



# The Forgotten Victims: Elder Homicides

SEPTEMBER 25, 2017

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE  
**ElderJustice**  
INITIATIVE



**OVCTTAC**  
OFFICE FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME Training and Technical Assistance Center



# TECHNICAL OVERVIEW

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- ▶ Today's session will be recorded and made available on the training website.
- ▶ If you have questions, type them in the feedback box. We will address as many as possible throughout the webinar.

# ELDER JUSTICE INITIATIVE

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The **mission** is to support and coordinate the Department of Justice's enforcement and programmatic efforts to combat elder abuse, neglect, and financial fraud and scams that target older adults.

The Initiative does so by—

- Promoting justice for older adults.
- Helping older victims and their families.
- Enhancing state and local efforts through training and resources.
- Supporting research to improve elder abuse policy and practice.





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## ELDER JUSTICE INITIATIVE (EJI)

REPORT ABUSE OR FIND HELP

New on ElderJustice.gov

**EJI launches the MDT  
Toolkit and Guide for  
elder abuse case review  
MDTs**



1

2

3

4



**Elder abuse is a complex issue that intersects with many disciplines.**

Elder abuse can happen to anyone. It affects people of every ethnic background, gender, and financial status.

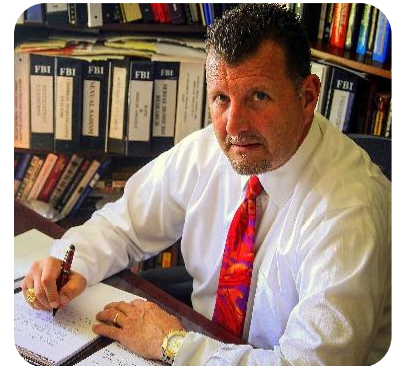
# PRESENTERS

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Associate Medical Examiner  
King County Medical  
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Supervisory Special Agent (FBI Ret.)  
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# The Forgotten Victims: Elder Homicides

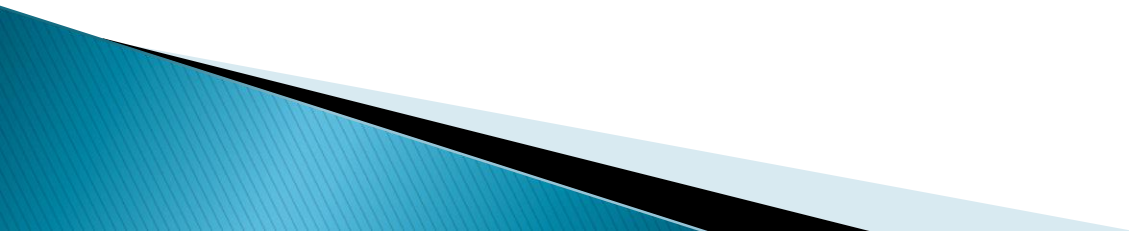
Micheline Lubin, M.D.  
Associate Medical Examiner  
King County Medical Examiner's Office  
September 25, 2017

# Objectives

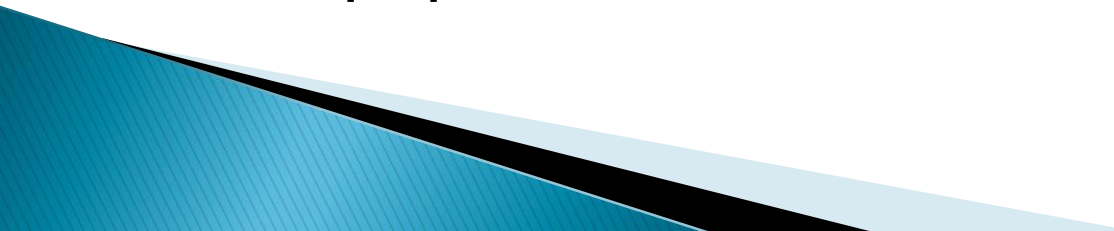
Describe how elder homicides are different from homicides of younger age groups.

Explain who are more likely to be victims of elder homicide.

List the common injuries that can be seen in elder homicides.

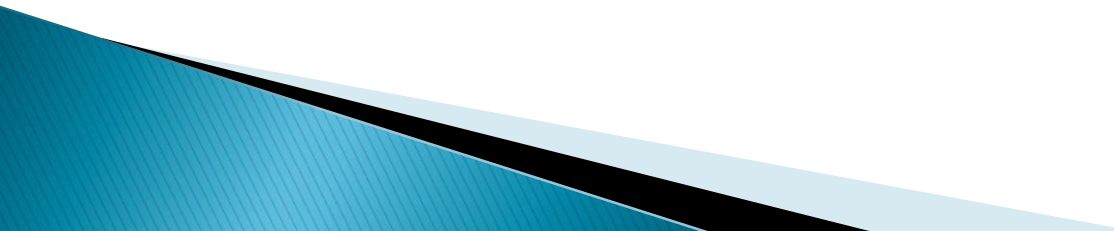


# Elderly Population in King County

- ▶ According to age-related population data, in 2000, persons older than 65 years old represented 10.5% of the population, and 10.9% in 2010.
  - ▶ In July 2016, according to the Census Bureau, the estimated total population of King County numbered 2,149,970.
  - ▶ Persons age 65 and older comprised 12.7% of that population number.
- 




