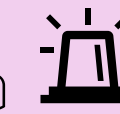




Policing and the police: policing homicide



Introduction

Contemporary policing is shaped by increasing public expectations, technological advancements, and a growing emphasis on legitimacy and accountability (Schafer, 2013; Murphy et al., 2016; Ugwu-dike, 2024). When focusing on major crimes such as homicide, these themes become particularly prominent due to the serious nature of the crime and the intense public scrutiny which they attract. Homicide can be considered the most serious form of violence. It is the killing of one human by another, it encompasses a wide range of actions, both criminal and non-criminal (Newburn, 2017). One crime within homicide is murder, this is committed when a person of sound mind unlawfully kills another human, outside of wartime, with intent to kill or cause grievous bodily harm (Crown Prosecution Service, 2024). This case study evaluates the contemporary policing agenda and its future directions through the lens of homicide investigations, with reference to governance structures and accountability mechanisms.

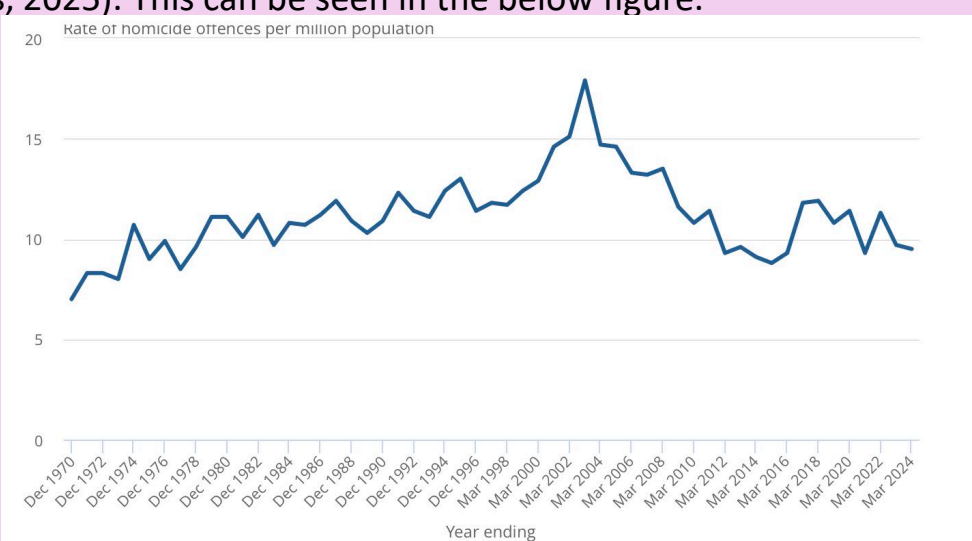
Contemporary Policing Agenda in Murder Investigations

Contemporary policing in homicide investigations focuses on improving efficiency, resource allocation, and victim support. This includes adopting new technologies, improving training for investigators, and prioritising the needs of victims (HMICFRS, 2025). Current day police services in England and Wales are increasingly guided by evidence-based policing (EBP). This is practise of using the 'best available research evidence to guide and evaluate decisions in policing' (SEBP, 2025). In homicide cases, EBP depicts itself into structured investigation framework such as the major crime investigation manual (MCIM), which standardises practices and improves investigative outcomes (NPCC, 2021).

Another key part of modern-day policing, both for major crimes such as homicide and crimes of lesser severity, is technology. Technology has become a fundamental element of modern criminal investigations, facilitating enhanced methods for evidence collection, suspect identification, crime pattern analysis, and crime prevention. Advances such as facial recognition, DNA profiling, data analytics, and surveillance technologies have significantly reshaped the investigative processes, contributing to greater accuracy and efficiency within the criminal justice system (Jasoria & Patel, 2025). An example of this is the Home Office Large Major Enquiry System (Holmes), which is a computerised database specifically designed to support large-scale investigations, facilitating the systematic collection, organisation, and cross-referencing of information obtained during major enquiries. This tool enhances investigative efficiency by enabling law enforcement agencies to manage complex data sets and identify critical connections within the evidence (CPS, 2021).

