

Submission

1997 Herman Goldstein Excellence in Problem Solving Award

"Unsolved Homicides"

**Detective Robert Schock and
Detective Mark Deasaro
St. Petersburg Police Department
St. Petersburg, Florida**

Introduction

This Problem-Oriented Policing project has taken an in depth look at the crime of homicide (which was typically investigated through traditional methods) and examined it with a new approach. As we strive forward to solve the problem of today, our efforts heard calls from the past, literally. Unresolved homicide victims' families and the community were calling for closure within their lives, so they could move forward, returning to "somewhat normal lifestyles". When we went beyond the families, who routinely contacted us, we found many more individuals, who's lives had been affected by the loss of a loved one. The homicides themselves have shown their face indiscriminately to all parts of the community, affecting more than just family members. During our research and analysis within our department, we found this problem plagued departments and communities in every part of the country. Police agencies, concerned with the quality of life within their communities, have attempted to combat this problem with limited success.

This project titled "OUTCRY" is the acronym for the "Open and Unsolved homicide Team Cases which Require Your (the community) assistance". This was chosen because it allows us to mention our greatest asset, the community, and asks them to help us help them.

With the media attention, often sensationalizing, unresolved homicides, attributing them to serial killers who are roaming the country, our project shows a resolve by the department to "leave no stone, unturned" in our pursuit of justice. The emphasis on solving new cases, should not alleviate us from resolving the old, using the latest technologies to assist all members of the community (including the victims, who now lay in silence).

Scanning

The Saint Petersburg Police Department always strives for a successful conclusion in all cases. Homicide investigations are no exception to this statement. Not every case has a successful conclusion. Some are ended by time itself; unsolved homicides do not have this luxury.

We are always aware that violent crime can have long term affects on the surviving family members, friends, acquaintances, co-workers, the community and professionals (police and medical) who were involved in the aftermath of the incident. These individual often look to the police and especially members of the homicide squad for "closure" to this tragic event in their lives. It is not uncommon for the family members to remain in contact with the homicide investigators for long periods of time, to include

birthdays, anniversaries and significant case dates, as well as for their own peace of mind. Often, the investigators give them hope and seem to be the only ones who care about them (the victims). These "friendships" or contacts often last for years, even after the closure of the investigation.

In the past, older unresolved homicides were investigated by detectives only after being contacted with an additional lead by an interested party. Instead of searching for new avenues of investigation, there were few attempts to re-introduce an active investigation. Typically cases have sat dormant for a variety of reasons:

1. Community (media) apathy
2. New homicides needing immediate attention
3. Manpower, transfers and other personnel changes within the department
4. New community projects requiring immediate attention.

The members of our homicide unit realize their responsibility to the community and have recognized a need to actively pursue the investigation of unresolved cases . We began by examining unresolved homicides over a ten year period of time (1986-1995). We elected not to include the most recent year (1996) since some cases are still in the original investigative stage.

Analysis

The major sources of data and information was obtained from out departments 's Record Section, the Crime Analysis Unit, and the Homicides Unit's files. The data was gathered was analyzed in ten different ways:

1. Solved and unsolved homicide totals by year, 1986-1995
2. Homicide investigation comparison, 1986-1990
3. Homicide investigation comparison, 1991-1995
4. Homicide suspect-victim relationship analysis, 1990-1995
5. Homicide motive analysis, 1990-1995
6. Homicide methodology analysis, 1990-1995
7. Homicide closure classification analysis, 1990-1995
8. Homicide closure rate 1994,1995
9. Homicide closure comparison
10. Homicide closure percentages

(1) The frustration of unsolved homicides has existed to some degree since police departments started collecting data. However, nothing was being done with that data, outside the traditional methods of investigation. To begin our analysis of the problem since the beginning of our departments efforts to collect this data would be an overwhelming task. Therefore a period of ten years was selected for this data analysis. A more extensive study was done, on a six year (1990-1995) time period, reference

additional factors. We gathered data on the number of homicides and their status for the previous ten years, as you will see in Table 1.

