

MODULE 1 - WHERE ARE WE?

LECTURE 6 – In this lecture we're gonna talk about THE TRADITIONAL INVESTIGATION PROCESS.

That's what we call the way police currently investigate crime.

WHY FOCUS ON VISIBLE INDEX CRIMES CONDUCTED BY LOCAL AGENCIES?

To start, let's go back and be sure we remember that in this course we concentrate on the investigation of the **Visible UCR Index crimes** conducted by **local agencies**. Why do we do that? Well, I'll tell you why.

Because we have the **most research** and the **best crime data** (the NCVS and UCR) on **Visible** crimes.

And because the **local agencies** are the **largest** group of agencies, they have the **most investigators**, they conduct the **most investigations**, almost all of the available **research** is on them, and they report the **CLEARANCE RATES** for **Index** crime investigations in the UCR. That's why. We just don't have this kind of data for other agency or crime types.

So you can see how we just sneakily applied the **definitions** you learned earlier about **major categories** of crime, how we **count** crime and **types of agencies** that investigate crime, in order to explain something. It wasn't so bad, was it? And as I said, you're a **better person** for it, **to boot!**

So now we're going to spend some time describing the normal **traditional investigation process** itself. Why? Again, if you don't know what they do, it's hard to understand or explain the results or how effective the process is. Like the traveling from somewhere in **California to New Jersey** somewhere **thingie**. Just keep that thought in mind, will ya?

We're going to look at how police handle burglary and robbery crimes. We're using these two crimes because what we **know about them** is specifically based on research. That research was conducted in the 1980s and is probably older than most of you. But, incredibly, it is still the most comprehensive and current information available regarding this subject. Imagine that, we're in the 21st century, and some of the only hard data we have regarding how police conduct burglary and robbery investigations is taken from two or three agencies and is thirty years old. But on the brighter side, it's more than we have on any other crimes. So that's good, right?

THE PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION, SCREEN/ASSIGN AND FOLLOW-UP PHASES

We're going to describe **three main phases** of the process in some detail – **the preliminary investigation phase, the screen/assign phase, and the follow-up investigation phase.**^{10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16} And just to make it interesting, we're gonna use all that **PLAN-ACTION-ESCAPE-FUGITIVE-DISPOSAL** and **spacey-timey** terminology of the CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK to do it! Oh, I can tell, this is **gonna be good!**

The first phase of the process is the **Preliminary Investigation Phase.**

So, here we go, a **Visible burglary or robbery crime** is **reported** to the police. The report normally occurs **after the fact** (i.e., after the **PLAN, ACTION** and **ESCAPE** phases of the crime, and when the offender is already in the **FUGITIVE** phase).

A patrol officer typically is notified of the report by his/her supervisor or a dispatcher and **reacts** by responding to the crime scene. This is the **spatial** area of the **ACTION** and **ESCAPE** phases, and again, the **time** of the response is usually **after the offender has departed** and is in the **FUGITIVE** phase. So most of the time the offender is gone by the time the police get there.

The patrol officer **conducts a preliminary investigation** to collect information from available sources at the crime scene. The investigation takes about one hour on average, and the officer may do the following, as he/she deems appropriate:

- Upon arriving at the scene, secure and **search** it (done about 90% of the time)

- **Canvass** the area (done about 20% of the time).

- **Interview** the **victim** (90% of the time – sometimes victims are not available).

- Interview **witnesses** (about 45% of the time). These are typically the most productive sources. **They are people!** The available sources still at the crime scene are usually quite limited and decrease as people move on, and as the time between the commission of the crime and the arrival of the officer increases (that's the **me-knife-body thingie** scenario).

- Collect **things** like physical evidence – that’s crime artifacts, you know. This is usually done less than 10% of the time – that’s right, **less than 10% of the time**).

- Check police records, informants, and **other sources** of information.

- Write a preliminary investigation **report** and give it to his/her supervisor.

So to quickly recap, what we’ve got here in this preliminary phase is the offender doing his/her thing in the ACTION and ESCAPE phases, usually pretty quickly, and usually in an area or manner not very visible to the public, and then making off into the FUGITIVE phase with the rewards of his/her efforts.

Then, sometime later (seconds, years, etc.), if what the offender did is ever reported to the police, the patrol officer responds (usually pretty quickly, within minutes) and tries to collect info about who, what, where, when, why and how.

But, alas, the info remaining at the crime scene when the officer responds is usually pretty limited. Sometimes, however, the offender is still at the crime scene when the officer arrives, or has been sufficiently identified by victims, witnesses or informants to be quickly apprehended by the officer. Like in some domestic violence or assault incidents or something. But most of the time he/she’s long gone and his/her identity remains unknown.

In case you haven’t noticed, **I’m repeating** myself on several points of the CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK. But its like tautology with a purpose, because I’ve been told that by describing it in different ways, it helps to get a better understanding of how it all works. And be forewarned – I’m gonna do that a lot in the lectures ahead. It’s necessary to get this stuff into your head so you can use it. So bear with me on this, OK? I’m doing this for you, STUDIOUS TRAVELER. **I know most of this stuff already.**

The second of the three-phase process is the **Screen/Assign Phase**.

The police supervisor screens the patrol officer’s preliminary investigation report and decides how to handle it as a “**case**.” This is essentially an administrative process based on informal police procedures. Typically, there are no standard or written screening criteria to follow, just routine on-the-job stuff based on past experience.