Homicide Statistics

In the year ending March 2024, the reported number of homicide incidences was 552 within England and Wales, resulting in 570 victims. This was a marginal decrease from the year prior, which had a total of 566 incidents (Office for National Statistics, 2025). This can be seen in the below figure.



Governance and Accountability Structures

Contemporary policing in the UK is shaped by various governance structures designed to ensure accountability and maintain public trust. The primary governance mechanism includes the Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs), who over-see local police services and ensure that policing priorities, such as homicide investigations, align with public needs (gov.uk, 2024). PCCs hold Chief Constables accountable for the delivery of policing services, ensuring that resources are used effectively to address crime, including homicide (Loveday, 2013).

The Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) also plays a crucial role in maintaining accountability within the police force. The IOPC investigates complaints against the police, ensuring transparency and preventing police misconduct (IOPC, 2023a). In homicide cases, particularly those involving controversial police conduct (such as the use of force or discrimination), the IOPC may intervene to ensure public confidence in the integrity of the investigation process. An example of this was the kidnap, rape and murder of Sarah Everard by a then serving police officer, which resulted in multiple investigation into to the police service including that of the IOPC (IOPC, 2023b).

Furthermore, the His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) conducts independent inspection of the police service, assessing their performance and offering recommendations for improvement. Their evaluations focus on areas such as leadership, effectiveness, and the handling of serious crimes like murder (HMICFRS, 2024).

Challenges in Contemporary Homicide Policing

Despite contemporary methods in policing homicide expanding far beyond traditional investigative techniques, these methods raise concerns about privacy and the potential for biased policing (Babuta & Oswald, 2019). Studies have suggested that predictive policing algorithms can perpetuate racial bias, particularly when historical data is used to predict crime in certain neighbourhoods (Lum & Isaac, 2016). This poses significant challenges for governance and accountability, as police forces must balance technological advances with ethical considerations. The Macpherson Report (1999) which was a result of high-profile homicide cases, including the killing of Stephen Lawrence in 1993, exposing institutional racism within the Metropolitan Police. This case redefined public perceptions and policing agendas around race, ultimately leading to reforms such as diversity training and changes to stop-and-search protocols (Macpherson, 1999).

Future Directions in Policing homicide

As technology, societal expectations and criminal methods evolve, the policing of homicide must adapt through innovation and reform. Possible directions the police service may take could include:

1. Ethical and Regulatory Oversight

As digital tools become more embedded in investigations, concerns about privacy, data misuse, and biased algorithms will require stronger regulatory frameworks. The demand for transparency and fairness may lead to the establishment of independent oversight bodies and clearer legal guidelines (GOV.UK, 2020).

2. Community Policing and Public Engagement

Despite the growth in technological tools, the solving homicide cases will likely continue to rely on public cooperation. Future strategies may emphasize community trust building, transparency, and collaboration to encourage the flow of intelligence from the public (Jones et al., 2020)

3. Integration of Advanced Technologies

In this every changing world, technology is advancing rapidly and the power of this cannot be ignored. Developments in artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, and big data analytics are likely to increasingly assist in pattern recognition, suspect identification, and predictive policing. Facial recognition and real-time surveillance tools are becoming more precise, while forensic advancements, such as rapid DNA analysis, offer may faster and more accurate identification of victims and perpetrators (Santosh Choubey, 2024; Faqir, 2023; Pandey, 2023)

4. Preventative intervention

Providing support for individuals at high risk of offending by tackling the vulnerability of the victim or location by collaborating with other institutes may help the criminal justice system prevent the homicide (HMICFRS, 2023).

Conclusion

Homicide is a greatly serious crime, contemporary policing of this is shaped by professionalism, technology and accountability. As time moves on the criminal justice system must continue to adapt, prioritising collaboration, ethical use of technology, and community trust.

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