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The Media as an Investigative Resource: Reflections from English Cold Case Units

Abstract

Purpose

The use of the media in live cases has been explored, in terms of its use and value to an investigation. However, it is unclear as to whether engaging with the media in cold case investigations results in a positive or negative reception, and what impact this can have on a case's possibility for progression. Due to the passage of time and a lack of, or a failed, prosecution means that the approach to media use needs to be different.

Design/methodology/approach

This study is a result of a seven-month observation period with a two-force collaborative cold-case team in England, and supplemented with interviews with 12 experienced cold-case detectives. Using inductive thematic analysis, the themes identified allow an exploration of detectives use of the media, and the effect that this has on progressing cases. Further, there is discussion as to whether the media's involvement is positive or negative.

Findings

The overarching theme is that when utilising the media, cold case detectives are met with a positive reception and interest. The media can be used to obtain information, particularly in cases with minimal information, and it is important to utilise murder-anniversaries to obtain help from the public. However, this needs to be a carefully managed strategy as the media coverage can be negative, including inaccurate or inappropriate reporting which can be of detriment to the investigation.

Originality

This is the first paper to explore how cold case detectives have utilised the media in order to progress cases, and the findings demonstrate that when the public are encouraged to come forward with information, there is a better chance of case progression. Further research is required to explore how all cold-cases can receive appropriate coverage.

Key Words

Cold-cases, unsolved homicides, homicides, policing, criminal investigations

Introduction

The act of homicide, and their subsequent investigations, are often a high-profile and heavily publicised event (Simon, 1999). In England and Wales, police forces are aware of this interest but are cognizant of the fact that they must maintain a control over the coverage (Feist, 1999). When the various media platforms (local and national newspapers and television news, the internet, and social media) cover a homicide event, the public are given the opportunity to follow a case through to its eventual resolution, which is typically the prosecution of the offender(s). Yet, not all cases result in the identification, arrest, or prosecution of the offender(s). Such cases are referred to as ‘cold cases’, which has become common parlance across England and Wales and the US (Allsop, 2013, 2018; Innes & Clarke, 2009; Walton, 2006, 2013). Once a homicide is reported to the police it is subject to a thorough investigation, with all investigative leads identified and pursued, with the intent of securing a resolution (Allsop, 2013; Gaylor, 2002; Innes & Clarke, 2009; Smythe, 2009; Turner & Kosa, 2003; Walton, 2006, 2013). In England and Wales, all homicides are subject to periodic reviews whilst the case is active, and these reviews occur at 7-, 28-, and 56-days. The purpose of the reviews is to ensure best practice has been followed, all lines of inquiry have been pursued and conducted appropriately, and there have been no missed opportunities (Nicol et al, 2003). However, once two years have passed since the homicide occurred, with no resolution, the case undergoes a final, or ‘closing review’, accompanied by a closing report (ACPO¹, 2012; Allsop, 2013; Gaylor, 2002). In this review, the Senior Investigating Officer (SIO), assigned to the case determines that there is no possible way, at this time, that the case can be progressed, without obtaining new information, which is typically new evidence or witnesses (ACPO, 2012; Allsop, 2013; Gaylor, 2002; Innes & Clarke, 2009). The case is then passed to the responsibility of the cold case team.

Cold case homicides pose a unique challenge for investigations and are inherently difficult due to the passage of time, possible loss of forensic exhibits, and a lack of resources available to investigate them (Allsop, 2018; Walton, 2006). Further, Allsop (2013) highlights how austerity measures across England and Wales are affecting the amount of resources that can be assigned to cold cases. This is still a concern today with the rising crime rates and declining officer numbers across the country (Home Office, 2019). Consequentially, police forces in both England and Wales and the US, have employed solvability, or prioritisation, matrices to prioritise cases based on their likelihood of eventual resolution (Davis et al, 2012; Lloyd-Evans & Bethall, 2009; Turner & Kosa, 2003). The

¹ The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) is now the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC), but at the time of this document’s publication it was ACPO, as referred to in this publication.

highest scoring cases are those with forensic evidence that could be advanced through new techniques; definitive proof of murder; the body's recovery; and cooperating witnesses (Lloyd-Evans & Bethall, 2009; Turner & Kosa, 2003).

The authors (*c.f.* Lloyd-Evans & Bethall, 2009; Turner & Kosa, 2003) that have explored solvability matrices have focused on specific forces and so it is unclear if all forces in England and Wales, and the US, utilise such systems for their cold cases. Nevertheless, the importance of forensic evidence has been associated with the investigations of cold cases and attributed to their successes: it has become the focal point of both academic inquiry and cold case investigator's actions (ACPO, 2012; Allsop, 2018; Chapman et al, 2019). Notable successes in the use of forensic evidence for solving cold cases, such as Collette Aram's murder in England (Allsop, 2018), and the possible identification of the Golden State Killer in the US after 40 years (Lussenhop, 2018), support the use of this approach. However, not all cases may benefit from this investigative strategy, as they do not have forensic evidence available to test, or the exhibits have since been lost. Thus, this study focuses on trying to get witnesses, or those with information, to come forward to assist the investigation in the hope of achieving some progress. Allsop (2018) reports that police forces in England and Wales are encouraged to 'advertise' their successes of resolving a cold case through the media. This presents the opportunity for forces to bring other cases to the forefront of the public's mind that these cases may also need assistance. In order to reach the widest audience, the use of the various media platforms can be beneficial, but this does not necessarily come without its disadvantages. These issues are discussed alongside the police-media relationship when covering a homicide event, and the importance of witnesses. The media platforms of focus are local newspapers and social media.

The Media

The journalist's motto of 'if it bleeds, it leads' (Schildkraut & Donnelly, 2012) explains the prominent interest in covering live homicides. Gilliam and Iyengar (2000) report that homicides are the most likely offence types to be covered in the media. Research from the US focuses on which homicide cases receive coverage, with a focus on the victim's demographics (i.e. age, race, and gender) and the circumstances of the killing (i.e. stranger or sexually motivated homicides) (*c.f.* Chermak, 1998; Gruenewald et al, 2009; Johnstone et al, 1994; Lundman, 2003; Peelo et al, 2004; Schildkraut & Donley, 2012). However, Soothill et al (2002) notes that the academic inquiry into the media's coverage of homicide in England and Wales is focused on the disproportionate coverage of this offence compared to others. These are also known as 'newsworthy factors' (Jewkes, 2015), which determines if a case receives coverage or not, and for how long (Brookes et al, 2015; Chibnall, 1977; Greer & Reiner, 2012; Gruenewald et al, 2009; Paulsen, 2003). As England and Wales experience much lower rates of homicide compared to the US (approximately 16,214 in the US in 2018 (FBI,

2018) and 726 in England and Wales; ONS, 2018), it is expected that all homicides receive coverage in the media, but certain factors will affect how long the coverage is given for.

