtime Use Affect Clearance Rates?

As all detectives realize, most cases cannot be solved in an eight-hour time frame. When a fresh murder occurs, all possible resources should be utilized and all hot leads followed before they get cold, witnesses change their minds or suspects flee. Most departments, however, are confronting budget cuts and coping with decreased financial resources. The issue of a detective working in an overtime capacity can often be a delicate balance between department-wide efforts to stay within a strict budget and what is necessary to further, follow-up, or strengthen a case for arrest and/or prosecution. The balance between monitoring overtime authorization for possible abuse versus curbing the morale and enthusiasm of a detective eager to make an arrest or help shore up a case for potential conviction can be complex.

The results of this study indicated that 76.4% of the departments **required** supervisory approval to permit detectives to work overtime. However, those departments that **did not** have that requirement had a **9.0 percentage point higher** clearance rate. Eighty percent stated that there was no limit to the amount of overtime a detective can work, and those departments had a clearance rate **9.2 percentage points higher** than those who reported having

limits. A majority of departments (87.3%) reported that there were **NO** stringent rules in place to make working overtime difficult, and they had a clearance rate **6.0 percentage points higher** than those who reported they had stringent rules. These differences possibly indicate that most departments with high clearance rates do not have blanket rules to discourage overtime use. This finding implies that most detectives in high performing departments are aware of when overtime use is appropriate, and are also given the flexibility to make decisions concerning overtime approval based on their own judgment.

**CHART D**



## Do Cold Case Squads Increase Clearance Rates?

While all detectives want to solve every case, the reality is, despite their best efforts, some cases go unresolved. These cases haunt the victim's family, the community, and the case detective. A fresh look at a cold case and a more current analysis of evidence concerning it could generate new leads, which may possibly provide resolution for all those involved. The creation and use of cold case squads (CCS) have become more prevalent, as investigative commanders realize the great potential of such a unit.

Of the departments in this study with clearance rates above the national average, over 80% had some type of CCS. (This figure would be higher, except for the fact that several high-performing departments had few unsolved cases, so there was no need for the establishment of a full-time CCS).

There are a variety of reasons why a cold case investigation may generate additional leads. These reasons are addressed below.

### *Advances in Forensic Science*

Probably the number one reason to re-investigate cold cases is for the tremendous advances constantly taking place in the field of forensic science. What may have been collected and determined to be a worthless piece of evidence just ten years ago, may now be the one piece that could potentially identify and convict a suspect.

While this fact is now well known by investigators and crime lab technicians, this within itself does not mean that cases will be automatically re-checked for evidence. It still requires a detective to review the case and

resubmit evidence for analysis. Therefore, it still requires time for an investigator to assess the case, check for an original analysis of evidence, and then determine if that original evidence is, in fact, still available to be analyzed. Even in older homicide cases, evidence may have been lost or mishandled, or the evidence sample may have deteriorated to the point that the more modern scientific analysis is fruitless. This is why it is critical that evidence not only be properly preserved, but that older cases are reviewed as soon as possible before critical evidence is lost, mishandled, contaminated or inadvertently destroyed.

#### *Ex-wives and Ex-girlfriends*

When police are questioning one intimate partner as to the criminal activities of the other, the intimate partner is not likely, even under threat of arrest, to offer statements or evidence that may cause the arrest of the other. Fortunately, since many criminals have difficulty maintaining that same intimate relationship, they are often not with the same partner after a period of time. Since the relationship, and likely personal affection will diminish after the conclusion of that relationship, this may provide a rich opportunity for the investigator to re-interview the prior partner and potentially gain valuable information that could help solve the case.

Further, when criminals are in an intimate relationship, they often give jewelry and gifts to their love interest. These gifts may be the proceeds of ill-gotten gains. Subsequently, when the investigator conducts their interview in a cold-case investigation, one should

ask as to whether, during their relationship, their prior love interest ever gave them any jewelry or gifts. Documenting the description of such an item to compare it to stolen items may provide a significant lead. Taking this one step further, should the interviewee still possess and provide the item(s) to the investigator, a stronger potential exists to identify and link the suspect to the crime, and ultimately facilitate an arrest.