# Elderly Population Growth

- ▶ Rapidly growing population that is estimated to rise up to 83.7 million by 2050 (Census 2010 estimates)
  - ▶ By 2030, it is projected that more than 20% of the population will be 65 and over (Census 2010 estimates)
  - ▶ With the increase in population, the incidence of crime against this vulnerable group is likely to rise substantially
- 

# Racial Breakdown

- ▶ General population in King County (2016)
  - Caucasians 68.9%
  - Asians 17.4%
  - Blacks 6.8%
  - Native American 1%
  - Two or more races 5%
  - Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander 0.9 %

# Elder Homicide

- ▶ Defined as the death of an elderly person over the age of 65 as a result of the harmful actions of another individual.
  - ▶ The elderly are the least likely group of people to be affected by homicides and represent only a small number of all homicides.
  - ▶ In King County, they comprised 5.5% (74 out of 1,358) of homicide deaths over a 17-year period from 2000 to 2017.
- 

# Sex and Age Distribution

- ▶ Males 31 (42%)
- ▶ Female 43 (58%)
- ▶ Differs from young homicide victims in that women are more likely to be killed

| Age | Number | %  |
|-----|--------|----|
| 60  | 17     | 23 |
| 70  | 28     | 38 |
| 80  | 21     | 21 |
| 90  | 8      | 8  |



# Sex and Racial Breakdown

| Sex    | Race            | Number |
|--------|-----------------|--------|
| Female |                 | 43     |
|        | White           | 37     |
|        | Asian           | 3      |
|        | Black           | 2      |
|        | Native American | 1      |
| Male   |                 | 31     |
|        | White           | 25     |
|        | Asian           | 2      |
|        | Black           | 4      |
| Total  |                 | 74     |

# Place of Injury or Death

| Place of injury or death                      | Number |
|---|--------|
| Died at home                                  | 52     |
| Died outdoors                                 | 7      |
| Nursing home                                  | 3      |
| Found in cars                                 | 2      |
| Hotel room                                    | 2      |
| Restaurant                                    | 2      |
| Gas station, bar, grocery store,<br>workplace | 1      |
| Unknown location                              | 2      |

# Types of Injuries

| Method of injury   | Number |
|--------------------|--------|
| Blunt force injury | 22     |
| Gunshot wounds     | 21     |
| Stab wounds        | 15     |
| Asphyxia           | 4      |
| Homicidal violence | 1      |
| Other              | 11     |

# Blunt Force Injuries

- ▶ Objects used included—
  - Hammers
  - Hatchets
  - Axes
  - Fists and feet
  - Shopping cart
  - Decedent pushed, striking head to ground

**WARNING – Next slides show graphic images.**





# Blunt Force Head Injury

- ▶ 72-year-old female found deceased in her home
- ▶ Blood was noted on her bed and spattered on the wall
- ▶ The body exhibited extensive cranial trauma on the posterior skull; two small skull fragments were found near her head
- ▶ Numerous contusions were observed along her neck, shoulders, and hands


# Blunt Force Head Injury (Hammer)

- ▶ This 73-year-old female was attacked by her husband while at home.
- ▶ She was taken to the hospital and died shortly after arrival.
- ▶ Her husband committed suicide before he could be arrested for her death.

# Hammer

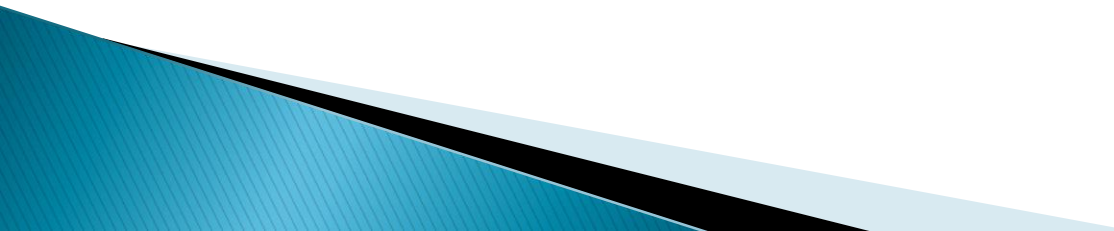
- ▶ The weapon used to assault her was a hammer.
- ▶ The hammer was placed against the wounds for tool markings.
- ▶ She suffered multiple blunt force injuries of the head, neck, torso, and extremities.

# Homicide Demographics

- ▶ Whites more likely to die of blunt force injuries than any other race
  - ▶ Females more than males
  - ▶ Reflects national studies that show more individuals died of blunt force injuries compared to other modes of death
  - ▶ In this series, 9 homicides involved murder/suicide, 8 involving spouses, and 1 involving a son and mother
  - ▶ The females were the homicide victims in all cases
- 



# Gunshot Wounds

- ▶ A large number of individuals died as a result of firearm injuries, second only to blunt force injuries
  - ▶ White females were more likely to die of gunshot wound violence than any other group of people (13 out of 21, 62%)
  - ▶ White males were second most likely to die by this method of death (8 out of 21, 38%)
- 

# Case Example

- ▶ 88-year-old female, reported to have been shot by her son, with whom she resides
- ▶ Son had been distraught over recent job loss
- ▶ Decedent found lying face up at home
- ▶ Gunshot wound was observed on the decedent's chest
- ▶ Perforating heart and lung