As discussed by Innes (2003), all homicides are likely to be reported in the media in England and Wales: however, this is most likely to be in local newspapers, or local televised news (Greer, 2003; Mitchell, 1998; Stempel & Hargrove, 1996). Some cases, however, will receive intense and prolonged coverage based on the newsworthy factors related to the victim's demographics, and the circumstances of the killing. Innes (2003) refers to such cases as '*case célèbres*' and Christie's (1986) work refers to '*ideal victim*' cases. Importantly, however, Innes (2003) notes that out of the 700 (approximate) homicides that occur each year in England and Wales, only two or three cases will earn this accolade. However, editors must also base their decision on what cases to cover based on the available information (Fahmy, 2005). Further, they must be able to identify where they can obtain information quickly for the release of the story (Walsh-Childers et al, 2011). The agency with the most knowledge of the homicide is the police, who maintain a '*gatekeeper*' relationship with the media (Chibnall, 1977; Ericson et al, 1989). Ericson (1995) reports that the police frequently withhold information from journalists: reasons for this include the demographics of victims (i.e. the very young, vulnerable, or elderly), and the integrity of police investigations (Ericson et al, 1989).

However, the introduction of social media platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, pose entirely different challenges for police forces, particularly as they have doubled in their use since their inception in 2010 (Brainard & Edlins, 2015; Goldsmith, 2015; Webster, 2010). The development of social media has led to the rise of a 24-hour news platform, that puts pressure on the police force to respond to the media's demand for information (Mawby, 1999). Police forces in England and Wales have been known to utilise social media platforms to their advantage: over a 24-hour period in October 2010, Greater Manchester Police (GMP) used Twitter to report every incident that came into their control room (Crump, 2011). This led to a significant increase in their followers, demonstrating the public's interest in knowing this information (Crump, 2011). When a series of riots broke out across major cities in England in 2011, the police used social media platforms to reassure the public and to both provide and obtain information (Crump, 2011). During the riots, it was discovered that although the police obtained invaluable intelligence about perpetrators and planned looting, they ended up with far too much information to be able to manage and process it (Proctor et al, 2013). The consequence of a substantial influx of information obtained through the media is a significant concern for serious and complex investigations also, including homicides. This issue was demonstrated, albeit historically, with the Yorkshire Ripper enquiry when the case was misled by a hoax caller, resulting in misdirected resources and wasted police time (*c.f.* Miller, 2014).

In a report for the Policing and Reducing Crime Unit (PRC, Home Office), Feist (1999) acknowledges that the media and public interest in homicides is high, but this will diminish after a few days, and both parties will move onto other stories. If the public and various media platforms move on very quickly, this presents significant challenges for the investigators of cold cases who are hoping to utilise the media, and for the victims of cold cases. Police forces recognise that the primary goal and motivation for the media, and particularly newspapers, is to generate public interest, beat their competitors, and make a profit (Feist, 1999; Huey & Broll, 2012; Innes, 1999; Johnstone et al, 1994; Shoemaker, 2006). Feist (1999) identified that the SIO will spend 20-40% of their time dealing with the media during the first two days of an enquiry. It is recognised that police forces do have specialist media liaison teams, however, this is still reported to be a significant skill required by SIOs, and part of their role (Feist, 1999; Stelfox, 2008). It is expected that social media increases have made this more of a time-consuming activity, if not for SIOs specifically, then the force as a whole. There primary reasons for engaging with the media are to provide information to the public, reassure them, and obtain information (Feist, 1999). In the initial stages of a homicide investigation, the police may choose to give out only limited information to the media whilst emphasising that enquiries are ongoing (Innes, 2003). This ensures that the media are satisfied that the police are engaging with them, whilst maintaining the integrity of the case. If the police disclose too much information, it may affect prosecution at a later stage of the investigation. However, if the media suspect that the police are withholding information then they may simply seek their own sources. This is a concern as the sources used by the media may not be reliable or accurate, and this can lead the police to be inundated with irrelevant and unhelpful information which is demonstrated in the Yorkshire Ripper case. But as all information must be processed and assessed to ensure all leads have been explored, it is a time-consuming strain on the force (Innes, 2003). Therefore, the importance of a good media strategy is imperative. However, if the police are still not obtaining the information that they require, or they need more, then they have the option of going back to the media and disclosing further information (Innes, 2003). A concern is that by returning to the media with slightly more information, and a request for assistance, it may become negative for the investigators. If the police have not arrested, identified, and convicted the offender quickly, it can lead to criticism, particularly towards the SIO (Innes, 2003). In cold cases, engaging with the media after a significant period of time has elapsed may lead to a negative reception from the public as the case has not been resolved. Yet, Turner and Kosa (2003) counter this hypothesis by suggesting that coverage of a cold case gives a representation of the police that is positive and shows their dedication for all cases, regardless of their inherent challenges.

The newer forms of media, such as social media and the internet, have not replaced the more traditional forms of news reporting, such as television news and newspapers, but they complement each other (Yardley et al, 2017). The newer and traditional media platforms actually shape and

refashion each other in a process that Bolter and Grusin (1999) call 'remediation'. Thus, the advantages of one media platform can outweigh the possible disadvantages of another. For example, police forces can use social media to quickly inform the public of any ongoing situations, as was the purpose of Twitter during the 2011 riots (Crump, 2011). A more detailed and carefully managed approach to complex investigations can be achieved through direct communication with the journalists covering the story to ensure an appropriate message is portrayed to the public (Huey & Broll, 2012). In such investigations, quick updates may be helpful through social media, but more in depth engagement may be better suited in newspapers. In a series of interviews with 31 Canadian detectives, Huey and Broll (2012) found that detectives were sensitive over their image as they felt that they are presented negatively in the media. Further, they felt that the force, themselves and the victim can be misrepresented, and so prepared media releases were preferred to obtain greater control of information. Participants reported that if they did not engage with the media, the story still ran, but it was highly inaccurate (Huey & Broll, 2012). Further, one of the participants, a Major Crimes investigator, felt that if the police and media had a business relationship, it may increase trust and the media may publish less speculative stories as they are more involved in the finer details of the case and investigation (Huey & Broll, 2012). Ensuring that the force is presented in the most appropriate light and avoiding fear and speculation from the public is imperative if the police are going to use the media to their advantage. A primary objective for the police when using the media is to obtain witnesses (Feist, 1999; Innes, 2003; Turner & Kosa, 2003) The focus in this study is on the force's use of the media to encourage witnesses to come forward and help with inquiries.

[The Importance of Witnesses](#)

The witness to a homicide provides investigators with invaluable information about the suspect, the victim, and the circumstances in which the homicide occurred. Thus, they can be important sources of information during a live investigation. However, if a witness is not interviewed or identified immediately during the initial investigation, it can be hard to secure their testimony later. It was found that even if police are aware of a witness, not all of them will necessarily cooperate with the investigation: Borg and Parker (2001), from a US perspective, found that people living in poor, high-crime neighbourhoods are less trusting of police and are, thus, less likely to provide information to them about a homicide. A RAND Corporation study sought to identify whether the investigative practices used by American police forces affects the clearances rates of homicides (Greenwood & Petersilia, 1975). The study reported that the ability to identify witnesses at the scene and secure their testimony was associated with an 80 percent chance of resolving the homicide (Greenwood & Petersilia, 1975). Even if a witness cannot definitively identify a suspect, or is unable to clarify all details of the circumstances of the homicide, their testimony can be beneficial for progressing the case by filling in gaps of knowledge for the investigator, or clarifying other pieces of evidence that the

police are in possession of. For cold cases homicides, if the police have not obtained information from witnesses at the time of the original investigation, then there is a concern that it will be lost forever, which may be detrimental to cold cases.