#### *Former Friends and Cell Mates*

For similar reasons as above, many criminals are unable to maintain close relationships and, as such, former friends and cell mates who were once loyal and tightlipped about any criminal activity that the other may have been involved in, may now have a different view of that relationship. They may also take advantage of this information should they, themselves, have criminal charges pending.

#### *Death of Documented Suspect*

In many cases suspects are identified, but for a variety of reasons there is simply not enough evidence to charge them criminally. As time goes on and new cases take police departments' attention away from older cases, the suspect(s) remain uncharged. Since many suspects continue in their illegal ways, this will increase the likelihood of them becoming a homicide victim themselves. While this may or may not offer much closure to the original victim's family, it may be sufficient to warrant follow-up investigation to determine if an administrative closure, following UCR guidelines, may be appropriate.

### *Change of Conscience*

Although rare, there are cases when either the suspect or someone who has knowledge of a crime may have a change of conscience and decide to advise law enforcement of the information that they have, up until then, been withholding. The author equates this with winning the lottery, in that you know it happens to somebody somewhere, just not to yourself. Should someone come forward, however, investigators need to be ready to spend time documenting the information and digging through old or lost case material to verify it. This can often be an arduous and time-consuming task. Having a cold case squad in place to do that can keep detectives who are working active cases ready to quickly respond to the next phone call.

### *Administrative*

The objective of a CCS is to identify and arrest the offender, removing a violent offender off the street and giving the victim's family some closure. There is also a distinct advantage, administratively, for having a CCS. In following UCR guidelines, a department will obtain credit for a clearance in the year the clearance (arrest) is made, regardless of what year the actual homicide occurred. Therefore, by obtaining credit for a clearance without having incurred a homicide in that year (the homicide was already counted in the year that it occurred), statistically, it will increase the department's overall clearance rate. In this survey, several departments went from a below-average UCR clearance rate to an above-average UCR clearance rate based solely on the performance and clearances made by their CCS.

### *Alternatives to Manpower Issues*

For all the above reasons and more, the establishment of a cold case squad makes sense from an investigative, administrative, and certainly from a community services perspective. The issue for most, however, is the ability to dedicate sufficient manpower to such a unit. The following are suggestions for those departments who are unable to staff cold case squads with full-time sworn detectives:

*Use of retired homicide detectives* - A trend has developed to use recently-retired homicide detectives to work in the cold case unit. This is a productive and cost-effective way to utilize all of the experience and knowledge a detective has developed over the years. If interested, retired detectives require little if any training, are typically self-motivated, and have a base of institutional knowledge that can be a tremendous resource in working cases, as well as in offering real-life training to newer detectives.

Some agencies offer a flexible work schedule, allowing the retirees to work the hours they want/need. Since they already have retiree health benefits, the only cost for the agency is the hourly wage. This allows the retired detectives to continue to utilize their skills and abilities and stay in contact with their co-workers, all while offering some additional income. It can be beneficial for the department, the detective and the public.

*Use of retired criminal investigators* - For the same reasons listed above, utilizing retired criminal investigators to work in cold case squads can have benefits

for all. One does not necessarily need to have been a homicide detective to conduct cold case investigations; therefore, homicide command should not overlook this valuable resource.

*Use of Auxiliary Officers* - Most auxiliary officers are very competent, enthusiastic, and can offer much to a cold case squad given the appropriate parameters. Since much of the workload in these investigations is administrative (finding, assessing, and evaluating old case files), there is good reason to allow auxiliary officers, who typically already have signed confidentiality agreements, to access and work cold cases using established protocols (see following page).