YR	Homicides	Open
1995	31	7
1994	27	7
1993	27	5
1992	36	10
1991	33	10
5YR	154	39
	Homicides	Open
1990	38	9
1989	48	7
1988	28	6
1987	30	5
1986	32	4
5YR	176	31
TOTAL	330	70

The analysis was completed for three hundred and thirty (330) homicides which had occurred during the time period. There were seventy (70) unsolved homicides during this time, with an average number of thirty-three (33) homicides per year. The highest number of homicides forty-eight (48) occurred in 1989 with a low of twenty-seven (27) in 1993 and again in 1994. The average number of unsolved homicides per year was seven (7), with a high often (10) in 1991 (and 1992), and a low of four (4) in 1986.

Twenty-two (22) more homicides occurred during the years 1986-1990 as opposed to 1991-1995 (176 as compared to 156). There were eight (8) more unsolved homicides between the later five years as opposed to the earlier (39 as compared to 31).

(2) During the time period of 1986-1990, there was a rapid increase in the number of homicides. It increased from twenty-eight in 1988 to forty-eight and thirty-eight in 1989 and 1990, respectively. This increase coincides with the influx of "crack cocaine" into the greater St. Petersburg area. The percentage of solved homicides decreased from 88 % in 1986 to 77 % in 1990. The unsolved rate also increased from 12 % to 23 % during the same period. The averages number of unsolved homicides per year for this time period was six (6.2) or 17 %.

(3) The average number of homicides per year during the years 1991-1995, was thirty-one (31) with eight (8) remaining unsolved. As for a high, there were thirty-six (36) homicides in 1992 and the low was twenty-seven (27) in 1993/94, The number of unsolved homicides ranged from five (5) in 1992 to ten (10) in 1991/92. The reduction of the number of homicides may have been related to special policing projects, i.e. "Operation Crackdown" and the deployment of community based policing. It may also have been related to the opening of a new trauma center within the city and the advancements of medical technology.

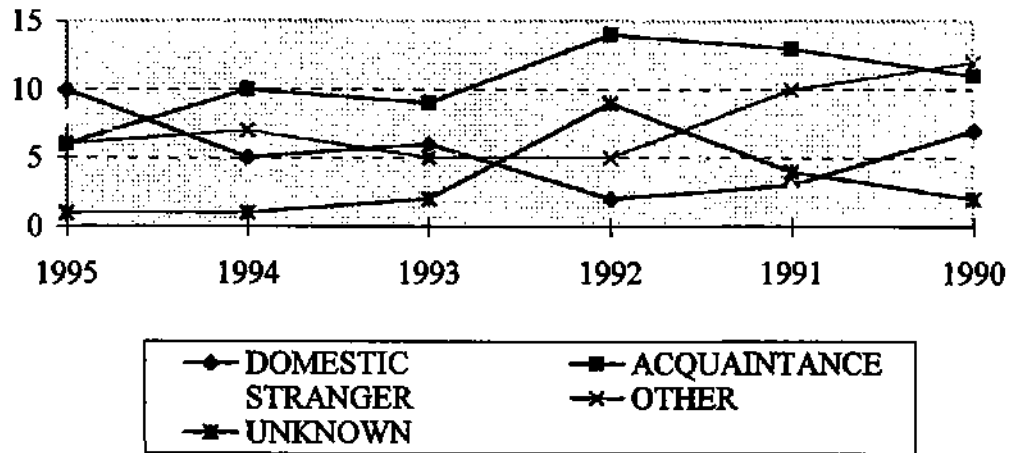
During the analysis of the ten year period we found that the grisly effects of 330 homicides had serious, long term, negative impacts on the lives of, the victims families,

friends, co-workers, neighbors, professionals (both medical and law enforcement). For twenty one (21) percent of these individuals closure was still unobtainable, as the cases were unsolved. The investigations for the most part, had slowed considerably or halted, for reasons previously described.

Additional analysis was conducted for the years 1990-1995 in order to better understand the homicide information in the fields of relationships, motive, method and closures.