When cold cases were becoming a more prominent police activity in the US during the 1980s/1990s (Davis et al, 2012; Innes & Clarke, 2009), the sole focus was on the utilisation of former witnesses, or those with information, to come forward and provide further clarity (Innes & Clarke, 2009). On the other hand, the UK were heavily focused on using advances in forensic evidence to progress their cases (Allsop, 2013; Innes & Clarke, 2009). After following these separate trajectories for many years, the US followed in the UK's footsteps and began considering the application of forensic evidence advances as the most beneficial and cost-effective approach to cold cases. Nevertheless, witnesses remain a vital component of cold case investigations. When asked which factors they felt were important for progressing a cold case homicide, detectives ranked information from witnesses as one of the most important, alongside forensic evidence (Davis et al, 2012). It may be difficult to locate the witnesses identified during the original investigation, but Turner and Kosa (2003) recognised that this may be a time-consuming activity that becomes highly beneficial. At the time of the original investigation, some witnesses may have been fearful of retaliation from the suspect, or their emotions or loyalties have changed during this time and they will now provide information that could help progress the case (Kirsch, 2006; Reyes, 2009; Turner & Kosa, 2003). In cold cases, the aim for investigators is to reach out to those witnesses who did provide information at the time, and those who did not, to see if they have remembered further information, or if they have learnt anything over the years that could be helpful. One way in reaching a large audience and locating witnesses is to use the media, but this should be a carefully managed strategy in order to benefit the investigation, rather than it becoming a hindrance.

Context for this Study

This study is one part of a larger project that explored the investigations of cold-case homicides across England. There were three stages of data collection involved in the larger project: the first stage was a quantitative approach, and the stages discussed in this study are qualitative. The quantitative stage of data collection involved using data from 42 police forces in England and Wales to identify the prevalence of cold case homicides in their force. Further, the forces were asked to provide the following: (a) whether they have a dedicated unit for their cold cases, (b) the personnel in the department, and (c) any policies that the force uses. This information provides a baseline for the study, and so does not influence or inform the qualitative stages of data collection and analysis which are discussed in this study. However, as will be discussed in later sections, this stage of data collection did identify suitable forces that could participate in the qualitative stages.

The main focus of the project sought to both identify and explore the variations in approaches and techniques utilised in cold cases when investigators conduct either a review or reinvestigation of the case. Atkin and Roach (2015) identified several decisional ‘tipping points’ that determine if investigators should conduct a review or reinvestigation. The tipping points to determine if a review or reinvestigation should be conducted was not an element of the larger project as the focus was on the investigative strategies, which is discussed shortly. In order to explore the investigative techniques used, and how they must be altered, or adapted, to negate the challenges of cold cases, such as the passage of time, a more detailed and thorough consideration of the case is necessary. Therefore, the project relies on forces who conduct reviews of their cases to explore areas where the case could be developed, such as ensuring all information was gathered and assessed, following all lines of enquiry, and so forth. Therefore, forces who rely solely on forensic evidence to prioritise when their cases are to be reviewed are not necessarily applicable for this project (see above section related to prioritisation scoring). The Murder Investigation Manual (MIM: ACPO, 2006) is a procedural guide for live homicide enquiries and recommends investigative strategies around house-to-house enquiries, witness and suspect management, forensic strategies and communication. Given the passage of time in cold cases, investigators conducting a review must be cognizant of what was available back when the cold case originally occurred. For example, how beneficial would enquiries around telephone and CCTV be for a case that occurred in the 1970s? Further, the investigators must be mindful as to what technology and information is available today that could be retrospectively applied to cold cases in order to provide possible resolutions. This is evidenced by the advances and applications of forensic evidence in cold cases (c.f. Allsop, 2018; Chapman et al, 2019).

Both Allsop (2018) and Chapman et al (2019) highlight and discuss the importance and usefulness of forensic evidence and applications within cold case investigations. In the UK, the Home Office realised that forensic evidence offered the possibility of ‘quick wins’ by upgrading DNA samples from cold case sexual assaults (Operation Advance) to the National DNA Database (NDNAD) in the hope of identifying the offender (Allsop, 2018). The success of Operation Advance saw the Home Office grant funding for cold case homicides (Operation Stealth), of which police forces had to apply for the funding based on the likelihood of resolving the case, but the successes were not as plentiful as Operation Advance (Allsop, 2018). This is because homicides are more complex, and there is not always forensic evidence available for case progression. However, this is just one investigative strategy available to investigators, and this study considers the media as an investigative resource in cold case investigations.

What follows are some reflections from English police forces that should be considered by investigators who are also conducting cold case reviews. The police forces are important to discuss as

they have their ‘corporate’ image to maintain, which can have an influence on the decisions made by investigators when they are recommending actions within their review. Nevertheless, of importance is the investigator’s personal experiences in both live and cold case homicides, their understanding of how the media works, and how they have used the media in cold cases, which is discussed below.

Method

Approach

The larger project that encompasses this study has been highlighted within the context section of this paper. What remains is a discussion of the qualitative stages of data collection and analysis that have been conducted to understand how the media can be used as an investigative resource. The first stage of qualitative research was observations, which were followed by individual semi-structured interviews. Observations were chosen as an appropriate method for this project as field notes can provide rich descriptions (Geertz, 1973) of the subject area, as well as the activities and processes of the participants (Cotton et al, 2010). Bernard (1994) emphasises that the method of observations allows for a degree of researcher objectivity, and by taking on a ‘non-participatory role’ the researcher can be simply an observer of events, rather than participating in the role of a cold case reviewer (Cotton et al, 2010).

The purpose of conducting non-participatory observations was to become fully immersed in the processes and activities of investigators as they conduct reviews of cold case homicides. The limited literature available meant that an understanding of the cold case processes and activities had to be obtained before interviews. The questions developed for the interview protocol were initially identified through an exploration of the previous academic enquiries into this area. The observations, however, allowed for refining and expansion of the questions once a more thorough understanding of the review process was established. For seven-months, the weekly team meetings of a two-force collaborative unit were observed. Each investigator is assigned to a case, where they will continue their review, or investigative actions, during the week and then discuss their progress at the weekly team meeting. At the meetings, the investigators would take it in turns to briefly summarise the progress that they have made on a case, what remains to be completed², and areas where actions have been identified. The format of the meetings allows the team to share and discuss their ideas on how a case could be progressed, which is oriented towards their previous experiences. For example, one case observed was the recovery of only a few skeletal remains, and so the team offered suggestions based on their experiences of similar cases, as to how the body may have been disposed of.

² The observed unit use a review template which lists the area of an investigation that are to be reviewed. This template is populated with similar headings to what is covered in the Murder Investigation Manual (ACPO, 2006).

