**Crucial first 48 hours after a crime has been committed?**

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**Introduction**

Police tried and tested methods over many decades are still important in our high-tech age. The first 48 hours after police discover that a crime has been committed are said to be crucial for gathering vital evidence. After then, it becomes more difficult to gather good evidence and the likelihood of that perpetrator being caught is diminished, it has been believed.

Certain old police true-crime TV series tells one rather than turning over every stone in a police investigation, it is wiser to *“turn over the rock under the rock”* as police officers move closer and closer to the reaching the conclusion of their hunt for the suspect.[[1]](#footnote-1)

A well-planned police investigation should never be governed by any clock over the investigators’ heads. Nor should investigators rely solely on high-tech wizardry and gadgets. Successful investigations are concluded primarily upon tried methods that have been in use over many decades of police know-how, insight, skill, honesty and integrity, be it follow-the DNA or follow-the money, whatever the crime.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**A crime of burglary and rape**

In one particular case, a woman had gone to sleep in her second-floor bedroom whilst her husband watched on their television in another room, a playoff football game. A stranger had entered the home through an unlocked downstairs window. He had walked upstairs; entered the woman’s bedroom; crawled across the floor to steal her cell phone; and as she heard a movement in the bedroom and was about to get up, she confronted the stranger who then leapt up and threatened to kill her with a knife he claimed to be holding, though she never witnessed a brandished knife. He ordered her to remove her clothes and told her he “wanted her" as well as her phone.

Stalling for time, the female householder asked this stranger in her bedroom if he had any sexually transmitted diseases, and he replied: “*No. I swear on my dead sister.”*

He proceeded to rape the woman. He then fled from the house, taking the woman’s cell phone, some cash and a television. Her husband had watched the football game and had gone to sleep in another room. He had heard nothing.

After being raped, his wife lay quietly in her bed and the offender ran down the stairs and out the front door with the stolen property- her cell phone and a television set and some money. She only got up and alerted her husband *after* she heard the front door close behind the offender. After all, the burglar had warned her that he was in possession of a knife.

**Golden nuggets of evidence**

*The crime- scene* itself is deemed to be the first old-school tool of investigation in a crime of this type. The facts are as follows:

The offender entered the house through a downstairs window.

This window was one that was commonly left ajar to allow for ventilation.

The wife was in one bedroom and in bed on her own.

Her husband had stayed up to watch a football game on television in another room.

She had been raped.

She did not protest or scream because the rapist warned her that he had a knife.

The intruder’s rape session was short.

He quickly took her cell phone, money and a small portable television set and hurried down the stairs and exited through the door.

She waited until she heard the door close and then alerted her husband.

**Police response**

Her husband telephoned local police and reported these crimes and police arrived shortly afterwards. Uniformed police officers and crime-scene technicians arrived and determined that this as a stranger-on-stranger crime. They rapidly decided that this crime did not involve the woman’s husband. He was asleep when his wife called out to him after the burglar/rapist had left. Police CSI technicians dusted the downstairs window and surrounding area for fingerprints other than those of the husband and wife occupants of these premises. They took the fingerprints from the husband and the wife for elimination purposes. The couple were the only occupants of their home.

Fingerprint results came in later and there was one fingerprint that did not match those of this couple. Within a few hours, a match was found for the third fingerprint[[3]](#footnote-3) on the window after it had been submitted to AFIS.[[4]](#footnote-4)

**Crime victim removed from crime scene to police station**

The rule of thumb is that it is important to remove a crime victim from the crime scene as soon as possible so as to distance him or her from any distractions. Police therefore requested the victim of the rape, the wife, to travel with them to attend at the local police station for them to obtain further information from her. [[5]](#footnote-5)

The rape victim was driven to the police station and during conversation at the police station; this victim was able to recall how the burglar/rapist swore by his ‘dead sister’ that he had no venereal diseases. It was at the police station that this rape victim recalled the perpetrator’s ‘dead sister’ reference. She had asked him about venereal disease because she suspected that this criminal might also rape her. This was a most valuable piece of recall from this rape victim.

A police sketch artist was asked to attend at the police station and the victim was able to provide detailed recollection of the suspect to him.

**DNA evidence**

Other valuable evidence to be retrieved as soon as possible in any rape crime is DNA sample found on the victim, in the bed sheets at the victim’s home; or on any discarded item left at the crime scene-a hat or a condom or a tissue from which DNA would tie a suspect to the crime scene.

**No condom used but no semen-but trauma on body part**

The victim told police that this man did not use a condom so the chances of such a sample being present were very high if he had ejaculated in or on or near the victim. The victim told police that this rape only lasted for less than 30 seconds and police applied a sexual assault kit which confirmed signs of trauma to her body part but was unable to recover any DNA. [[6]](#footnote-6)The only other evidence to be collected was the inventory of what items the burglar/rapist had stolen. This included the cellular telephone belonging to the victim.

A search warrant with exigent circumstances was executed upon the cellular provider. A location of the phone could not be determined but a call was made from that phone less than 5 minutes after the victim’s husband called 911 from the home telephone. Because the crime report call had been made five minutes before the burglar used the victim’s stolen cell phone to make a call, police were certain that the burglar made his call after he had left the victim’s home.

**Burglar called a number which reported a domestic to police**

A search of the in-house police database showed that the victim’s cell phone had been used to call a number from where a domestic disturbance had recently been reported at a property just two streets away from this burglary/rape attack.

