Understanding of forensic intelligence within policing forensics

Research into criminalistic forensic intelligence.

Key details

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Police region	London
Collaboration and partnership	Thames Valley Police
Level of research	PhD
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Research context

This research will be based on the subject area of forensic intelligence, specifically that of criminalistic forensic intelligence. This area has not been comprehensively studied and is therefore not convincingly explained in the literature available on policing and military intelligence. This research is designed to address these challenges and facilitate the initial conversations in academia.

The use of forensic evidence may not always be primarily concerned with proving guilt or innocence. The collection and use of forensic intelligence – both overt and covert – can help to fulfil the roles stated above. It can also provide the valuable information required to assist in an

investigation, plan tactics for future forensic operations, and even disrupt criminals before they commit crime.

'Yet while the concept of forensic intelligence has caught the attention of a number of policing agencies around the world, it has yet to become a mainstream undertaking. In part this is an artefact of a pragmatic policing culture that only institutes new practices based on demonstrable, research and practice-based effectiveness.' (2012).

While criminalistics forensic intelligence could be used to identify suspects, it may be that the intelligence itself would not be admissible in a court due to its method of collection or that it would not be disclosed as it would divulge the techniques or sources used.

The author will argue that criminalistics forensic intelligence should be used in these cases as a means to assist in identifying possible suspects, materials, locations and techniques used by terrorists. It can therefore positively support investigators and allow informed and directed investigations to be carried out using specific criteria.

This research intends to examine the following hypotheses.

1. Intelligence products are not readily available to individual forensic departments.
2. Forensic resources do not have the relevant intelligence available to them when attending scenes.
3. The tasking of forensic resources is not driven by intelligence but by force strategy and policy.
4. Forensic resources are not appropriately trained in intelligence products.
5. Forensic intelligence is not appropriately integrated into crime intelligence processes.
6. Forensic resources do not fully understand the requirements of forensic intelligence.

Research methodology

The collection of research data by conventional methods such as postal and telephone questioning can not only be time consuming and expensive. In these days of COVID-19 and lockdowns, even face-to-face interviews are unfeasible. This research will therefore be based on the collection of data through a carefully designed, online-based survey platform.

This method offers a cost effective, COVID-19-safe, alternative, which can collect large amounts of anonymous data in a timely manner. The questions can be formatted to include responses that

require either short answers, multiple choice and true false answers.

The survey has been produced to be user friendly, avoiding multiple responses and allow for secure well-defined data management criteria. A user-friendly design is essential to make responding as easy as possible to get the highest possible return. The survey will require a minimum amount of computer skills and is simple to navigate. Moreover, as online surveys are generally self-administered, answering instructions must be extremely clear.

The sensitive questions, and those about personal data will be placed at the end of the questionnaire, and there is always an option for responders not to answer, but continue the questionnaire, should they desire not to answer certain questions.

Crime scene investigation is a process that can be roughly divided into four high-level processes, which often require numerous inputs, decisions and outputs. This electronic and self-administrated questionnaire has been designed in order to test these hypotheses. The questionnaire will be sent to staff employed within the forensic department.

This questionnaire was structured around the four processes to collect information.

1. Distribution of intelligence products to forensic resources – historic intelligence is made available to forensic resources to enable targeted tasking, directed forensic examinations, linking of crime series, identification of offenders.
2. Scene attendance – tasking and the identification of scenes where there is a realistic opportunity to harvest forensic evidence and/or intelligence.
3. Harvesting of trace evidence and forensic intelligence – the identification and harvesting of forensic evidence and intelligence gathering, that is, modus operandi (offender methods of procedure) and victim/witness observations.
4. Forensic examination outcomes – the exploitation of forensic evidence recovered from the scene and other sources, which is fed back to forensic resources to inform the proposed intelligence process.

Biographical data such as gender, age, education and professional experience has been incorporated to establish if there are any trends that can be attributed to this data set.

The questionnaire is composed of questions and subsets. Except for five of the questions, which are short answers, all questions are structured following a closed multiple response format. A

personalised link will be generated for the participants to access the online questionnaire, this will be distributed by email.

The email will only be used to share the survey link to ensure participants' details are protected, and measures put in place to avoid multiple responses from single participants.

The survey design and online tool will allocate a exclusive number to the participant which will minimise the chance of multiple enrolments and allow for anonymity of the respondent.

Sampling and participant recruitment

A police force will be asked if their forensic department staff can be approached to participate in the completion of the questionnaire. It is expected the participants will be staff members of the forensic department and will include a selection of the roles within the department and number more than one hundred possible participants.

The target sample size is 30 and these could include:

- managers
- supervisors
- operational staff
- administrative staff

The participants will be sent the same questionnaire and asked to complete them on an anonymous and voluntary basis.