Comprehensive notes were taken throughout the team meetings and were initially organised according to the cases discussed, as this was the organisation of the meetings. Areas of follow-up were highlighted during note taking and clarified during individual interviews or with the team leader at the end of the meeting, where necessary. After each meeting, the observation notes were transcribed, and the six stages of Thematic Analysis (TA) were followed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The six stages of TA are: (1) familiarity with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. The first stage was achieved through the transcribing of both observations and interviews. Once initial codes were identified, the emerging themes were highlighted and the data was assigned to the relevant themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The observations and interviews were analysed simultaneously, and so themes were searched for across both stages and then refined to triangulate the two stages of data collection (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). During interviews, participants made reference throughout to cold cases that they had worked on previously to help conceptualise their processes and activities. This was particularly helpful in assigning interview quotes, and observation notes, into emerging themes. Once the themes were identified, they were defined and named (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Both observations and interviews generate rich and detailed data, and during interviews participants were encouraged to discuss any issues or areas that they felt was pertinent to understanding cold cases and their investigations. If participants were not from the observed forces, they were asked to outline their day-to-day activities and approaches to cold case investigations. However, the organisation of team meetings and the assignment of cases to investigators which were identified during the observation period was an echoed approach across all participating forces and not just the observed unit. This was also beneficial in searching for and reviewing themes during phases three and four of TA (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The themes reviewed were the result of merged data from the observations and interviews, which resulted in several main- and sub-themes being identified across the larger project, and more specifically, for the media as an investigative resource. The limited literature required an inductive approach to TA, where the data could be explored and coded without trying to force the data into a pre-existing theory or framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Of importance were the complexities and realities of cold case investigations that are explored through the participant's experiences.

Participants and Participating Forces

In order to reach a wide range of forces and participants, the inclusion and exclusion criteria for this project was broad, with only two factors necessary for inclusion: (1) the force must have a dedicated unit, or investigator(s) assigned to cold cases, and (2) there should be no expectation that the

investigator(s), or members of the unit, are to work on live homicides. The suitability of forces was identified through an earlier stage of quantitative analysis in the larger project. This stage is not discussed further as it was a baseline study that has no influence on the results discussed in this study. To obtain a diverse and representative sample 20 forces were approached, which were a mixture of both rural and metropolitan forces. There were only four forces who responded to the request. The details of participants and units are supplied in Table 1.

Ethics

Before commencing observations and interviews, ethical approval was firstly granted at University level. Once obtained, this approval was sent to the participating forces, accompanied with information about anonymity and confidentiality of themselves, their force, and any example cases that may be discussed. In order to conduct the observations, a confidentiality agreement was stipulated by the force which outlined the researcher's commitment to the integrity of the force, victims, and any future investigations. Each member of the cold case team had to consent to participating in the observations in order for the data collection to commence. As forces requested anonymity, all participants and example cases are anonymised throughout and are referred to as participant number, which is highlighted in Table 1.

| Force | Pertinent Information about the Force | Participants Associated with Force | Demographics of Participants |
|--------------|---|--|--|
| Force A | A 5-force collaborative unit, with three rural and two metropolitan forces. Responsible for over 80 cold case homicides, and an unknown number of unsolved sexual assault cases. Cases are assessed on their likelihood of resolution through forensic evidence advances. | Participant 1 (P1) (Male) Participant 2 (P2) (Male) | Both participants are now retired after serving 30 years' service ³ with one of the forces in the collaboration. Experienced in investigating live homicides, including SIO responsibilities. |
| Force B | A large metropolitan force with nearly 200 cold case homicides. The prioritisation of cases within this force is depicted in Figure 1, and this is necessary as there are only three investigators assigned to the unit. | Participant 3 (P3) (Female) | The only warranted officer within this study. 30-years' experience as a police officer, with 6 of these years in the cold case review team. |
| Force C | One force that is part of a two-force collaboration (observed unit). This force experiences around 12-15 homicides a year. There are around 40 cold case homicides that are the responsibility of this unit. | Participant 4 (P4) (Male) | A retired officer who joined cold cases after 30-years' service. 15 years of his career was working on serious offences, including sex crimes and homicides. |
| | | Participant 5 (P5) (Male) | Retired from Force C but was commissioned to work on an external review of several sex worker murders before being asked to join the collaborative cold case team. |

³ In England and Wales, officers are required to complete 30 years of service to receive the full pension entitlement, under the Police Pension Scheme 1987. Despite being retired, these detectives can be granted powers by the chief constable of the forces to complete investigative activities such as arresting and interviewing suspects.

| | | | |
|---------|---|---|---|
| Force D | This is a rural force that is part of the collaboration with Force C. Although there are around 40 homicides within the collaboration, only 10 (approximately ⁴) are from this force. | Participants 6 to 12 (P6-12) are from this force. (5 males and 1 female) | All participants from this force are retired, after completing 30 years of service. Not all participants retired from Force D and were warranted officers with Force E (N = 3). Participants' expertise is within homicide teams, with one participant (P6) being an experienced family liaison officer. |
|---------|---|---|---|

⁴ The total number of cold-case homicides was not identified during data collection as they were compiling a list of all their cases. By the time data collection finished, the total was around 40 cases.

Findings

Before discussing the considerations of media engagement in cold case homicides, some of the key points from the larger project are discussed to provide context. Only Force B used a specific prioritisation matrix which is depicted in Figure 1. Their cases are prioritised on the method of killing, with consideration given to the victim's vulnerability (i.e. children, the elderly, or killings occurring in the victim's home). Force A only looked for forensic opportunities within the case. Forces C and D do not use a prioritisation matrix, and cases are reviewed should investigators receive new information.

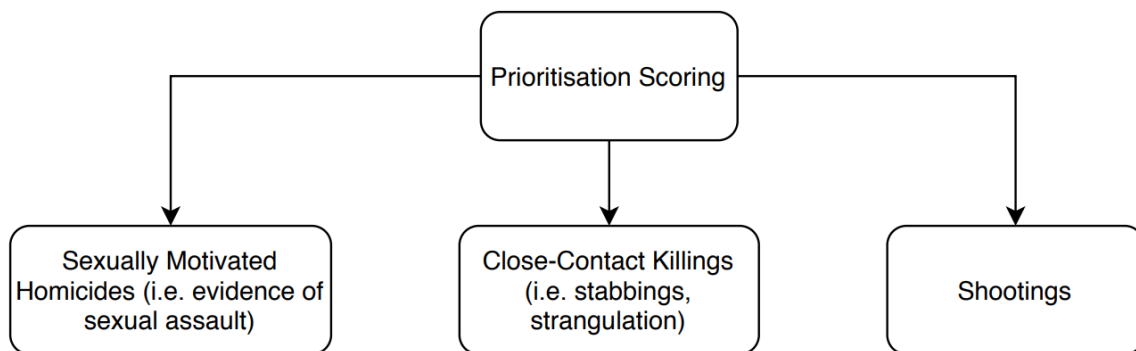


Figure 1. The prioritisation scoring system for Force B.