*Use of Criminal Justice College Interns* - For the same reason as auxiliary officers, college interns can be utilized to review case files and prioritize cases that are more likely to produce additional leads. Several departments in this study, who have acquired criminal justice interns from a local college or university, had much success in reducing the amount of time sworn-duty detectives spent looking through case files. Interns are typically enthusiastic about the possibility of helping to solve a case, and they will get a realistic idea of how investigations are handled. It is also a great public relations tool for the department, the students, and the university.

*Cold Case Review Protocol* - The use of retired detectives, auxiliary police officers, and college interns can all be more effective with the utilization of a standard cold case



review protocol. With a protocol for reviewing each case, anyone can go through a checklist of items to determine things such as whether or not there is any forensic evidence; whether there are any witnesses who were never located/interviewed; or whether various persons involved, including potential suspects or witnesses, are currently incarcerated or perhaps deceased. The protocol can be simple and its questions limited only to the investigative imagination of its users. Prioritization of cold cases based on a standard protocol can save significant time for a sworn detective. The list can also include whether the original lead detective or secondary detective is available to be interviewed, hence saving the time needed to get "up to speed" with the case.

#### Is A Rotation Policy Effective for Homicide Units?

The issue of rotating homicide detectives out of the unit after a set period of time, regardless of their effectiveness as a homicide investigator, is a relatively new phenomenon that is plaguing many homicide officials/supervisors. While the concept of a rotation policy is not new to the business world and may have benefits from a management perspective, police chiefs who may be considering implementing such a policy for homicide detectives should proceed cautiously. In this study, only three of the fifty-five departments had a rotation policy of any type within their detective division. No department experiencing over eighty homicides a year reported having a rotation policy for homicide detectives. Even those departments with a rotation policy are now extending the period of time that a detective can remain in the unit.

## Prosecutor's Role in Homicide Clearances

The role of the prosecutor varies greatly from one locale to another. While prosecutors and homicide detectives work together on cases, one must understand that their perspectives may be very different. While both share the same ultimate goal of a successful prosecution of a case, they have different perspectives on how this is accomplished, based on the nature of their duties and responsibilities.

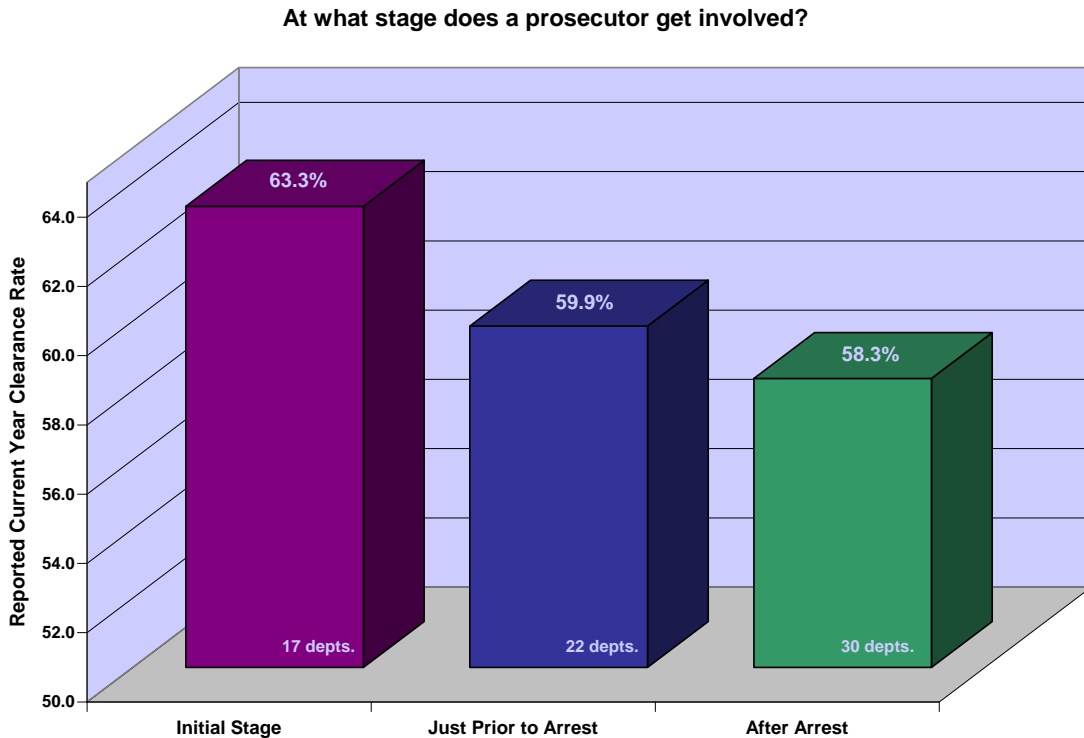
When asked if prosecutors responded to the initial homicide scene, 60% stated they rarely do, 18.2% stated only when requested by the investigator, and 16.4% stated prosecutors responded at their own discretion. Eleven percent reported that prosecutors sometimes respond out, and only 9.1% reported that they almost always respond out to the initial scene.