# Stab Wounds

- ▶ 15 individuals died via this method, representing 20% of the study population
- ▶ Demographics included 6 females and 9 males
- ▶ 8 died in their homes, while 7 others were away from home

# Stab Wounds

- ▶ 65-year-old male stabbed by an unknown assailant while eating at a restaurant
- ▶ Assailant reportedly approached the decedent from behind, pulled out a knife, and stabbed him in the neck and back
- ▶ There was no reported interaction between the decedent and the suspect prior to the incident

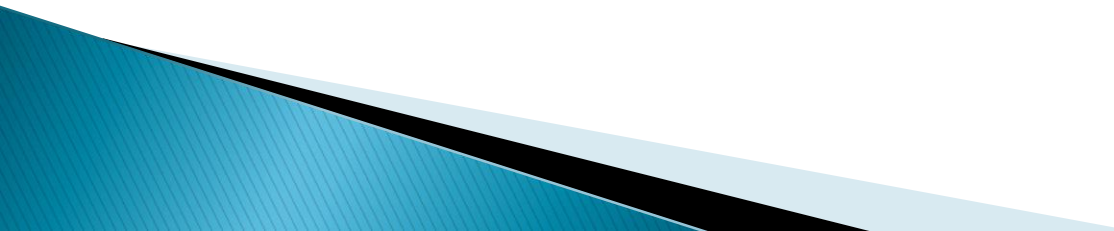
# Stab Wounds

- ▶ 84-year-old male stabbed at home by family member
- ▶ Taken to the hospital and later died
- ▶ Died of multiple stab wounds of the torso

# Stab Wounds

- ▶ 70-year-old male stabbed multiple time during the course of an attempted robbery in his apartment
- ▶ Suffered multiple stab and incised wounds of the neck

# Asphyxia

- ▶ Reported to be a relatively less common mode of death in comparison to firearm, sharp force, or blunt force injuries
  - ▶ 4 people died via this method
  - ▶ Mechanical asphyxia accounted for 1 and strangulation accounted for the other 3
- 



# Strangulation

- ▶ Elderly couple found deceased in their home
- ▶ Examination of the decedents revealed ligature marks around their necks, facial congestion and petechial hemorrhage around the eyes and in the conjunctive
- ▶ Neck examination revealed soft tissue hemorrhage in necks and fracture of the hyoid bone and thyroid cartilage in both victims

# Other

- ▶ Subcategory includes cases that had a combination of injuries involving—
  - Blunt force injuries
  - Stab wounds and asphyxiation
  - Severely neglected elders
- ▶ 11 individuals in our data set fell into this category


# Elder Abuse

- ▶ 90-year-old female living with family was taken to the hospital after reportedly being found down
- ▶ Found to have multiple pressure sores and Adult Protective Services notified
- ▶ Found to have sepsis due to decubitus ulcer

# Homicidal Violence

- ▶ 72-year-old female killed by her husband
- ▶ Suffered multiple sharp force wounds of the head and torso
- ▶ No evidence of defense wounds

# Conclusion

- ▶ Elderly population is projected to rise substantially by 2050, which will likely increase the victimization incidence on the elderly
  - ▶ Most elderly people are killed during the course of robbery and are more likely to die at home
  - ▶ Male elders are more likely to die at the hands of strangers
  - ▶ Female elders are more likely to die at the hands of family members
- 

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# Part II: Investigation and Research of Sexual Homicide

Linking Offender Characteristics  
to Victim and Crime Scene Attributes





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## Breaking News

Posted on Wed, Oct. 04, 2006

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# Trial delayed in elderly-abuse death

By KEVIN HOFFMANN  
The Kansas City Star

The trial of a Lafayette County woman accused of abuse that led to her elderly mother's

**Suzanne H. Skrzelewski faces charges of second-degree murder, domestic assault and elderly abuse in the death of Longina Skrzelewski, who was 85.**

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When Skrzelewski reported the death in January 2005, investigators arrived and found a stench-ridden home packed with trash. Her mother's body was found on carpet soiled by her own urine. Prosecutors allege that Skrzelewski killed her mother by letting her lie in fecal matter and other filth for so long she developed gangrenous sores that eventually led to death.

The trial was scheduled to begin today. Lawyers and judges will meet to set a new date.

Woman, 73, gets life for hammer attack - Crime & courts- msnbc.com

Saturday, December 15, 2007

4:56 PM

AP Associated Press



## **Elderly woman gets life for murder by hammer 73-year-old Pa. woman struck 84-year-old neighbor 37 times**

EASTON, Pa. - A judge convicted a 73-year-old woman of first-degree murder Wednesday for killing her older neighbor with 37 hammer blows to the head and sentenced her to life in prison without parole.

Kathy MacClellan declined to speak on her own behalf before receiving her sentence and rocked in her chair as the judge imposed it.

She was found guilty of attacking 84-year-old Marguerite "Tuddy" Eyer with the claw end of a hammer on Feb. 7, 2005, in a mobile home community north of Bethlehem, which is about 45 miles north of Philadelphia.

Eyer identified MacClellan as her killer before she died in the emergency room, and police testified that MacClellan's face, hair and clothing had been covered in Eyer's blood. Prosecutors did not discuss a motive.

"Your conduct cannot be discounted because of your age," Judge Emil Giordano told MacClellan.