The forces' approach to cold cases is opportunistic and there was a reliance on both receiving and generating new information that could offer case progression, as well as looking at the areas of the original investigation that could be exploited further. Participants were adamant in all their interviews that their goal in conducting reviews is to not provide criticism of the original investigating team. Participants were aware of the differences in how previous major incidents were ran by SIOs many years ago in comparison to the present day. The participants discussed unwillingness on the SIO's behalf to consider alternative hypotheses in the investigation if they had already focused on a line of inquiry. During the cold case review, investigators may identify where the investigation became 'tunnel-visioned' and will record this, with the reminder that investigative processes were different at the time in which the cold case occurred.

Participants reported that they continuously work on cold case reviews, but the discovery of new information (i.e. witnesses, public information, a suspect being arrested for a serious offence) will increase the prioritisation of cases for review. For instance, a woman rang Force D to ask what progress had been made with a missing person case from the early 1990s: they were concerned that a relative of the victim's was not being appropriately punished for the disappearance. Investigators determined that the case had not been reviewed for a significant period as the case had not been assigned to any unit within the force. The case became the responsibility of the cold case unit, who

began a review to determine if and how the case could be progressed. Consequently, this case has now become ‘live’ and investigators in the live and cold case homicide teams are actively pursuing various lines of inquiry. A member of the public ringing to enquire about the case led to a review commencing, but for some cases they do not have any spontaneous information being forwarded to the investigators. Thus, a more proactive approach is required by investigators, which can be achieved by utilising the media. The decision to use the media was made on a case-by-case basis but was generally considered a useful strategy when investigators were faced with limited information, the passage of time, and fully exploited or unavailable forensic opportunities.

The investigators maintain varied opinions as to the media and their involvement in homicide investigations. The detectives recognise that the media can be their line into the community and so they accept that they must engage with them. However, this is not to say that the investigators are particularly positive to the media’s processes and organisations. Yet, they are mostly positive towards the use of the media in their cold case investigations if it is something that they can control and manage. It was noted during interviews and observations, that coverage could be initiated at any time in relation to a cold case, and this may be from the police force themselves, or the media. The following sections highlight the main and sub-themes that were identified during both observations and interviews in relation to the media’s involvement and coverage of cold case homicides. The thematic map for this study is presented in Figure 1, with three main themes, and six corresponding sub-themes.

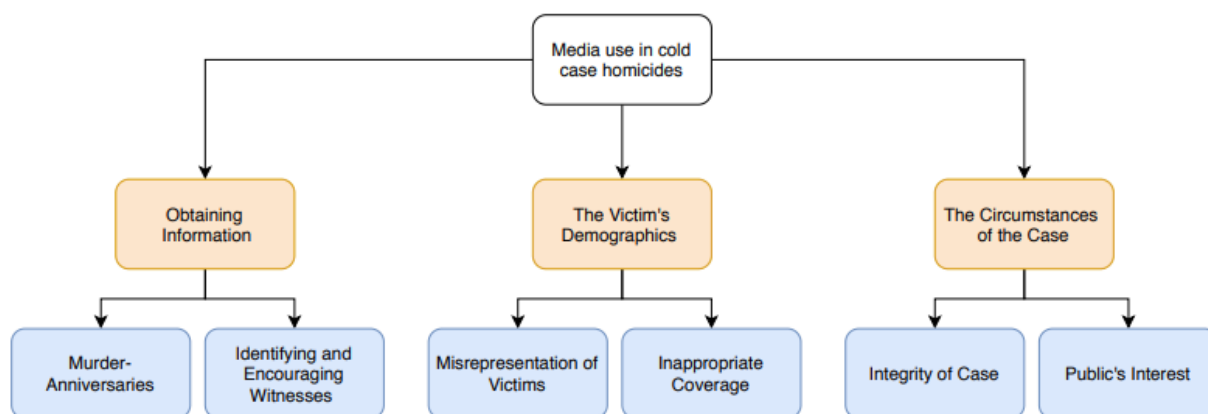


Figure 2: Thematic Map.

Obtaining Information

This theme represents one of the goals for investigators when they decide that they will engage with the media. Within this theme, the media could be portrayed either positively or negatively by the investigators, depending on how the information is portrayed to the public. The media can be used to

identify individuals who are in possession of information and never came forward, or it could be used to trace individuals in the case file who were not followed up thoroughly. Further, it can be used to encourage witnesses, or those with information, to let the investigators know if they have learnt any new information over the years. What follows are some considerations for the goal of obtaining coverage in a case.

“You’ve got to remember that people won’t tell us everything, the police, you know they [the public] sit on stuff and don’t want to tell us. They need that confidence to come forward and say: ‘well what are you going to do with it’? You know, so it could definitely be used to our advantage’ (P4, Force C)”

Through their experiences, participants are aware of the media’s likely interest in a case and how this could be beneficial. However, the participants from Force D spoke about the balance between the media and the corporate image. Until very recently, Force D’s senior management were reluctant to engage with the media, and so none of their cold cases have received a carefully managed, or effective, media coverage for a long time.

“Yeah, because they [the force] get slated all the time, and rightly so, some of the things that have gone on in [...], but bash, bash, bash. And so, they think ‘right, we’re not going to talk to the media’ but, I think that’s a negative because we could use [...] in the media to get someone information out of the community, I think, but they [the force] won’t do it (P4, Force C).”

Force A felt that the way the media coverage was framed would impact the amount of people who would come forward. Whilst investigating an offender thought to be responsible for several cold cases, Force A contacted the media to inform the public that they had a DNA sample and would like people to come forward to be exonerated.

“It was pretty obvious that the person was local to [...] by where the offence took place and whatever. So, we got some DNA, they got the full profile from one job, not hit anyone in the database, and they’d not really pushed out to the media, the local community. So, ‘look we’ve got DNA, we can eliminate people, you know, you ring us up we think it might be, or you’ve got any concerns.’ The result of that: they detected it within a week”. (P1, Force A).

It was noticed, however, that *“if someone didn’t phone in 20 years ago, you know, what would make them phone in now?”* (P1, Force A). This was particularly problematic in cases where significant periods of time have elapsed, and with no prior interest in the case. There is a possibility that even those with information may still not come forward following an appeal. Nevertheless, the police felt

that the media could be a possibility when other avenues have not been beneficial for the case's progression so far. P3 from Force B recognised that in certain areas, and particularly cases involving gang and/or drug related shootings, that people are not willing to come forward at the time of the initial incident, or they are not willing to cooperate. Therefore, the police do not receive information at the time of the original incident, which can directly impact the willingness of people to come forward in a media appeal once the case is classified as 'cold'.

“Very rarely does anyone want to talk [...] barriers, you know, about police and doesn't seem to be progressing and [...] loyalties and things” (P3, Force B).

Nevertheless, Force B are persistent in their strategy for their difficult-to-engage cases and will rely on the passage of time with the hope that this may encourage cooperation.

“People's alliances change over the years, and we do look for that and sort of media appeals...we kind of use the fact that over long periods of time someone, say for argument's sake, someone's girlfriend at the time of the shooting may have fallen out or moved out of the area, are more likely to help potentially” (P3, Force B).

Of importance is the ability to understand the media, determine what information is appropriate to disclose, and how it should be pitched to the public through the various media platforms, which in this study is local newspapers and social media sites. If this is not achieved, the following concern is highlighted:

“They [the media] won't focus your investigation and so they won't find your witnesses”. (P7, Force D).