Departments that typically involved a prosecutor in the early stages of an investigation, on average, had a higher clearance rate than those that did not. The average clearance rate became progressively lower when prosecutors became involved during the later stages of an investigation (see chart E). **Conversely**, when detectives were REQUIRED to consult prosecutors before an arrest warrant was issued, the clearance rate for those departments was **6.6 percentage points LOWER** than those departments whose policy DID NOT REQUIRE prosecutors to be consulted before an arrest warrant was issued. Perhaps departments that allow detectives to use their judgment pertaining to prosecutor notification, and prosecutors who are comfortable enough to allow detectives that discretion, have a better working relationship.

When asked whether prosecutors typically were able to assist detectives in preparing for court testimony, an overwhelming majority (83.6%) stated that prosecutors frequently help detectives.

When asked how they would describe their working relationship with prosecutors, 78.2% of the participating departments rated their relationship as either good or excellent. Departments that characterized their relationships this way had a clearance rate that was **6.2 percentage points higher** than those who rated their relationship as either fair or poor.

**CHART E**



## Individual Surveys

The questionnaire incorporated individual surveys for detectives and supervisors, as well as one for each commanding officer (CO). 400 detective surveys and over 125 supervisor surveys were received back. When asked what they thought was the biggest drawback to achieving higher homicide clearance rates, there was one common theme among all ranks: lack of public/witness. Personnel shortages ranked second, and legal/prosecutor issues ranked third.

The individual surveys also asked what they believed were the most valuable assets for a homicide detective. Communication skills were listed first by the COs and supervisors, and second by detectives. The ability to communicate, to include listening skills, was felt to be essential. Detectives who listen more than talk can efficiently utilize their communication skills, which may make them more capable of properly 'reading people'. Being able to solicit and analyze information provided by potential suspects, witnesses, and family members can make a detective extremely effective.

The detectives listed interview and interrogation skills as their number one asset. It was second for the commanders and third for the supervisors. Homicide detectives commonly report that good detectives must have interview and interrogation skills to get someone to utter the truth. Without this ability, arrests and convictions will be very difficult. While protection of civil rights is paramount, news and entertainment programs that educate suspects on the dos and don'ts of committing a crime and about giving statements to the police, give today's homicide detectives greater challenges in making arrests

and obtaining convictions than they have ever before experienced.

### Team Concept

As part of the individual surveys, a variety of questions covering a multitude of subject areas were also examined. While answers varied, one strong common theme surfaced among the top homicide units, which was the emphasis on **TEAMWORK**. Teamwork from the detective's level, supervisor's level, as well as the commanding officer's level was noted. While almost all detectives, commanders, crime lab personnel, and prosecutors will claim to be, and for the most part are, motivated to work together as a team, it takes a very dedicated group of individuals to work together in a genuine, fully professional manner. Most "talk the talk" when asked, but fewer "walk the walk" when tasked. This requires leadership, motivation, and direction from the very top all the way through to the bottom of the investigative and administrative chains, with managers/leaders setting the tone. Most departments have strong teamwork within their own squads and probably within their own shifts, but it is not an easy task to get all entities working in sync toward the resolution of a very arduous task. Genuine teamwork is required, ranging from simple duties such as relaying a phone message or getting someone to transcribe tapes, to the more complex tasks, such as facilitating the entire unit's interviewing assistance on a dozen-witness scene. The presence or absence of professional teamwork may have the biggest intangible impact on whether a homicide case is solved or not.

