

## An Examination of Homicide Solvability in Australia

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### Abstract of Thesis:

Due to the total numbers of reported crime only one in every five crimes that are reported to police is ever solved (Hirschy, 2003). The dim reality for law enforcement is that, in relation to reported 'volume crime' (break, enter and steal, assault and malicious damage) not every case can be investigated. When the crime is more serious, such as a homicide, how can police determine and triage which cases have the maximum possibility of being 'cleared by arrest'? The answer is solvability factors.

Solvability factors are specific facts and criteria that aid police in investigating homicides, examples are: the suspect's vehicle, name, alias and/or address. Homicide solvability and clearance rates appear frequently as interchangeable terms. In this thesis the author makes a distinct delineation between the two terms, that being: solvability factors or lack there of can determine whether the case is ever solved. Whereas, clearance rates are the degree to which homicide cases are cleared by arrest.

The following research addresses issues such as: the key homicide solvability factors, define clearance rates in an effort to understand what appears to be a simple principal but is in fact a complex issue, determine which solvability factors are the most predictive for solved cases and determine what types of information are most often needed to support an investigation.



This research and analysis will be completed on 1127 cases<sup>1</sup> and offers quantifiable evidence to answer the central null hypothesis that 'all homicides are equally solvable'. The empirical evidence has been collected and analysed between January 2009 – February 2010 and studies the intricate differences in solvability factors for all homicide<sup>2</sup> cases occurring within the NSW Police jurisdiction between 1998-2008. This thesis is based upon multiple sources including inter alia observations made in the field by the researcher over a fourteen month period, whilst on-call with the NSW State Crime Command Homicide Squad. The methods used in this research fit the operational tempo of the squad and included interviews, surveys, observations and quantitative datasets.

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<sup>1</sup> The data was obtained from the NSW Police database 'COPS'.

<sup>2</sup> The term 'Homicide' for the purposes of this thesis includes only murder and manslaughter. Charges of 'attempted murder', 'solicit', 'conspiracy' and 'shoot with intent' have been removed from the cohort.