Murder-anniversaries

One way in which forces may specifically look to obtain information is through trying to give a case coverage on their murder-anniversary. A murder-anniversary, in relation to cold cases, is media coverage on the victim's date of death, or another significant event in the victim's life, such as their 50th birthday. Further, some media outlets will run a story about the cold case once a certain amount of time has passed, for example, 10-years since the killing occurred. The aim of providing media coverage on the anniversary of a victim's homicide is two-fold: (1) it reminds the public that the case is still unsolved, and (2) it shows the police's dedication in trying to provide a resolution.

“The media is massively helpful for appeals and anniversaries and things like that, and it does draw in witnesses that are excellent, but you’ve got to accept that you will also have a massive response of information that you’ve still got to investigate that won’t take you anywhere. That’s the balance of the media” (P6, Force D).

Force B reported using a murder-anniversary as an opportunity to engage with the media, and P3 spoke of a regularly monitored spreadsheet that informs the unit when a significant event involving the victim is upcoming. At the start of each year, the spreadsheet is consulted to determine which cases would be appropriate for a media story to be released in the hope of obtaining further information. P3 also reported that she will check what information was released as part of previous media appeals, and what the strategy was during the original investigation. It is not always helpful for the cold case unit, however, to engage with the media during a murder-anniversary.

“The media can slow you down with cold cases, having a media appeal” (P1, Force A).

Yet, this sentiment does depend on whether local or national media outlets will engage with the unit in covering a story. A consideration for some participants, is that should the national media outlets cover a case, then there is anticipated to be more information received than what could be obtained in the local newspapers which impacts on resources. P3 recognised that the national media outlets would be the most beneficial where the case receives wide coverage, which may help target people who have since moved from the area. However, the local media outlets are the most receptive.

Force D have a missing person case which received both local and national media coverage at the time the individual disappeared, but it was not received any attention for a long time. P4 felt that a media appeal around the circumstances of the case, including an emphasis on the passage of time and how many birthdays have been missed by the individual would be beneficial for the case.

“If we did a press release around [...], I’m convinced that loads more people would come forward, but they [the force] won’t do it” (P5, Force C).

Importantly, all participants stipulated that the media is just on strategy that you could use:

“It’s one of many that you would use. You know, but it’s not necessarily the first but if it’s right, so this anniversary, you know, a big anniversary coming up on a job, then it’s absolutely right and proper, it’s a tactic that you’d use” (P1, Force A).

The following theme highlights that although the police believe that the media is an appropriate strategy for some cases, not all cases receive coverage on any of the media platforms.

The Victim's Demographics

This theme incorporates two sub-themes which are discussed simultaneously as they impact upon each other: sub-theme one is the misrepresentation of victims and, sub-theme two is inappropriate coverage. The focus of this theme is how victims can be given inappropriate coverage, and not how investigators or units are portrayed in the media. Throughout interviews, participants are aware that although the public may be interested in cold cases, it does not mean that all victims will receive equal coverage in the media. Some of the participants discussed the effects of inappropriate coverage on the victim's family, but this was discussed predominantly with P6 who is an experienced Family Liaison Officer (FLO). P6's view of the media is mostly negative, and the following quote demonstrates as to why:

"I understand that the media have a job to do, but it is different if you are spending long periods of time with families and seeing what they are going through, and seeing that the person that they have lost, who meant everything to them, is breaking their heart and they are struggling to survive...you are seeing them at the worst time of their lives." (P6, Force D).

When engaging in a media appeal in cold cases, P3 reported that "you'd potentially go down the, erm, family line and sort of pulling at people's heartstrings", but this is not necessarily applicable to all victims.

"They have the ability to pick and choose the stories that they [the public] will see, and I don't think that's necessarily fair to victims. Who says that one victim is more worthy than the other?" (P6, Force D).

Force C and D have a very high-profile case that's been reviewed numerous times by that team, as well as being subject to an external review before the unit was formed. The coverage of this case was frequently discussed during the observations as it had just passed its 10-year murder-anniversary. The unit themselves and senior management have been involved in the media coverage of this case. Contrastingly, the unit also has a case that does not receive media or public interest now it is a cold case.

“[...] difficulty in the community in getting information because they got a lot of publicity, but people saw [...] as a glue-sniffer [...] so they weren't bothered at all, whereas if it had been someone's child taken away and killed, you know, then there would be a lot more interest” (P4, Force D).

This refers to a 25-year old homicide involving a homeless individual, who the public saw, and continue to see as a 'glue-sniffer'. P4 reported that although family and friends of the victim have come forward with information, it was believed that there are a lot more people with knowledge of the crime. P4 accepted that media attention around this case would be hard to ignite, and was a recurring theme from the original investigation, 25-years ago.

“One of the SIOs is quoted in one of the press articles, you know he's appalled by the lack of response because the public's perception is that he is a glue-sniffer, you know”. (P4, Force C).

The media, and therefore the public, appear unable to move past the stereotype presented of the victim as being a 'glue-sniffer', which impacts on the coverage given and how the public perceives them. Yet, this was a similar trend for other victims also. P3 spoke about some journalists getting a “*bee in their bonnet*” about certain cases and suspects, and this subsequent representation may be problematic. In Force D, they had a missing person who was eventually located deceased. The case received coverage at the time that it was reported, and the local newspaper were particularly interested. However, the poor relationship between the force and the local newspaper led to little interaction between the two parties, but this did not stop coverage of the case. Specifically, the media associated the disappearance, and subsequent death of the victim, with a known offender in the community who is imprisoned for another offence. The force is aware of this angle taken by the media, and although there have been no indications (through the investigations and subsequent reviews) that this person was involved, the media continue with this angle. This gives the public an inaccurate representation of events and may hinder the police's progress in the investigation. Specifically, the participants felt that this was affecting the type of information that they are receiving as they are being misdirected by the media, and subsequently not covering other avenues of the case. Further, the participants felt that the media do not particularly care about the victim in this case but are simply taking the opportunity to display Force C in a negative light by implying that they are not acting on the public's concerns.

Although the police's investigation may be impacted, P6 spoke about how the victim's representation in the media can be upsetting for their family. P6 spoke of her experience on live homicides and the stance that they have taken to ensure that the victim is portrayed in a way that the victim's family are satisfied with.

“But, one of the things that we had to start doing, on that very first contact, was to say to them ‘have you got a photograph that you like’? Because, we knew that if we did not get that photograph that they wanted...I mean they probably didn’t even want a photograph going out in the media, but we used to have to tell them that there would be one, but it might not be the one that you want it to be...the media will go to someone on Facebook, that hardly knows...maybe had a drunken night out somewhere...and not the most flattering, but they will get it and use it, if it is the only that they can get. That is what they will use” (P6, Force D).

The photograph will continue to be covered in any further stories which can influence how receptive the public are towards the victim and their case. P3 mentioned that whenever her force is determining that a media appeal or murder-anniversary coverage might be appropriate for a case, they ask the journalist if the victim’s family can be contacted first for approval.

“We will...ask the media if they are interested, they allow us to contact the family first so that someone in their family doesn’t open the paper and see their child...So, quite often we will....always give the family the opportunity to be interviewed by a journalist themselves and quite often that does happen”. (P3, Force B).