(4) Analysis was conducted as to the relationships between the victim and suspects, to determine how it did or did not reflect the unsolved cases. The homicides were examined by year : (Please refer to the graph below)

SUSPECT-VICTIM RELATIONSHIPS



This analysis showed the most prevalent type of relationship was of the acquaintance category. These relationships surfaced in sixty-three (63) homicides. The category

consisted of relationships which could be described as boyfriend-girlfriend, neighbor, friend and relationships with other known individuals.

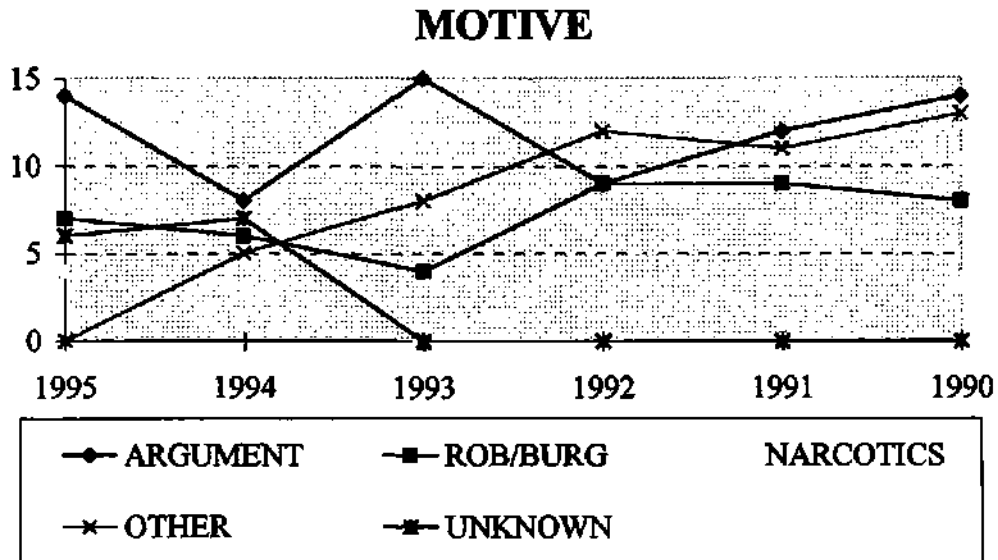
A general category, listed as other was the second most prevalent, showing forty-five (45). This category included individuals involved in known narcotic purchaser and dealers, robbers, burglars, merchant/patron, and other sub-types (not included in other categories).

Two groups were tied for the third most common causes; they were domestic and strangers related homicides. Both of these categories appeared thirty-three times (33) within the target area. Domestic related homicides were defined as having occurred between married individuals as well as blood relatives, i.e. father-son, mother-daughter, husband-wife. The stranger category Hsted people who had no known relationships.

In the final category, "unknown", there is no or not enough information to categorize this homicide. There are eighteen (18) such cases, all of which remain unsolved and include cases, for example, of skeletons found years after the homicides, victims which have been killed elsewhere and left within our jurisdiction, etc...

(5) The motive of the homicides was also analyzed and placed into categories:

(Please refer to the below listed graph)