The case can normally be handled in one of three ways:

- **The first is the “Solved” or “slam dunk” way.** If a suspect has been arrested by the patrol officer who did the preliminary investigation, for example, the case is considered a “slam dunk” and assigned back to the officer or to detectives for **post-arrest** processing and disposition (preparing for referral to prosecutors, juvenile officials, etc.).

- **The second is the “Solvable,” or “Where Are They?” way.** These are cases that may be solved if a reasonable level of investigative effort is applied to them, consistent with available resources, but will not be solved otherwise. If sufficient information was developed during the preliminary investigation to identify outstanding leads, then the case may be assigned to a patrol officer or detective for follow-up investigation.

- **And finally, the “Unsolved,” or “Whodunit” way.** If there is insufficient information to follow up on, the case is screened out of the police workload and no further investigation is conducted. This happens to about ½ of all reported burglary cases, but robbery cases usually receive some follow-up investigation because of the more serious nature of those crimes.

The last phase of the traditional police investigation process is the **Follow-up Investigation Phase.**

- If the case is assigned to detectives, they will spend an average of **four hours or so** conducting **routine investigative leads**, which includes re-conducting all or part of the preliminary investigation. **Generally no new information** is developed.

- **Informants** are the most productive sources of new information, and they **provide information about 30%** of the time.

- After two days, about **¼ of the cases are suspended** (screened out/no further logical leads/no further investigation).

So the **traditional process** is to **wait** until a crime is reported to the police, then **react** to the report, and treat the crime as an individual **case. It reacts to reported crimes and is case-oriented.**

When we put the traditional process into our **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**, we see that the offenders go through the **PLAN, ACTION, ESCAPE and FUGITIVE** phases. And if the crime is **not reported** to the police, which is the majority of the time, the police normally **do not get involved** in any phase.

But if the crime **is reported** to the police, a patrol officer responds to the **space** of the **ACTION** and **ESCAPE** phases **after** the offender is already in the **FUGITIVE** phase. The officer then attempts to collect information at the space of the crime scene (the **ACTION** and **ESCAPE** phases), which is typically the most **time-limited** part of the crime continuum, and which typically contains only **minimal and transitory information**.

Based on what the patrol officer finds in this phase, a **decision is then made** regarding whether or not the police will proceed further with the case. Mind you now, this decision is normally made based on whatever info was obtained from the **ACTION** and **ESCAPE** phases only, where only a minimal amount of info is usually available.

If the offender was apprehended by the patrol officer, the case is a **slam-dunk** and is referred for prosecution or other disposition.

If the offender was identified but not apprehended, then the case may be considered **solvable (where are they?)**, and may be referred for further investigation while the offender is in the **FUGITIVE** phase.

The follow-up investigation routinely proceeds with a re-visit to the space of the **ACTION** and **ESCAPE** phases, and sometimes can proceed into a search for the whereabouts of the offender in that specific crime incident in the **FUGITIVE** phase.

If the case is considered **unsolvable (a whodunit?)** based on the patrol officer's preliminary investigation report, which in turn is based on info obtained in the space of the **ACTION** and **ESCAPE** phases after the offender has fled into the **FUGITIVE** phase, and no logical leads present themselves, then the case is not further investigated.

So, in the traditional police investigation process, which I have just so painstakingly analyzed above using the **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**, we can see that if, and that's a big if, a crime is reported to the police, and if the police react to the report, which they mostly do, almost everything that the police then do hinges on the minimal and transitory info that may be obtained from the very limited spaces and times of the **ACTION** and

ESCAPE phases. Most of the time, the police investigation never moves beyond the **ACTION** and **ESCAPE** phases. And the only time the police will take action in any of the other three phases is if they develop specific information on that specific case, and then target and try to locate a specific offender in the **FUGITIVE** phases related to that specific case.

Gosh, doesn't that seem weird? I'm not criticizing – yet, but I must say it does seem weird to me. I mean, if I'm the **VICTIM**, I want the police to DO SOMETHING!! Like, ANYTHING!! Yeah, but unfortunately, my memory has not yet deteriorated to the point where I've forgotten all the times when I personally responded to a **VICTIM's** pleas with something to the effect that, oh, we'll **keep an eye out**, or the case will remain in a pending status, or that we'll canvass our sources periodically, or **yada-yada-yada**, knowing in my heart that the case would pretty much remain a "whodunit" forever unless something really unusual happened. But what else could I do? I've got tons of cases just like this, and even worse, I'm way behind on almost all of them, as my boss reminds me on a daily basis. What else could I do?

Now here's some caveats to all of the above that we need to know about. The traditional process **varies** with the severity and types of crimes. For example, the patrol officer preliminary investigation activities are limited to the greatest extent in murder investigations – detectives usually assume most of the responsibility on them. But patrol officers are most active in burglary investigations, and detectives may assume little or no responsibility. And there are always **exceptions** driven by the nature or location of the crimes, the status of the victim, public or political interest, etc. But the preliminary investigation, screen/assignment and follow-up investigation phases, which are limited by info obtained mostly from the **ACTION** and **ESCAPE** phases while the offender is in the **FUGITIVE** phase, are the normal routine.

As an aside here, you can begin to see here how the roles of patrol officers and detectives are different, but how they are critically intermeshed based on crime types and decisions made during the traditional investigation process. OK, let's move on~~ Man, I can hardly wait to see what's next, and I've been through all this before!