It was recognised that the victim’s family do not have full control as to what is reported in the media, but it does allow them some control as to how their loved one may be portrayed. Further, the police’s involvement in the media coverage is important for the integrity of the case.

The Circumstances of the Case

The circumstances of the case refer to the manner in which someone died, and specifically the method of killing such as blunt force trauma, shootings, or strangulation. It was observed and discussed in interviews, that the way someone was killed can impact on the amount of coverage a case receives, and how the case is then portrayed. This is similar to the victim’s demographics, in that not all of the manner of killings will receive coverage, and how it is covered can be impact how beneficial the coverage is for the police. There is reference to the release of information and how this may impact on the integrity of the case, and the public’s interest.

Integrity of the Case

All participants mentioned that the media is just one strategy that might be used in a cold case review that can be advantageous. The biggest concern for all participants was that it can be difficult to control the coverage given to the case and how the information may be portrayed.

My...not every SIO works like that, but and there are some situations where you can't possibly give the information out because it would put somebody at risk, or it will put the investigation at risk. You just can't put information out there sometimes, but that realistically is where I'd want to be with the media each time. Get them and work with them to try and influence what goes out there to the broader public to manage risk, reassure, and give them the information that is needed.” (P7, Force D).

One of the concerns discussed by several participants was how quickly the public can obtain information through the media.

“I've had families who have found out that loved ones have died through the media and social networking, and that is the worst thing in the world.” (P6, Force D).

However, working with the media and developing trusting and professional relationships was seen as important in covering cold cases so that there is a reciprocal relationship between the two organisations.

“You can't tell them a lot or give them everything, but what you can do is give them something, try to enhance and influence them, as they are going to print anyway: if you don't tell them, someone else will” (P7, Force D).

“If we get one coming up like this one has, then they are going to be interested so what we've done here is that we have invited them, and they have assisted us. But what you do then is, at your peril, is just cut that chain – we haven't done this with this [...] by the way – but then once you've got what you want from a witness appeal or whatever and then say to them 'right, we're done'. That will work against you. Because I guarantee you there will be more information, in this job or another, where you will want the media again and they won't want to know. They will just print what they want to print” (P7, Force D).

The following quote is linked to the above point, where some participants expressed concern that some of the media outlets would approach the victim's family and friends, or the suspect, themselves which can jeopardise the investigation. During observations, this scenario occurred with one of the cases currently under review that was progressing to the live team for them to continue the case as a live homicide, including the arresting and interviewing of suspects. The media platforms, however, approached several sources to gather more information and more details are released than what the force would like. Therefore, the participants felt that they should withhold certain information to help focus their enquiries, but this does not mean that the media respects this.

“If they’re wanting to know the cause of death then I don’t think we should be too specific around that because it can be operationally, erm, it can affect it really. You don’t want to put too much out in the press. Like I know, died of head injuries, rather than how the head injuries were caused” (P4, Force C).

Whilst conducting observations, a decade old unidentified body was being reviewed, and Force D had worked extensively with the media themselves (rather than through corporate communication/media teams) to help progress the case. P6 to 12 spoke about how the media had been an imperative tool in being able to identify the victim (the first media strategy), and then continuing to both update the local community and receive information from them about the victim through social media. However, the concern, specifically identified with Force A, was that if a media appeal is done on a case, they may not have the capacity to deal with it.

“If it was a high-profile case from a few years ago, we can’t manage, you know, any sort of media release. You know, cos you could end up with people ringing... 100 people ringing in, you know, we can’t manage that. That is a force decision, you know.” (P2, Force A).

This can have a significant impact on the investigator’s ability to control the coverage and the progress of the case. Further, P6 mentioned both positives and negatives of the media, despite holding a negative opinion herself, but also how quickly the media can move on. This is not the case, however, for the victim’s family. For some victims their story remains in the spotlight for a significant period, but this is not the case for the majority.

“I understand the need for the media and understand that people want to hear the story. But once they’ve read the story it is over and done with. It’s just yesterday’s news story. But, it’s not for the family” (P6, Force D).

Public Interest

Participants recognised that the media’s decision to take on a story is based solely on the public’s interest. Importantly, nine participants felt that the public were interested in cold cases which can be of benefit for their cases. When asked if he felt that the local community were interested in cold cases, P4 stated:

“They [their cold cases] seem to get some comments on the article you know [name of journalist] who does the write-ups for [...], they always seem to get some sort of comments on them. So, yeah, I’d

say that they are, and I think that we could use the media more to our advantage definitely” (P4, Force C).

“This kind of work in the country, a lot of people are interested in. A lot of people are interested in cold- cases” (P7, Force D).

However, participants were quite negative about the media’s methods of reporting in order to draw in readers to their newspaper, and subsequently the story.

“They want to sell papers don’t they...they want to look at what spin they can put on things” (P4, Force C).

“[The] media are notorious for making things up if they can – why let the truth get in the way of a good story” (P5, Force D).

“I’m always minded, that they are going to want to publish stuff that is interesting. That people are going to want to watch or read or whatever. There is no point, I mean a lot of this stuff is mundane, but what the media want are stories that will light people up and make the public watch them, or read their newspapers, over the others” (P7, Force D).

P5 spoke about the manner in which the media report on the force’s cold case homicides and felt that they put very little effort into the stories and simply rehash what they have published before: *“It’s like Queen doing a compilation album, bunch of lazy b*****s” (P5, Force C).* Further, some participants felt that the reproduction of stories that have been previously published is not necessarily helpful for focusing the narrative on obtaining information.

In order to satisfy the demand of the public, P6 reported that the media will make comments such as *‘the distraught families of’* in their coverage of the case, but will not detail all their methods of obtaining information:

“But they won’t add that they’ve been knocking on the door and trying to get in and sat on the doorstep and following them down the road and stuff” (P6, Force D).

The following quote demonstrates the possible advantages of the media, but the associated consequences also.

“The media is massively helpful for appeals and information and things like that, and it does draw in witnesses that are excellent, but you’ve got to accept that you will also have a massive response of information that you’ve still got to investigate that won’t take you anywhere” (P6, Force D).

Discussion

This paper explored how the media can be used by police forces for their cold case investigations. The themes identified in the study were from observations of the cold case review processes, and semi-structured interviews with experienced investigators. The prioritisation of cases is important as this project found that austerity measures across England and Wales are affecting the amount of time and resources devoted to live cases. In particular, the number of investigators assigned to the unit and the number of cold cases, meant that forces were often unable to undertake the two-yearly reviews that are recommended in the ACPO (2012) policy. Therefore, in some forces, the investigators have to be mindful as to which cases show the greatest potential for a resolution which justifies their involvement in the case. The themes represent the goals for investigators when using the media (obtaining information), with consideration to how the victim’s demographics and circumstances of the case can affect the coverage. The larger project identified that cold cases are opportunistic and are reliant on forensic evidence advances or the procurement of new information. Although the media may not be the first choice, there is recognition that this may be a valuable opportunity to obtain further information that may progress the case. Yet, this approach is not without its drawbacks.