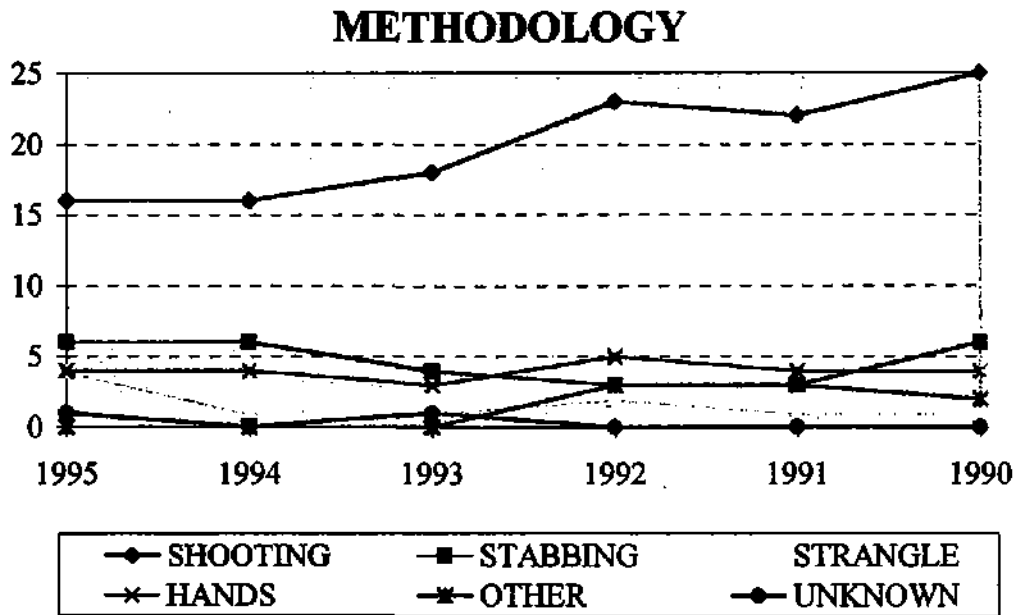


In comparing the motives for the homicides during the target period, most of them, seventy-two (72) occurred as the result of an argument. These arguments were domestic related, as well as between neighbors, friends, business associates and other individuals. The second most common category is listed as other. This category included homicides that were sexual, racial, or revenge motivated. The category appears forty-nine (49) times.

A considerable number of homicides also occurred as a result of or during the commission of other crimes not specified in other fields, and are listed as robbery or burglary, since they were the largest offenses of the field. There were forty-three (43) homicides in this category. Fifteen (15) homicides were directly linked to the sale or purchase of narcotics and are listed in the narcotics category. The narcotics related homicides do not include murders which were committed during home invasion type robberies or disputes between seller and buyers. The true nature of the narcotics transaction is often not related to law enforcement, even though the investigation suspects

these facts. In total, there were thirteen (13) cases where the motives have not yet been established.

(6) The methodology of the homicides was also analyzed. This analysis dealt with how the murder was committed, either by weapons of opportunity or introduced into the scene. (Please refer to the below listed graph)



As a method used or means by which the homicides were committed, shooting (by firearms) are easily the most prominent, occurring one hundred and twenty (120) times, which is just over four times more frequently than the next most common. Stabbings by edged weapons were the weapon of choice in twenty-eight (28) homicides. The homicides which were committed by physically or manually beating/kicking/bashing, occurred twenty-four (24) times during the target period. Then there were ten (10) strangulations.

In looking at the strangulations, it appears as if this method, is the most specific or signature like. It was observed that approximately one-half of them can be attributed to two individuals.

The final category examined in this field was listed as other and contains eight (8) homicides. These homicides occurred from bludgeoning, drownings, specific blunt objects, torture, etc....

In examining the analysis, homicide victims cross social, racial, economic and geographic boundaries. The suspect-victim analysis showed that the victim were most often killed by someone they knew. There were no known domestic related homicides which were unsolved during the ten year period. Usually people leave behind information or evidence regarding themselves, either conscientiously or unconscientiously. This could be anything from statements made to family members or friends, to paper or documents linking an individual to the crime scene.

The homicides were committed for a variety of reasons, which vary with the circumstances surrounding the crime. As previously stated, the homicides criss-crossed the lines of society and touching the entire community. The most common method of committing the homicide was by firearm, which relates directly to legal, ethical and moral arguments which have gone on for sometime, regarding firearms. However it should be noted that when firearms were not used, individuals still found ways to commit the offenses.

