

## Course Learning Outcomes for Unit VI

Upon completion of this unit, students should be able to:

4. Explain crimes against persons.
  - 4.1 Describe the differences between the crimes of homicide, robbery, and sexual assault.
5. Analyze the differences in investigatory procedures utilized in crimes against people.
  - 5.1 Differentiate between the various methods law enforcement can use to investigate a homicide, robbery, and sexual assault.

Course/Unit Learning Outcomes	Learning Activity
4.1	Unit Lesson Chapter 10, pp. 271–308 Chapter 11, pp. 311–341 Chapter 12, pp. 345–367 Unit VI Essay
5.1	Unit Lesson Chapter 10, pp. 271–308 Chapter 11, pp. 311–341 Chapter 12, pp. 345–367 Unit VI Essay

## Required Unit Resources

**Chapter 10:** Death Investigation, pp. 271–308

**Chapter 11:** The Investigation of Sex Crimes, Assault, Child Abuse, and Related Offenses, pp. 311–341

**Chapter 12:** The Investigation of Robbery, pp. 345–367

## Unit Lesson

### Death Investigations

In a death investigation, a detective must determine the victim's manner of death. The *manner of death* is classified as either (1) death by natural causes, (2) death by accident, (3) death by suicide, or (4) death by homicide (Brandl, 2019). The manner of death is determined after the investigator has determined the cause of death. The *cause of death* is based on the nature of the victim's injuries, characteristics of the deceased, and the circumstances associated with the death. A death investigation usually begins where the body is found that can sometimes also be the crime scene.

According to Brandl (2019), there are three basic questions that need to be answered in death investigations:

### Who is the decedent?

- This information can be found by asking witnesses, friends, and/or relatives who may be present at the crime scene. Other means of determining the identity of the victim are through an examination of DNA and fingerprints, anthropological facial reconstruction, or examination of the individual's possessions.

### What is the cause of death?

- This can vary widely at crime scenes. Brandl (2019) states that causes leading to death can include gunshot wounds, cutting wounds, blunt force injuries, asphyxia, poisoning, drug overdoses, and death by fire.

### Who committed the murder?

- The incident's circumstances and characteristics of the victim are critical in determining the perpetrator of the murder. For example, if the homicide was committed in a private place like an apartment, then chances are high that the victim and the offender knew each other. Also, physical evidence on the victim's body or at the crime scene may lead to the killer's identification. Investigators should consider everything as evidence and expect to find physical evidence at homicide crime scenes. It is at homicide scenes where physical evidence is the most critical. Determining a motive is also important when determining who committed the murder. Motive can be found when analyzing diaries, letters, e-mails, telephone records, and appointment books. In addition interviewing friends and relatives of the victim can help the motive be discovered.

## More About Causes of Death

As discussed above, one of the most important questions that must be answered during a death investigation is the cause of the victim's death.

- *Gunshot wounds* are a result of firearm use. Shell casings used, the presence of entrance and exit wounds, the distance of the gun from the body, the amount of trauma sustained by the victim, the location of the trauma, and gunshot residue are all important features of firearm deaths that need to be evaluated.
- *Cutting wounds* involve the slicing of tissue with smooth edges. Stab and puncture wounds will present holes in the tissue. Trauma of this sort often involves excessive bleeding and extreme damage to internal organs.
- *Blunt force injuries* are characterized by irregular or rough-edged lacerations, bruising, and possibly broken bones in the contact area. Hammers, pipes, crowbars, and clubs often cause them, and they are evidenced by hemorrhaging of the upper eyelids.
- *Asphyxia* occurs when a person is unable to breathe due to an action or material. It can occur in the form of manual strangulation (with hands), ligature strangulation (such as a rope or purse), hanging, suffocation (smothering), or drowning. Such a death is evidenced by *petechial hemorrhaging*, which occurs when capillaries leak into the skin and leave a red mark.
- *Poisoning* most often occurs accidentally or as the result of a suicide. Indicators of poison consumption depend on the poison ingested.
- *Drug overdose* deaths are often about determining who supplied the drugs to the victim because that is a serious crime in and of itself. Drugs can be introduced to the body in many ways: intravenous, intramuscular, oral, cutaneous, rectal/vaginal, inhalation, subcutaneous, and sublingual.
- *Death via fire* is often confusing for investigators due to how little is known about it and the reliance on medical personnel to find answers. Most often, fire deaths are a result of smoke inhalation, and the burning of the body happens after the person is already dead (Brandl, 2019).

## Estimating Time of Death

Estimating the time of death is essential to the identification of a suspect because it can be used to determine if a suspect would have had time to commit the crime based on his or her alibi. Estimating time of death can be done through witnesses or through conditions of the body. The *postmortem interval (PMI)* guesses the time of death through the changes a body goes through after death, including the following:

- *algor mortis*, which refers to the cooling process a body goes through after it is dead;
- *livor mortis*, which refers to the blood settling within the body after death and the discoloring of the skin; and
- *rigor mortis*, which is the rigidity of the muscles of a body after death (Brandl, 2019).