### Additional Traits

Departments that responded to the study mentioned additional traits of successful homicide units. Although they did not prove to significantly increase clearance rates by themselves, the author shares them to help agencies better evaluate their practices.

### *Initial Detective Response*

The reality of personnel, logistics and resources influence how many homicide detectives respond to the initial crime scene. Results from this study indicate that over 60% of departments have at least three or more detectives initially responding. The flexibility of a secondary group of detectives that are independently mobile may be beneficial in the initial stages of an investigation. The discovery of a secondary scene, additional witnesses not currently at the initial scene, or a number of other scenarios warrant at least one additional vehicle. The totality of this study would suggest that a **minimum** of two, two-person detective teams respond to the initial crime scene, with the assistance of a detective supervisor.

### *Case review and follow-ups*

In examining how soon a case is reviewed by all personnel involved, 58.2% reported a review within the first 24 hours, and 70.9% reported a review within 72 hours. Of those departments that experienced clearance rates higher than the national average, 65.2% had a case reviewed by all personnel within the first 24 hours, and 82.6% within the first 72 hours. This review includes the crime lab personnel involved, any analyst or intelligence

resources that can aid in the case, the prosecutor if appropriate, as well as the detectives and supervisors.

Almost all departments (89.1%) reported that they have at least one type of system in place to ensure that all follow-up investigations are conducted in a timely manner. Most (60%) were simply reviewed informally by the supervisor, while others (23.6%) were set up in a tickler file. Twenty percent were left to the discretion of the detective, and 18.2% were automatically generated by a computerized case management system.

#### *Anti-Gang Squads*

Of the 55 departments that responded to the survey, 40 departments (72.7%) had an anti-gang squad. The number of gang detectives ranged on average from 7.7 detectives in the 25-49 HPY group to 16.7 detectives in the 50-99 HPY group and 23.6 detectives in the over 100 HPY group. Of all these groups, 87.2% reported that their anti-gang squads actively assisted in homicide investigations.

#### *Task Forces*

When asked whether their department participates in, or has access to, any state/federal/local task force squads that can or do assist in homicide investigations, 83.6% responded that they do, with another 10.9% responding that they sometimes do. Of those groups, 69.1% noted that task forces are used either sometimes or frequently. More importantly, 80% of the departments advised that task forces are sometimes and/or frequently effective as an investigative tool.

The FBI's National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime (NCAVC) assists a variety of departments that do and

do not work with task forces. There is a multitude of benefits for departments to utilize joint resources and work together towards achieving a common goal. This however, is not an easy task. Most police detectives, by their nature of taking ownership and pride in their cases, may suddenly find themselves in the position of having to share case-sensitive information with persons outside their department. Detectives may also have to share information with another department or agency that perhaps, in the past, has not been as friendly or cooperative as they would like them to have been. Politics, laws, and departmental policy may also inhibit multi-agency cooperation. Detectives and, more importantly, supervisors should recognize these issues and find effective avenues of communication and information sharing long before a crisis occurs or joint task force involvement becomes necessary.

#### *Medical Examiners*

The study also asked several questions pertaining to their agencies relations with the medical examiners (ME) or coroner system. Sixty-five and a half percent stated that they had a ME system; 29% had a coroner system; and 5.5% had both. Sixty percent stated that detectives are **required** to attend the autopsy.