MacClellan had been scheduled to plead guilty Monday to third-degree murder in exchange for a sentence of 17 to 39 years in prison. But the judge ordered a nonjury trial after she refused to agree to the facts of the case as laid out by Northampton County District Attorney John Morganelli.

MacClellan had earlier waived her right to a jury trial when prosecutors decided not to seek the death penalty.

MacClellan told police she went to Eyer's house with cookies and a photo album and found her bleeding on the floor, authorities said. She said she got on top of Eyer and moved her arm around because she thought that would comfort her, and got Eyer's blood on her, according to testimony.

The defense did not put on a case. Defense attorneys Anthony Martino and Mark Minotti declined to comment after the sentencing.

# Man kills elderly wife in murder-suicide at Pennsylvania hospice, DA says

March

19, 2013

*By M. Alex Johnson, staff writer, NBC News*

An 83-year-old woman and her husband were found shot to death in her hospice room Tuesday in what authorities in Allentown, Pa., were investigating as a murder-suicide.

Lehigh County District Attorney Jim Martin said there were no witnesses to the incident at Lehigh Valley Hospital. He said the man apparently shot and killed his wife and then killed himself.



NBC News US

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The shooting was confined to the room, and "no other patients or staff were placed in jeopardy," Martin said in a statement after the bodies were found about 1 p.m. ET.

"Contrary to some rumors, this was not an active shooter situation," he said.

Authorities wouldn't identify the couple because their family hadn't been notified.

Chuck Lewis, senior vice president of Lehigh Valley Health Network, which operates the facility, confirmed that the dead woman was an inpatient in the hospice unit.

# Where do we start?

## Who are we looking for?

No witnesses

Not high-risk victims

No enemies

Not gang- or drug-related killing

No jealous boyfriends or love triangle

Not a domestic killing

Not for insurance or inheritance

What difficult problem do we have to overcome?

# Sexual Assault Perception

Motivated by sexual arousal and desire

# THEORIES OF OFFENDING

Psychodynamic interpretation of rape

**Groth** – female represents authority figure who needs to be controlled, hurt & degraded

**Pollack** – acting out of motives of rage and sadistic intent



# What motivates these offenders??

Power and Control

Myers, W.C., Husted, M.D., Safarik, M.E. & O'Toole, M.E. (2006). The Motivation Behind Serial Sexual Homicide: Is it Sex, Power and Control, or Anger?. *Journal of Forensic Sciences*. July. Vol. 51, No. 4. pp. 900-907.