Potassium levels in the vitreous humor (the tissue which fills the eye between the lens and the retina) can be indicative of the time of death (Brandl, 2019). If a victim's last meal is known, the contents of the victim's stomach or gastrointestinal tract can be useful in estimating time of death. The degree of decomposition can also determine the time of death (Brandl, 2019). Depending upon the environment, insect and animal activity are also relevant. An insect's presence, stage of development, and contents of its gut provide a temporal dimension to the death of an individual. The type of insect can also give critical information.

## Rape and Sexual Assault

According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI, n.d.) Uniform Crime Report (UCR), *rape* is now defined as the "penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with a body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim" (para. 4). This is classified as a new definition of rape because it now includes male victims in addition to female victims, and it includes actions other than sexual intercourse (Brandl, 2019). Sexual assault is one of the most traumatic types of criminal victimization. As such, investigators must be careful in their approach to rape victims for victims may be either expressive or guarded but are always vulnerable.

Emotionally, sexual assault victims can experience trauma for the rest of their lives. The emotional reaction of victims during investigative interviews can range from shock and disbelief to hysterical crying. Physically, victims of sexual assaults are likely to be sore for a long period of time after the attack. Both emotional and physical trauma can last from only a few weeks to the rest of the victim's life. The degree of the crime differs depending on the use of a weapon, the age of the victim, the level of violence during the crime, the number of offenders taking part in the crime, and others. The only crime committed less often than rape is murder (Brandl, 2019).

## Robbery

*Robbery* refers to the taking of objects of value from the control of another person by threat or force and without permission (Brandl, 2019). Robbery is the second most common violent crime and often occurs in urban neighborhoods. Robbery can occur as one of four types: street robberies, commercial robberies, vehicle-related robberies, and home invasion robberies. Robbery offenders and victims are often young males and very rarely do the victims and offenders know one another (Brandl, 2019). Robberies are often committed with a weapon, or strong-arm tactics sometimes referred to as a mugging. Robberies often have low clearance rates because the victim and the offender are often strangers and little physical evidence is left behind.

## Robbery Apprehension

More has been written about robbery prevention strategies than on robbery apprehension strategies due to the lack of evidence available at crime scenes. Hold-up alarms, eyewitnesses, modus operandi evidence, and physical evidence recovered from the scene can lead to the identification of perpetrators.

## Holdup Alarms

*Holdup alarms* have more to do with apprehension than prevention (Brandl, 2019). The value of alarms lies in their ability to stir a quick police response. The faster the police response time, the more likely the perpetrator will be apprehended. Police procedures require that the police be attentive when called to robbery scenes, as they are likely to be dangerous. Investigators should assume that the perpetrator is armed and that there is more than one. Nothing should be done to create anxiety in the perpetrator.

## Eyewitnesses

*Eyewitness identifications* are often the best evidence available in robberies. Composite pictures of the perpetrator(s) and/or the getaway car should be advertised so that the police can obtain information through tip lines (Brandl, 2019). In some cases, composite pictures and a description of the getaway car could be published on social media. Closed circuit television (CCTV) security surveillance camera videos can be essential to the identification of a perpetrator (Brandl, 2019). However, this technology still has limitations: (1) Many robbers are aware of the cameras and conceal their identities or render the camera useless in some way, and (2) many security camera video images are of poor quality and can be useless in investigations.

## Modus Operandi

An offender's *modus operandi* can be substantiated through victim and witness information. This information can link robberies to one offender, clear crimes, or provide further clues to the characteristics of the offender (Brandl, 2019). Targets that are unguarded and in a robber's familiar geographic zone where escape routes are known and clear to the offender are the most attractive targets. Because robbers rob places they are comfortable with, they often are former employees of the places that they rob. Robbers that have planned the crime in advance are typically older and serial offenders (Brandl, 2019).

## Physical Evidence

Leads in a robbery investigation may be developed through physical evidence recovered from the scene (Brandl, 2019). One type of evidence that is sometimes found in bank robbery investigations is a dye pack. Unfortunately, robbery scenes typically do not have a lot of physical evidence available. Another source of information may come from the property taken. Robberies are all about money. This stolen money is often spent immediately and never recovered by the police. A common piece of property taken in a robbery is a cell phone. A cell phone may be taken to prevent the victim from calling the police as well as for the monetary value it possesses.

## References

Brandl, S. G. (2019). *Criminal investigation* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Federal Bureau of Investigation. (n.d.). UCR offense definitions. Retrieved from <https://www.ucrdatatool.gov/offenses.cfm>