A variety of reasons support the detective's mandatory attendance at the autopsy of a homicide victim, such as allowing the ME to ask the detective pertinent questions in reference to the scene, witnesses accounts, and possible evidence, as well questions that may arise from the examination of the body. It will also allow the detective to ask the ME direct questions about information pertaining to the victim's injuries and any abnormalities,



particularly noting injuries not observed or documented at the crime scene. This process also fosters a better chain of custody for evidence and decreases the chance of a communication breakdown of potentially critical issues that may surface during the investigation or even worse, at the criminal trial, resulting in tremendous negative effects.

When asked if detectives are provided with a detailed sketch and photos of the victim's injuries, an overwhelming majority (92.7%) responded that these materials were provided to the detectives by the ME/coroner's office. When asked how they would rate their working relationship with the ME/coroner, almost 90% rated their relationship either good (29.1%) or excellent (60%).

### **Conclusion**

When looking at the commonalities of high-performing homicide units, the following traits were noted:

- No more than an average of five homicide cases per year as the primary detective.
- Minimum of two, two-person units responding initially to the crime scene.
- Case review by all involved within the first 24-72 hours.
- Utilization of a computerized case management system with relational capacity.
- Utilization of standardized and computerized car stop and neighborhood canvass forms.
- Comstat-style format within their department.

- Good working relationships with medical examiners and prosecutors.
- No rotation policy for homicide detectives.
- Accessibility to work overtime when needed.
- Establishment of cold case squads.
- Use of investigative tools such as the polygraph, bloodstain pattern analysis, criminal investigative analysis, and statement analysis.
- Working together as a team.

Unfortunately, no single procedure will guarantee a higher clearance rate for homicide units. But, by assessing how successful ones operate, commanders and supervisors will have additional options to exercise that can maximize their department's performance. They can evaluate the "best practices" and implement what they believe will work to improve their agency's homicide clearance efforts.

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<sup>1</sup> See chart A, Source: FBI's Uniform Crime Reports. The number of homicides in 2008 and 2009 has begun to decrease very slightly, however the rates per capita have remained consistent.

<sup>2</sup> See chart A, Source: FBI's Uniform Crime Reports. While 2008 and 2009 National UCR Clearance Rates have increased slightly compared to the previous year, the author believes, based on interviews of homicide commanders and Bureau of Justice Statistics personnel, that the increase is based on cold case clearances, and that the current-year homicide cases are still experiencing decreasing clearance rates.

<sup>3</sup> The questionnaire, developed by the author, consisted of 103 questions and a statistical sheet covering homicide data from 2000 through 2004.

<sup>4</sup> The departments were originally identified using Bureau of Justice Statistics information for all departments who submit data.

<sup>5</sup> The 55 departments represented 27 states, covered jurisdictions ranging in population from under 100,000 to over 3 million, and employed from 60 to 8,500 personnel.

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<sup>6</sup> The clearance rate determined was derived over a five-year average, utilizing that current-year clearance rate.

<sup>7</sup> The mean difference, not the percent difference, was utilized throughout this study in comparing departments. The comparison shows the difference in the average clearance rate from one group of departments to another. Example: A group of departments with an average clearance rate (CR) of 65% was compared to another group with a 60% CR and would show a five point higher CR, not a percent difference of 8.0%. For the purposes of this paper, we will be referring to this as "percentage points".

<sup>8</sup> Retrieved from [www.ppdonline.org](http://www.ppdonline.org) on 22Feb07.

Tim Keel is a retired Detective Lieutenant from the Baltimore Police Department's homicide unit. He now works at the FBI's National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime's Behavioral Analysis Unit in Quantico, Virginia as a Major Case Specialist. He can be reached at [Timothy.Keel@ic.fbi.gov](mailto:Timothy.Keel@ic.fbi.gov).

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Also, to all the homicide detectives and commanders who offered their time and effort to answer the questionnaires and submit their data. This study would not have been possible without you, and it is for you that this study was conducted.