# Vulnerable and Accessible

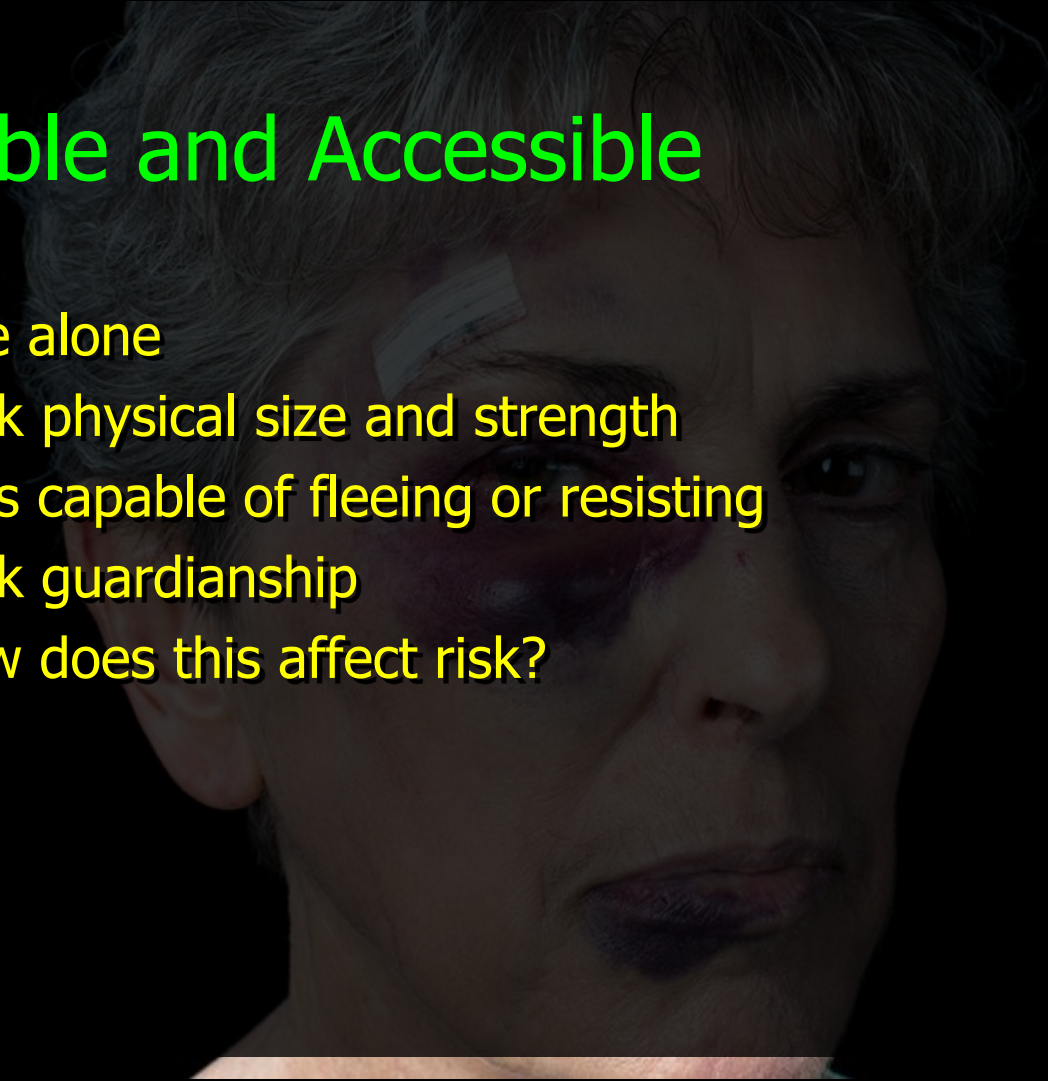
Live alone

Lack physical size and strength

Less capable of fleeing or resisting

Lack guardianship

How does this affect risk?



# ELDER WOMEN IN STUDY

128 murdered

Mean age – 77

Widowed and live alone – 83%

Homicide in residence – 94%

White (over represented) – 87%

Black – 9%

Hispanic – 4%

Lived in neighborhood 10+ years – 73%

No home security – 81%

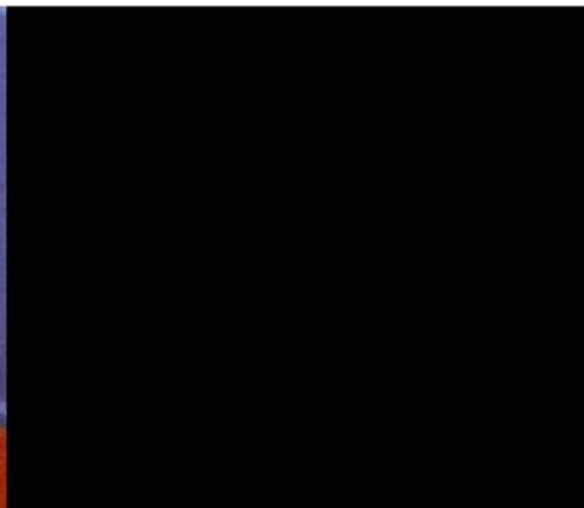
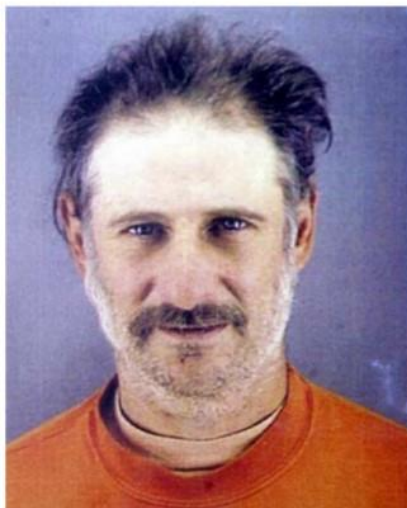
Residence unsecured – 60%

# S.F. killer admits to 4 more slayings / Convict demands death sentence in return for detailing other attacks on elderly

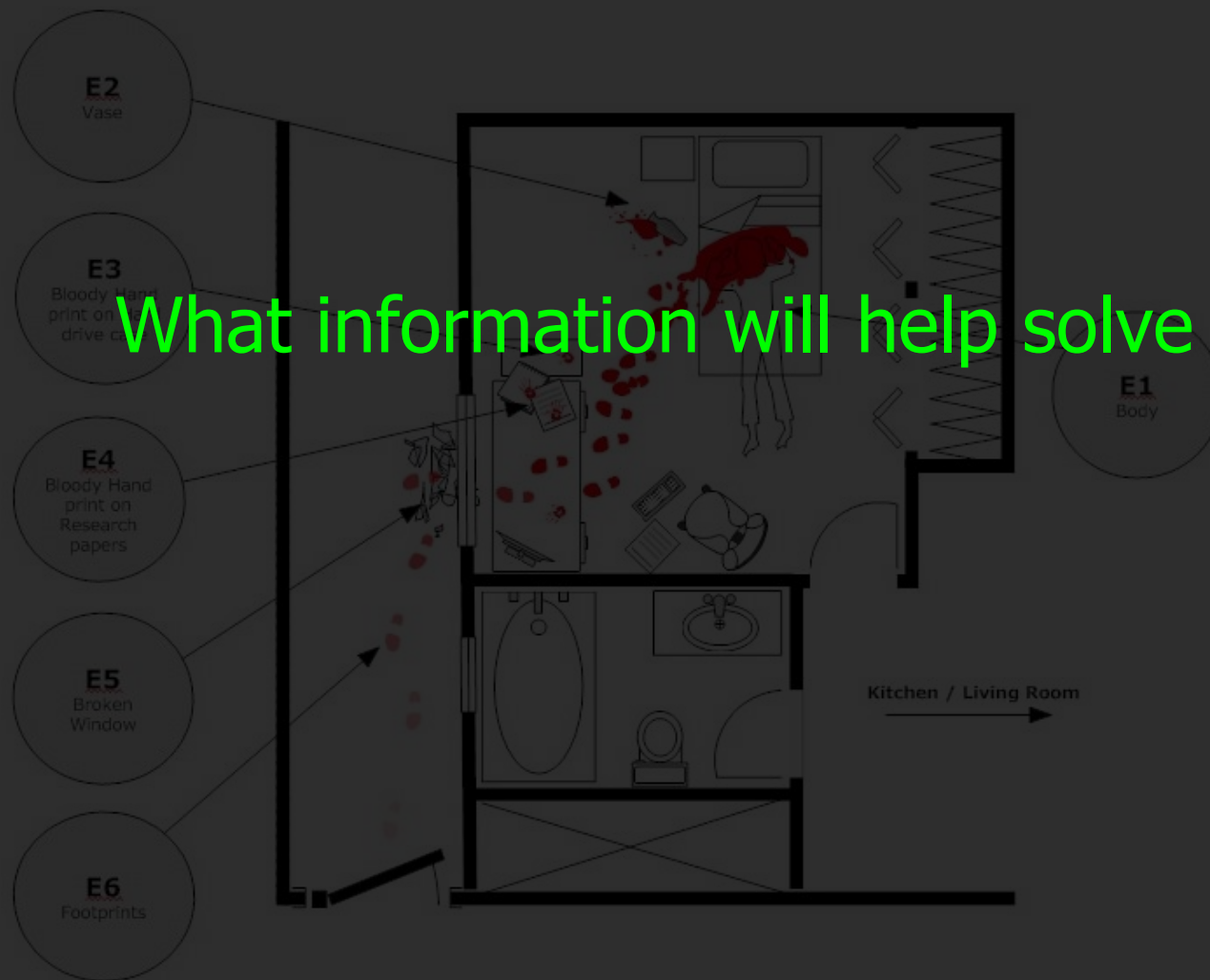
By Jaxon Van Derbeken Published 4:00 am, Sunday, March 30, 2003



