

Applying Crime Analysis to Solve Cold Case Sexual Assaults

The National Sexual Assault Kit Initiative (SAKI) program has led to an impressive number of evidence-linked cases within and across jurisdictions.¹ Data from these cases have provided investigators with important and actionable lessons, such as (1) the prevalence of repeat offenders in both stranger and non-stranger cold case sexual assaults and (2) the crossover between sexual assault and other crimes. Thanks to SAKI and its efforts, every stakeholder in the criminal justice system now has an increased opportunity and obligation to prevent future victimization, improve community safety, and solve cold cases more efficiently by using and sharing data. This brief discusses how to leverage principles of crime analysis and its associated technologies to solve cold case sexual assaults.

Crime Analysis and Your Agency

Ideally, a crime analysis unit serves as a hub within a law enforcement agency. This hub collects, analyzes, and disseminates actionable information across often disparate and disconnected individuals. Because of this, crime analysis² can greatly benefit agencies—especially when implementing SAKI grant requirements and long-term violent crime prevention strategies. Further, crime analysis is an invaluable part of an agency’s mission when applied in tactical situations to identify and disrupt serial sexual assault patterns.

Crime analysis professionals optimize agency operations and improve public safety. For example, crime analysis can assist agencies with the following:

- ◆ Serving as a central hub for information collection and dissemination
- ◆ Developing tactics and protocols to prevent future crimes
- ◆ Locating and apprehending offenders
- ◆ Optimizing patrol, investigation, and internal operations
- ◆ Identifying long-term solutions for community problems
- ◆ Planning for future resource needs
- ◆ Educating the public on crime prevention strategies

A core function of crime analysis is the periodic and systematic review of criminal incidents to identify patterns of serial offending. Although the amount of time and the types of incidents being reviewed will vary, an analyst’s

approach to the systematic review should remain consistent. For example, an analyst may be tasked with reviewing violent crimes that occurred recently, such as robberies. After analyzing the cases, a serial offending pattern may emerge: robberies at commercial locations on weekend evenings with a suspect wearing a unique mask.

The same analytical approach can and should be applied to cold case sexual assault incidents. The types of incidents included under the umbrella of sexual assault incidents should not be overly restrictive, nor should the timeframe for analysis be too constrained. Serial offending patterns recognized during the review of sexual assault cold cases can be identified over years, across jurisdictions, and often with only a few consistent linking variables from case to case.³

Crime Analyst Roles and Responsibilities

Crime analysts focus on both criminal and non-criminal incidents, including disorder calls and traffic accidents. Depending on agency call volume and staffing, analysts should review all relevant police reports daily with the goal of identifying patterns in near real-time.⁴

Real-time analysis of trends, patterns, and hot-spots provides staff with actionable information about emerging crime and disorder in the community.

Agency Objectives and Hiring Needs

Before establishing a crime analysis unit or enlisting one full-time or part-time crime analyst, an agency must determine its objectives. Review the following questions to help with identifying your agency’s objectives.

- ◆ What types of operations would most benefit from using data-driven approaches?
- ◆ What crime/disorder types are most important?
- ◆ What types of crime analysis products would be most beneficial?
- ◆ How will crime analysis support the agency’s mission?
- ◆ Is there a regional crime analysis association or a neighboring agency that can provide advice and support?

Review IACA Workload Recommendations for Crime Analysts

The International Association of Crime Analysts (IACA) recommends one crime analyst per 1,500 Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Part 1 crimes per year. Alternative recommendations are one analyst per

- ◆ 1,800 National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) Group A crimes per year,
- ◆ 30,000 calls for service, or
- ◆ 70 sworn officers.

The development center on the IACA website outlines major concepts, provides standard templates and examples, and highlights innovative analytical products.