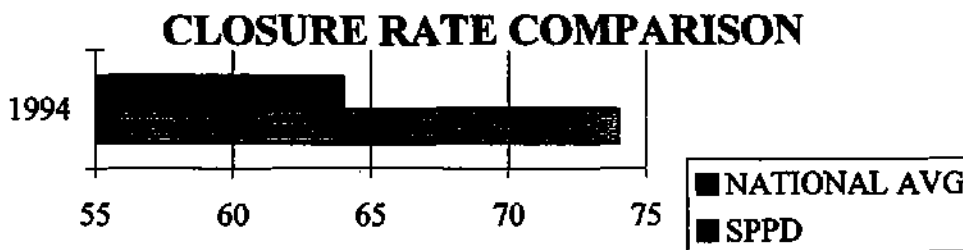
(7) In the period of years examined, the closure classifications were also examined. Homicide cases which had been closed exceptionally (13) or justifiably (14) make up a

small number when the number of cases closed by arrest (112) are examined. The exceptional and justifiable closures deal with homicides where the defendant died, the death occurred as the result of self-defense, or the homicide was not the result of a criminal act, i.e. line of duty shootings.

In regards to situational specifics, these homicides occurred on different dates and days of the week, in different areas, by different means and for different reasons. What ties together is the fact they are not solved rather than the elements which are usually used to link cases. However, on several cases, links were discovered which are pointed towards specific individuals committing several offenses. Due to technology not being what it is today, much of the data was not available during the initial investigation, creating certain analytical problems.

(8) During the analysis, some micro self-examination of the homicide unit was conducted. The unit's closure rate was higher than the national average, closing seventy-four percent (74 %) of the homicide in 1994 and seventy-seven percent (77 %) of the homicides in 1995.

(9) This closure rate comparison showed that the homicide unit is performing above the national average, according to 1994 F.B.I, statistics. (Please refer to graph provided below)



(10) During the ten year period, the statistics for closures was even higher. Homicides were closed at a seventy-nine percent (79 %) rate for the period as a whole. Due to the diligence of the members of our Homicide Unit, the above numbers reflect a positive quality of police work that our department and community can be proud to display.

In researching the data, we found that there was no ready sources of reference and this created a hindrance. Material which we believed was being maintained in a data base was in accurate and not readily accessible. A new resource reference was developed and it will be explained in the response section.

In another step of analysis, we met with several victims' families to gather their opinion of the project. In all cases, they were very positive and supportive to know that their loved ones had not been forgotten by time. The families volunteered to have their cases displayed in the media and some gave new information regarding certain circumstances about the homicide.

Response

It became evident that the current traditional methods of investigating unsolved homicides were not impacting the case status. A pro-active approach was introduced to

these cases. New exposure to these cases within the community allowing the lines of communication to be reopened and to welcome a new flow of information.

The first step in the process would become a review of the cases by the newly developed "Cold Case" detectives, currently Detectives Robert Schock and Mark Deasaro, with the insight of the original detective if plausible. These cases are then presented to the Homicide Unit and its supervisors to determine potential investigative leads and solvability potential, along with providing a forum for them to offer their expertise.

If a case was selected the following avenues of exposure would be utilized, in order to complete the investigation:

1. A continued investigation by the detectives, looking into the discovered leads
2. The re-establishing of communication with the victim's family, witnesses, State Attorney's Office and other interested parties
3. To create community awareness through the use of media sources.

Through our analysis, it was determined that the majority of the homicides had been committed by a known offender. Therefore, re-introduction of the crime information was important. This information could trigger a release of long held secrets, family tales, suppressed memories. We knew it would stir emotions which would have a remorseful impact on all parties involved.