ADVERTISEMENT



Homicide Inspector Armand Gordon



What information will help solve these cases?

# Offender Attributes

Race

Age

Relationship with victim

Distance to victim's residence

# Sample Populations

## Offenders

Total - 110  
White - 48 (44%)  
Black - 46 (42%)  
Hispanic - 14  
Other - 2

## Victims

Total - 128  
White - 111 (87%)  
Black - 11 (8.6%)  
Hispanic - 5  
Asian - 1



# OFFENDER RACE

Racial Composition of the Neighborhood



# Homicide Offenders

| <u>UCR 2010</u>       |                                     |                                     |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <u>Elderly Sexual</u> |                                     |                                     |
| Black-----            | 38%                                 | 42%                                 |
| White-----            | 32%                                 | 44%                                 |
| Hispanic-----         |                                     | 13%                                 |
| Cause of Death        | Firearm - 67%<br>Strangulation - 1% | Strangulation - 63%<br>Firearm - 1% |
| Black intra-racial    | 94%                                 | 23%                                 |
| White intra-racial    | 85%                                 | 96%                                 |

# Cross-racial Homicide

Hispanic - 80%

Black - 77%

White - 4% (anomaly)

**HOMICIDE**  
INVESTIGATION

CRIME SCENE

# What does this tell us?

Victim is Black - offender is Black

Victim is Hispanic - offender likely Hispanic

Victim is White - **CANNOT** use race

Victim is White - use neighborhood comp

# Offender Age

Ranged from 15 to 58 years



# Crime Scene Predictors

## Homicide Injury Scale

Victim's state of dress (covered or not)

# Homicide Injury Scale

Codes severity of injuries related to COD

Ordinal scale – 1 to 6

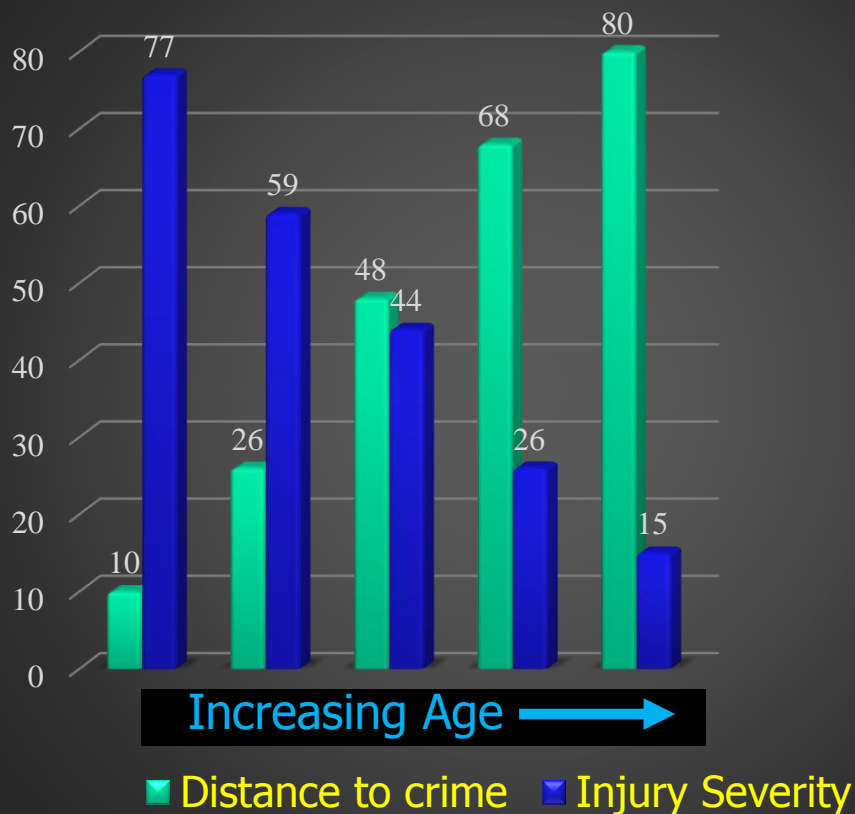
5 and 6 equal “excessive injury”

