

5 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT DEFINING AND SOLVING A COLD CASE

Cold case investigations are an underserved subfield of policing. Law enforcement's need to resolve cold cases is ever present; however, resources and budgets to solve these cases are not. Nonetheless, it is incumbent upon law enforcement agencies to actively investigate cases that have gone cold and bring answers, and perhaps closure, to victims and their families.

Many people think about an old, unsolved murder when they hear the term "cold case." Recently, more diplomatic words for cold cases such as "unresolved" or "long term" have arisen. Either way, many individuals and agencies define a cold case as a murder that has not been resolved beyond an arbitrary amount of time like one year and/or when all investigative leads have been exhausted. **This definition is not incorrect, but the idea that the term "cold case" only pertains to a murder is false.**

Cold cases also include missing and unidentified persons, undetermined deaths, and sexual assaults. These types of cases—like murder—can never close unless the victim(s) and offender(s) have been identified. A missing person must return or be located (alive or deceased), the John/Jane Doe identified, and a cause and manner of death established. Exceptions such as sexual assault cases with statutory limitations and requirements exist, but some state legislatures are pausing or extending statutes of limitations on cases that contain biological evidence.

Jason Moran, JEMM Consulting, LLC

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LEVERAGE FORENSIC SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Science and computer technology are constantly evolving. Advances have increased the ability of law enforcement agencies to gain new information about suspects and victims. Leveraging these resources can be as simple as locating evidence associated with the case and submitting it to a lab for DNA testing or resubmitting evidence that has been previously tested but provided limited data. Other strategies include utilizing federal resources such as the **FBI's Next Generation Identification (NGI) system** for fingerprints and other biometrics, as well as the **National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs)** and **National Crime Information Center (NCIC)** off-line searches. Genealogy and phenotyping are two new investigative tools.

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RECOGNIZE RELATIONSHIP CHANGES AND THE PASSAGE OF TIME

The passage of time is not typically associated with advancing an investigation, but as it pertains to some witnesses, it can be helpful. For example, changes in relationships can create an environment where witnesses are more willing to share information. It is important to learn about what your witnesses have been doing since the original incident and to revisit their prior statements. This process can provide opportunities to clarify or gain new information.

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EXPLOIT INFORMATION IN CORRECTIONAL SYSTEMS

When reviewing a cold case, determining what the witnesses and suspects have been doing since the original incident is imperative. Suspects may have been arrested and/or charged on a different case for the same or similar crime. Monitoring outgoing jail telephone calls and using confidential informants are conventional investigative methods. To expand upon these methods, consider meeting with the suspect's current and/or former cellmates. If the information can further the case, think about seeking a court order to record or "overhear" a conversation with a cooperative inmate and your suspect.

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IDENTIFY INVESTIGATIVE ERRORS

Errors occasionally occur during the investigative process. In addition, lack of training, resources, or skill sets may prevent some agencies from following cases to their natural conclusion. There are reasons why these types of cases were not solved the first time. Identifying those reasons can make all of the difference. Do not hesitate to reach out for help from other agencies, organizations, or individuals that have proven successful. A new set of eyes can change the status of these cases to "cleared and closed."

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BE PERSISTENT

Cases that have gone "cold" will not be resolved unless we continually review them. A person who went missing or was murdered many years ago is no less important than the one who goes missing or is murdered today. Even if not ultimately resolved, bringing cold cases to a "contemporary status" is law enforcement's responsibility and the key to increasing their solvability.

+According to the FBI's **2017 Uniform Crime Report**, when considering clearances of violent crimes, 61.6% of murders and 34.5% of criminal sexual assaults were cleared.

+The National Institute of Justice (NIJ) has reported on the "Nation's Silent Mass Disaster," describing the **more than 100,000** active missing persons cases and more than 40,000 sets of unidentified human remains in the United States.

+ According to the most recent statistics from the **Center for Disease Control (CDC)**, in the United States approximately 5% of all deaths have an undetermined manner of death.