The information that had been received from the victim's families along with the popularity of recent television ventures showed that the community would be receptive to

the concept. The media was queried informally to ascertain if they would entertain information along these lines. They all responded with enthusiasm. This allowed free exposure and coverage of case data. The media sources explored were:

- The creation of a re-enactment dramatization depicting the incident which could be filmed and produced by the departmental Training and Research and using the Government Public Access Channel
- Use of the Crime Stoppers, (the local television program) which depicts homicides and other violent crimes.
- The creation of a full time homicide TipLine which number could be displayed during programming, articles, fliers, etc.... This would allow twenty-four (24) hour access to the homicide unit detectives.
- Numerous newspaper articles and photographs have been printed in the local newspapers relating to the cases. "The Crusader", which is a news-source (paper and video) that deals with law enforcement related items, wanted persons, crime information and provides short television segments as well as a newspaper.
- We have made information available on the Internet, via our department's Internet home page (<http://www.sppd.cLst-pete,fl,us>)
- Information has also been shared through the use of "Police Only" restricted areas within the Internet, reference particular pattern or MO. This allows professionals, worldwide, to lend their expertise to the investigations. It allows detectives with similar patterned offenses to converse, exchange ideas and offer assistance to one another.

In dealing with the problem of a readily accessible file containing data on the homicides, a data base was compiled. It was called a Quick Reference and allowed cases to be researched by year, offense number, date, victim, location, suspect (or none), mode, status, detective. The data base ranges from 1990-1997, and is expanding (Refer to support paperwork for a two page example).

Assessment

The intent of the project was to keep the assessment relatively limited in paperwork and relaxed. While working on the project, both detectives maintained a caseload, although it was relaxed, and stayed active in the homicide rotation schedule. The Homicide Unit supervisor continued to direct the unit as well as the project and any other assignments given to him after the project began. Flexibility was also important, since either one or both of the cold case detectives could be pulled into another major case, which would involve intense staffing hours.

The actual case assessment would be a four phase process:

1. Review by the detectives and supervisors
2. Evaluation for additional investigation by the Homicide Unit
3. Presentation and plea to the community for assistance
4. Acknowledgment and response from the community.

Since the projects inception, over twenty (20) cases have been examined and many are within the process. There have been responses from the community, other agencies and family members, who advised they read about the homicides, viewed them on television or heard about the investigations re-opening from word of mouth. Some of the cases have been presented to the State Attorney's Office for consideration and prosecution. The specific guidelines in years (1986-1995) was held for the most part, however when leads surfaced from a 1969 homicide (a famous local case, involving a women found in a trunk) they were not ignored.

A separate set of assessment guidelines were created for the project itself. The project's assessment would be done in the following fields:

1. Evaluation of the quality of cases presented
2. Acceptance on the program by the community
3. Successful prosecution and/or closure of the cases
4. Additional concerns of the project supervisors and employees.

These sets of guidelines build upon one another so the assessment is somewhat constant. The project is being done from within the homicide squad room which has several wallboards containing case information and assignments, which are viewable by staff, supervisors and often the most severe critics, fellow detectives. The more formal evaluations would take place annually since some investigations span months or years, and this would allow a more complete evaluation.

Conclusion

At this point, the project is progressing in accordance with our planned goals and intentions. A successful closure has been obtained in five (5) cases and several are in the process.

AGENCY AND OFFICER INFORMATION

The entire St. Petersburg Police Department is involved in problem-solving policing, some through community based policing, other through their daily activities. All members of the Saint Petersburg Police Department have received training in the problem oriented policing. Since this project was outside the usual scope of the problem -oriented policing area, we had no true model to follow, however, we were given guidance by supervisors, familiar with the SARA method and project writing format. There were no noted problems found with using the problem-solving model and research discovered was provided to other units for their examination, i.e. number/method of domestic related homicides were routed to the domestic violence program. It was, however, a time consuming process to research and analysis the data needed for the project.

This project involved the detectives and supervisors assigned to the homicide squad, within the Investigative Services Bureau. The project used two homicide detectives, who's work loads were modified, and a supervisor. The detectives were freed of aggravated battery and assault cases however stayed within the regular homicide rotation. The majority of the detectives time was within the normal budget and some overtime was covered by a block grant.

There were no additional incentives provided for the police personnel, except the satisfaction of doing a good job for the community and the department.

The projects contact person is:

Detective Mark Deasaro or Detective R. Schock

Detective, Homicide Squad

1300-1 Avenue North

St. Petersburg, Fl. 33705

813-893-7339 or 813-893-7782

Fax 813-893-7192