Hispanics most severe injury (small N)

Half of 5 and 6 by offenders 15-24

Mean = 4.6

Highly correlated with ISS



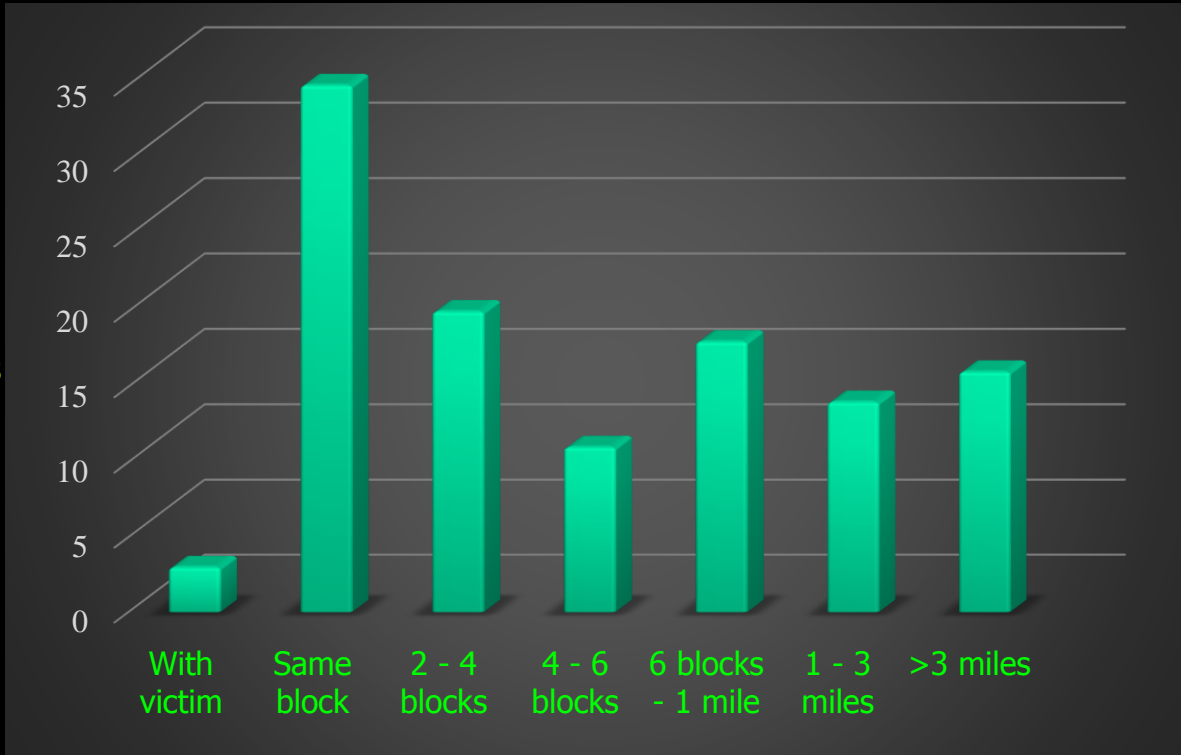
The more severe the injuries,  
the younger the offender

The more injury,  
the closer he lives



# Distance from Offender's Residence to Crime

Number of Cases



30% lived on same block

56% lived within 6 blocks of crime scene

# Journey of the crime

## Distance from Offender's Residence to Crime

### What predicts:

Homicide Injury Scale (HIS)

Racial composition of neighborhood

Offender walked to scene – 81%

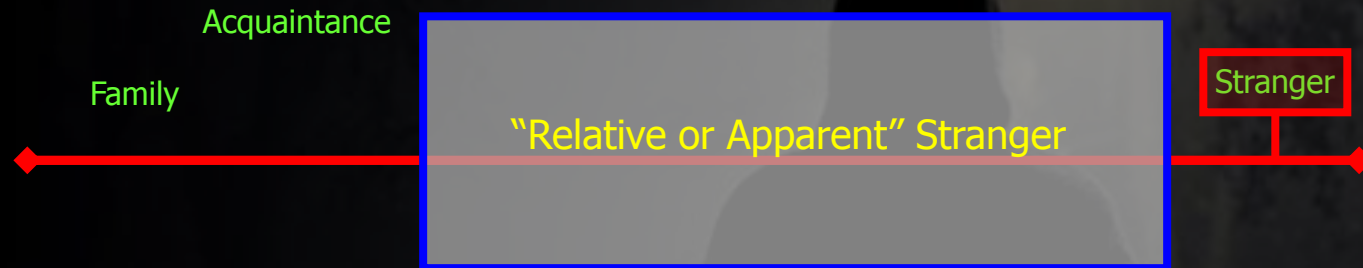
Blacks – 93%

Hispanics – 85%

Whites – 69%

Higher % than offenders living within  
6 blocks (56%)

# Relationship Continuum



# Victim - Offender Relationship

These women are targeted

Large grey area between stranger and non-stranger

Large category of "apparent" stranger

News

# Victim - Offender Relationship

64 year-old  
woman raped  
and murdered

Predictor – How victim was left at scene

Covered – known to victim

Greater probability he lives closer



# Foreign Object Insertion

Present in 22% of cases

Whites most likely

Hispanics least likely

Under 18 years - 33%

< 24 years of age - 50%

Do They Torture?