Determine Hiring Needs

Determining the actual hiring needs within your agency is critical. The IACA provides guidelines to assist with the process. Regardless of the hiring decision, the crime analyst must meet several important qualifications—including the following:

- ◆ Computer proficiency, preferably database experience
- ◆ Experience with statistics and research methods
- ◆ Knowledge of investigative techniques and police terminology
- ◆ Skills in written and oral communication
- ◆ Ability to think logically about complex and multifaceted issues

Many agencies have benefited from maintaining a full-time analyst, even if the IACA-recommended formulas indicate a need for a part-time role. Agencies can hire or appoint a part-time or shared analyst through partnerships with surrounding agencies. Crime analysis is virtually impossible without cross-jurisdictional data sharing; therefore, combining resources makes perfect sense for smaller departments. Consider the following options as alternatives to hiring new staff members to fill the crime analyst role.

Cross-Train Existing Personnel

Assign an existing member of your agency as a part-time analyst; this temporary assignment may be a good fit for crime prevention specialists, records management staff members, or light-duty officers. Crime analyst positions can be filled by sworn or civilian personnel, provided they possess the required skills and aptitude.

Develop a Temporary Assignment

If a crime analyst is being hired solely to work on SAKI-related investigations, consider a temporary assignment for someone with experience in sex crimes or homicide investigations. This person will need relevant training to be effective and to ensure grantee success.

Leverage Local Talent

A final option is to hire paid or unpaid interns from local colleges, specifically students majoring in crime analysis or criminal justice. Degree programs and certificate options in crime analysis have become increasingly common across the country in the last few years.

Incorporate Crime Analysts into Your Agency's Reporting Structure

How crime analysts fit into your agency's reporting structure depends on the defined roles and responsibilities. Ideally, a crime analyst would be dedicated to the unit they serve (e.g., sex crimes unit). However, it is less important to whom the crime analyst reports and more important that the crime analyst works closely with the collaborating investigations unit. Regardless of reporting structure, crime analysts should have frequent collaboration and communication with investigators to ascertain emerging patterns, offender tracking, investigative breakthroughs, and the long-term efforts of the unit.

Maintain Partnerships with Other Agencies

As part of the SAKI program, a crime analyst will interface with the FBI's **Violent Criminal Apprehension Program (ViCAP)**.⁵ ViCAP facilitates communication and coordination among law enforcement agencies that investigate, track, and apprehend violent serial offenders. The ViCAP system uses a nationwide data information center that collects, collates, and analyzes crimes of interpersonal violence to assist these agencies. ViCAP analysts work to identify potential similarities among crimes, create investigative matrixes, develop timelines, and identify homicide and sexual assault trends and patterns. ViCAP can be a vital resource during cold case sexual assault investigations and can also provide support to crime analysts assigned to the SAKI program.

The **Homicide Investigation Tracking System (HITS) program** is another resource for analysis of cold case sexual assault data; this program operates from the Washington State Attorney General's Office. HITS employs a full-time analyst, as well as investigators with decades of experience in sex crime and homicide investigations.

This resource program provides expertise to local and national jurisdictions and is known as a leader in developing and using technology in innovative ways to increase the solvability of crimes and prevent future victimization.

Taking a holistic approach to crime analysis involves defining your agency's objectives, evaluating hiring needs, and understanding roles and responsibilities of crime analysts—among other tasks. This approach will reap the most benefits for your agency and will further support sexual assault reform.

References:

1. The Bureau of Justice Assistance, along with state and local initiatives aimed at testing unsubmitted sexual assault kits, proudly funds the SAKI program.
2. Also known as *investigative analysis*.
3. For more information on linking cases, see the SAKI TTA brief on case connectivity www.bit.ly/saki_case_connectivity.
4. The role of a crime analyst differs from an intelligence analyst. These distinctions may vary by agency, but typically intelligence analysts focus on the “who” while crime analysts focus on the “what, when, where, how, and why.” Ideally, the crime and intelligence analyst roles are staffed in a way that ensures their functions complement one another and their common mission of crime reduction.
5. Refer to SAKI brief *Leveraging the Violent Criminal Apprehension Program* (www.bit.ly/SAKI_ViCAP) for more information.

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