Schildkraut and Donley (2012) refer to the journalist’s motto of ‘if it bleeds, it leads’ to explain the prominent interest in live homicides. However, one of the key issues that arose during observations and interviews is that not all cases receive coverage in the media. Further, this coverage is often limited to local newspapers, whereas national media platforms may be the most beneficial in reaching a wide audience. Nevertheless, investigators were often satisfied with receiving some coverage for their cases than none. Christie (1986) and Innes (2003) note that only certain homicide victims receive prominent and prolonged coverage in the media. This is applicable to cold cases also: some cases observed continued to receive media coverage, on both local and national platforms, irrespective of the passage of time, whereas others are quickly forgotten.

The media focus on the issues that are likely to draw in the public, which are the homicides occurring now that may pose a concern or risk to the general public. Given the passage of time, the risk(s) associated with a cold case homicide may not appear, to the public or media, as a significant concern and so does not warrant the media attention more than a current, or live, case. As a result, one of the problems that investigators face is getting the various media platforms willing to cover the case, whilst maintaining its integrity.

Wellman (2018) interviewed a victim's family of a cold case homicide and found that they did not always receive positive coverage in the media but were keen to engage with journalists if it helped their case. Participants in this study emphasised that all of their media engagements for a case are in consultation with the victim's family first to ensure that they were happy to proceed. However, participants, and particularly P6, were critical of the media's coverage of a case and the sympathy that they afford victims. There was mention as to whether some victims are more deserving of coverage than others. This can be problematic as a lot of cases rely on media coverage to obtain information from the public. Whereas there may be more suitable times to engage with the media, such as murder-anniversaries, coverage can occur or be initiated at any time. Some cases, however, may not be covered if the force is withholding information that the media platform wants in order to cover the case. Participants are not willing to jeopardise the integrity of the case just to satisfy the media and public's interest. Force C spoke about a positive relationship that they have with both local and national television news and newspapers that worked to their advantage in covering an unidentified body. However, the need for a more trusting and professional relationship with the media was cited as a beneficial for both the victim's case, and the corporate image, by all participants.

It was not only the corporate image that was a concern for participants. The manner in which victims may be covered in the media can be negative for two reasons: firstly, the negative framing of a story does not incite people to come forward with information and, secondly, the victim's family can be negatively impacted by the coverage. Further, the media's intense involvement with a case was reported as concern by P3 and P6. It was identified that some journalists become fixated on only one aspect of the story, which may not be of relevance for the force, and this skews the information that the force may receive. For example, two cases were negatively affected in Force's C and D, by the information reported in the story, and the media either focusing on an irrelevant suspect or speaking to the suspect themselves. In the former scenario, a suspect was eliminated in both the original investigation and again in the cold case review, yet the local and national media persist on associating him to the crime, and making it appear to readers that the police are not taking the individual seriously as a suspect. Further, the victim's family begin questioning the investigators as to the named suspect, and what they have done to prove or disprove their involvement in the killing of their loved one. But this always links back to the integrity of the case being upheld.

Conclusion

The academic and practitioner interest in cold cases is beginning to build momentum, with more academic outputs being published, albeit with a focus on forensic evidence advances and applications. Although a successful approach for some cases, other investigative strategies should not be overlooked in favour of forensic evidence. The growth in 24-hour media platforms offers both a challenge (*c.f.* Mawby, 1999) and opportunity for police forces (*c.f.* Crump, 2011), particularly in

relation to cold cases. There is the possibility of reinvigorating some cold cases and bringing in new witnesses, or those who have learnt information over the years. However, the experienced detectives who are likely to manage these cases may have their reservations over the media that could prevent an appeal, or media engagement, being proposed as an investigative strategy.

The experience of the participants in this study is a strength as they are appreciative of the investigative processes of both live and cold case homicides, yet this may also be a limitation. These investigators have worked a number of homicides, often in a high-ranking position (i.e. SIO or Detective Chief Inspector [DCI]), and so they understand how cases should be managed, both with and without the media. Some detectives may be unwilling to engage with the media due to past experiences, which can skew the understanding this study presents as to the reluctance to engage with the media: participants may be reporting on negative experiences of live homicides previously, and so ignoring possible benefits for cold cases now. This study presents a small sample size with focus on only a few participant experiences and observations of only a few cases. It was difficult to access the email or telephone numbers for the investigators or units for cold cases, and instead communication was through live chats on the force website or their generic public contact email. This, coupled with the sensitive nature of cold cases, led to only a small number of forces responding to the request. It will be noted in the findings section, that several participants provide quotations for the relevant themes, whereas some participants are not discussed at all. Five participants provided information for the earlier stage of the project, as they focused entirely on the processes of cold case reviews, with no reference to the media as an investigative resource. Thus, the experiences of all participants are quite limited, and there may be opposing or supporting views from these participants if they had provided information in their interviews as to the media. It may be that participants from other forces have different experiences, and this may also be influenced by the different cases that forces are responsible for. The observations and interviews only made reference to seven cold cases, and so discussions surrounding more cases may have altered the themes identified. Therefore, it is only possible to conclude in this study that the media is to be used on a case-by-case basis, and the above findings can help in the decision-making process for investigators.

It is acknowledged that literature exists into the investigations of homicide (*c.f.* Brookman, 2005; Innes, 2003), the use of the media in live cases (*c.f.* Brookes et al, 2015; Fahmy, 2005; Innes, 1999, 2003; Schildkraut & Donley, 2012), and how the media report on homicides (*c.f.* Huey & Broll, 2012; Lundman, 2003; Peelo et al, 2004). However, the inherent challenges of cold cases necessitates the need for a dedicated research base that understands and identifies the problems investigators have to manage when conducting reviews and managing the media (*c.f.* Allsop, 2018 for consideration to challenges in English and Welsh forces). Although participants expressed some frustration with the media's interest and engagement with their cold cases, they appreciate that their goal is to make a

profit (*c.f.* Innes, 1999). Thus, it would be beneficial to explore the media's desire or reluctance to cover cold cases, and what factors would predispose a case for coverage. This has been explored in live homicides, but not cases that have been out of the public's interest for a long time.

A lot of academic research, predominantly from the US, has considered how the victim's demographics and the circumstance of the case can determine whether the case will receive coverage or not in the media (*c.f.* Peelo et al, 2004). From observations and interviews it was clear that some cases receive attention once they have gone 'cold', but others receive nothing. It would be helpful to understand whether the cases receive coverage once cold because they were previously a 'case célèbre' (Innes, 2003), or if the interest increased because the case went cold, and with the subsequent passage of time. Finally, participants spoke about the integrity of the case and building a trusting and professional relationship with media outlets when using them for live and cold cases. Thus, it would be helpful to understand what 'ground-rules' are important for both agencies, and how these could be mediated to be of benefit for both. For example, at what point would the media consider obtaining their own sources for their coverage on a homicide, and could the police benefit by mandating the exclusion of certain sources, such as the suspect or an eyewitness? The management of media communications in forces is complex, as is the media-police relationship, which is not possible to address in just one study. Therefore, this study introduces some considerations that other police forces can contemplate when deciding if the media may be a beneficial tool for progressing their cold cases.

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