THE PREVALENCE OF SUSPICIOUS MISSING PERSON CASES CLASSIFIED AS UNSOLVED MURDERS

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THE INVESTIGATIVE LIFE CYCLE OF THESE CASES

Missing Person Case

387,930 in 2016/17 (1)

Suspicious Missing Person Case

11.4% classified as high risk (32,081 in 2016/17 (1))

Suspected Murder Investigation

0.11 – 0.49% (2)

Unsolved Murder

Estimated to be 1593 (3)
INVESTIGATING A SUSPICIOUS MISPER CASE

Suspicious Missing Persons
“Substantial grounds for believing that the suspect is in danger…may have been the victim of serious crime…” (4)

Twin-Track Investigation Commences (4)

PoLSA

SIO

The First 48-Hours (5)
“IF IN DOUBT, THINK MURDER”

NPIA (2010:70)
BUT, WHAT HAPPENS WHEN MURDER IS SUSPECTED?

0.11% to 0.49% of MISPERS end in murder (2)

7 & 28-day and organisational reviews (6)

2-year boundary (6/7)

Unsolved Murders
- A murder that was thoroughly investigated, but due to the passage of time and all lines of inquiry being exhausted, the case cannot be progressed further (7)
THE COMPLICATION...

No-Body Murders (8)

83% clearance rate for murder in England and Wales (9)

But, murders are often solved due to evidence (10)

No body = no resolution?

The Body

Witnesses

Evidence of murder
NO BODY MURDERS — ISSUES TO CONSIDER FOR THESE CASES

1. Has murder definitively occurred?

2. Has the body been well-hidden?

3. Where is the disposal site?

Konopka et al. (2006) = Polish examination of 23 solved cases. 3 victims were incinerated, 5 were burned and 15 were dismembered

Nethery (2004) = 38% - forested area, 14% - side-road or path, 12% - water, 10% - farmland (41 cases studied)

Hakkanen et al (2007) = 51% - tied up, put into a bag, rolled in a carpet, 13% - covered with plants, sticks or was buried, 20% - attempt to burn body. 46 murders studied
METHODOLOGY

Freedom of Information requests
- 43 English and Welsh police forces and Police Scotland

Secondary Research

Qualitative Research with English and Welsh forces

Demographic Information
- Consideration to the unsolved murder population and the murders that occurred in 2018.
RESULTS

2594 unsolved murders across England, Wales and Scotland

- Demographic information obtained for 1160 cases

44 cases identified as suspicious missing person cases (1.70%)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Force</th>
<th>Number of Suspicious MISPERS</th>
<th>Number of Unsolved Murders</th>
<th>Number of Missing Murdered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Avon &amp; Somerset</td>
<td>1 (3.12%)</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambridgeshire</td>
<td>9 (56.25%)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheshire</td>
<td>2 (10.52%)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devon &amp; Cornwall</td>
<td>1 (10%)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Durham</td>
<td>1 (25%)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater Manchester Police</td>
<td>2 (1.01%)</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hertfordshire</td>
<td>1 (5.55%)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kent</td>
<td>2 (3.70%)</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lancashire</td>
<td>1 (7.14%)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lincolnshire</td>
<td>1 (7.14%)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merseyside</td>
<td>3 (1.84%)</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norfolk</td>
<td>3 (11.54%)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Yorkshire</td>
<td>1 (20%)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northamptonshire</td>
<td>2 (8.33%)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northumbria</td>
<td>2 (7.41%)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nottinghamshire</td>
<td>1 (6.25%)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suffolk</td>
<td>3 (18.75%)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surrey</td>
<td>2 (4.17%)</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sussex</td>
<td>1 (4.17%)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>441</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Midlands</td>
<td>1 (1.06%)</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiltshire</td>
<td>2 (50%)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Wales</td>
<td>1 (14.2%)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
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</table>
RESULTS - GENDER

Unsolved Murders Population
Males account for much higher rates of victims (N = 688) compared to women (N = 384)

Murder Population (2018)
Males = 499 victims
Females = 227 victims

Gender of MISPERS Thought to be Unsolved Murder Victims

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RESULTS - AGE

Unsolved Murders Population
victims aged 25 to 35 were more likely to be the victims of an unsolved murder

Murder Population (2018)
16 to 24 year olds = 152 victims
25 to 34 year olds = 140 victims
RESULTS — SUSPECTED MOTIVE

Unsolved Murder Population
Robbery (N = 121), sexual assault (N = 67) and a domestic altercation (N = 41) were the highest recorded reason for the murder occurring.

Murder Population (2018)
Most common reason for the murder occurring was an argument or loss of temper (N = 373). Robbery followed with 47 occurrences.
CHALLENGES IN INVESTIGATING & RESEARCHING THESE CASES

1. A low rate of occurrence.
2. No evidence of murder.
3. A lack of evidence.
4. Accountability.
5. A lack of policy for investigating and managing these cases.
HOW COULD THESE CASES BE RESOLVED?

36 unsolved murders (1.39%) that started as a suspicious MISPER case

- 3 victims were dismembered
- In 12 cases the victim’s body was concealed
- In 9 cases the victim was thought to have been murdered in a different location to the recovery site
- In 3 cases the victim’s body had been wrapped up
- The victim’s body was buried in 8 cases
SUMMARY

1. Some missing person cases do result in murder (albeit a small number), and some of these can go on to be classified as an unsolved murder.

2. There is a lack of academic research into this area from a UK perspective.

3. There appears to be a lack of policy for these cases specifically, but the challenges are apparent when considering no-body murders.

4. But, the take home message, the reason why we need this research?
THERE’S NO JUSTICE FOR THESE VICTIMS.
REFERENCES


REFERENCES


(11) Konopka, T., Strona, M., Bolechala, F., & Kunz, J. (2007). Corpse dismemberment in the material collected by the department of forensic medicine, Cracow, Poland. *Legal Medicine, 9(1)*