# General Offender Characteristics

Live within 6 blocks – 56%

Live on same block – 30%

Hispanics living within 6 blocks – 85%

Unskilled – 93%

Education

20% 1–8

74% 9–12

Mean age – 27

White - 28

Black - 27

Hispanic - 25



# General Offender Characteristics

Criminal records - 90%

Burglary – 59%

Only 20% - sex offense arrests

Travel on foot – 81%

Blacks – 93%

Hispanics – 85%

Semen present – 48%

Brought nothing – 77%

Weapon from scene

Blitz approach – 82%

Never married – 70%

Lives with family – 42%

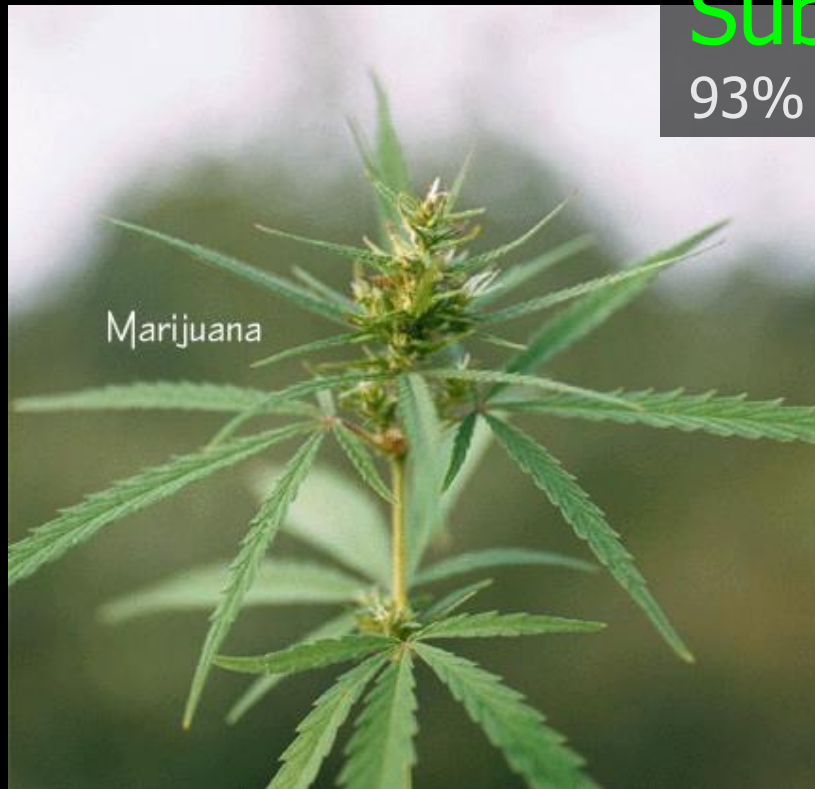
# Substance abuse

93% have history of abuse

86% -- alcohol abuse

54% -- marijuana abuse

44% -- cocaine abuse



70% under influence during crime – self reported

# General Offender Characteristics

Confessed – 45%

Whites confessed twice as often as Blacks

Made admissions – 19%

Blacks made admissions twice as often as Whites

# Confessions – What Works?

Remember that they are socially inadequate

Male interviewer

One on one

Remove items between you

Soft approach – personable

Empathetic – be understanding

## Themes

Financial gain motive

She was the aggressor

Project fault to victim

- CRITICAL -

DO NOT talk about sexual assault

# Organized – Disorganized Typology

Continuum of behavior

Assist law enforcement

Classify offenders based on CS attributes

# Disorganized

Overall impression of scene

Committed suddenly

No plan for deterring detection

Great disarray

Spontaneous, symbolic, unplanned quality

Kills instantly for control

Uses blitz attack

Victim caught unaware (sleeping)

Restraints not used

Weapon of opportunity from victim or scene

# Disorganized

Overall impression of scene

Body left at or near scene

COD often strangulation or BFT

Depersonalization

Mutilation after death

Specific areas of body targeted

“Overkill”

Crime scene and death scene usually same

No attempt to conceal body

Not evidence conscious - Forensic E present

# Disorganized

## Profile Characteristics

- Average intelligence
- Socially immature
- Poor work history
- Sexually incompetent
- Lives alone or with family
- Lives or works near crime scene
- Minimal interest in news media
- Societal aversion
- Feels rejected and lonely
- Finds interpersonal relationships difficult
- Lacks cunning
- Commits crime in a frenzy
- Social outcast





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[www.FBSInternational.com](http://www.FBSInternational.com)

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Q & A



# QUESTIONS & SUGGESTIONS

can be emailed to

**[elder.justice@usdoj.gov](mailto:elder.justice@usdoj.gov)**