**Evidence soon collected**

1. Police had a fingerprint from the window through which rapist entered property.

2. Police had information that suspect told victim he had a dead sister.

3. Police doctor’s exam of victim confirmed brutal sex assault.

4. Police artist made a sketch of suspect from victim’s recollections.

5. Police knew property to which suspect made cell phone call minutes after attack.

6. Fingerprint on window was from convicted felon James Arthur Ramsey.

7. Felon Ramsey’s girlfriend lived in house he made cell phone call to after rape.

8. Felon James Arthur Ramsey resembled the sketch police artist had drawn.

The above list represents enough probable cause to arrest James Arthur Ramsey and police arrested him less than eight hours after the rape of this victim. James Arthur Ramsey was not found at the girlfriend’s house two streets away from the rape scene but he was arrested at a place about 30 miles from the crime scene.

Police arrested him, read him his Miranda Rights and took him to their police station for interview.

James Arthur Ramsey vehemently denied any involvement in the rape and claimed to have been more than 50 miles away when the crime of rape against this victim had been committed. Under consistent interrogation, Mr. J.A. Ramsey began to try to gain sympathy from police officers by relating the stress and sadness he suffered over the past year due to the death of his sister which forced him to leave Florida where he had resided after his time in Prison, moving to this area because his mother lived here and he helped care for his orphaned nephews who now lived with his mother. He confessed shortly thereafter; was charged and remanded in custody until his trial date. James Arthur Ramsey was tried and convicted and received a thirty-year prison sentence, of which twenty-years must be served in jail.

**Conclusion**

This case has a twofold message. The first part of this message is the importance of the victim. For over sixty years now, it has been clear that the **victim of crime** is of most importance, not to be the forgotten party in the criminal Justice system. The police are central to the victim’s experience of any satisfaction to be found in the criminal justice system. Also important is the managing of not only victims but also of witnesses and suspects.

For a successful outcome, police must concentrate on quality material obtained by police officers and its handling process, taking account of anxieties and trauma witnesses might experience; fear of consequences of giving information; social, cultural and religious needs; witnesses need for medical treatment; witnesses need for security; mental, disability or age vulnerability of victims, in which case specialist interviewing skills may be needed.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Of crucial importance in ensuring continued support for policing is the maintenance of satisfaction of victims and the general public, especially for police to respond appropriately to women victims of crime. Police use of discretion depends much of their organisational values and they must think carefully of the balancing of catching criminals with treating victims of crime with dignity and respect.[[8]](#footnote-8)

The moral of the case in this article is that police officers are almost always correct in using long-proven methods of policing even though high-technology, telephony, and police databases are extremely helpful to them. Chasing leads does still remain important, as the Policeone.com author wrote.

**Further Reading**

Eastman, N., Adshead, G., Fox, S., Latham, R., and Whyte, S. (2012) *Forensic Psychiatry,* Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

John Gosart, “New detectives, remember to turn over the rock under the rock”, *www.PoliceOne.com*, Dec 14, 2022

Hoyle, C. and Young, R. (2003) ‘Restorative justice, victims and the police’, in Newburn, T. (ed.) *Handbook of Policing,* Devon, UK: Willan Publishing.

Walklate, S. (ed.) (2007) *Handbook of Victims and Victimology*, Devon, UK: Willan Publishing.

**ENDS+**

1. See *www.police1.com/police-jobs-and-careers/articles/new-detectives-remember-to-turn-over-the-rock-under-the-rock-wvGmiGonqI01HAMw/* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The challenge faced by a criminal investigator is to correctly identify the perpetrator and bring him or her to justice, by examining witness accounts and physical evidence recovered from the crime scene. Among physical evidence, DNA evidence has possibly the highest probative value of all evidence and is on a par with fingerprint evidence in identifying an offender. Forensic science is the application of the natural sciences to the analysis and the interpretation of evidence relating to criminal activity. Forensic science evidence is also known as trace evidence. Trace evidence reflects the words of a pioneering French Police Inspector, Edward Locard who said that every contact leaves a trace. From this came the *Locard exchange principle.* This is one of the most fundamental concepts in forensic science. The Locard exchange principle states that *“*the dust and debris that cover our clothing and bodies are the mute witnesses of all our movements and all our encounters.”See Locard, E., “The analysis of dust traces”, (1930) *American Journal of Police Science* 1:276-91. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See Schultz, M.M. and Reichert, W., ‘Archived or directly swabbed latent fingerprints as a DNA source for STR typing’, (2002) Forensic Science International 127:128-130. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. DNA profiles can be obtained from items that have been handled due to the presence of transferred DNA derived from skin cells. The amount of DNA deposited on contact depends on the donor. A person sheds DNA depending on his genetics and even on whether male or female. In the 1990s a method called PCR allowed the obtaining of profiles from minute amounts of DNA. A single skin contact with an object is often enough to deposit DNA in amounts sufficient for profiling, depending on the state of the evidence object; type of bodily fluid deposited on the object, etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Contrary to this belief is the idea some people uphold that staying at the crime scene itself might allow for recollections that otherwise would not come to mind. The old police custom has proved best. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. This is unfortunate that no semen was found. According to findings as published by the British Association of Chief Police Officers in year 2005(ACPO) name since changed, they calculated that semen had the highest success rate for obtaining DNA evidence (90%), followed by blood, chewing gum, cigarette butts, fingernail clippings, comb, razor, hair with roots, saliva, hair without roots, cigarette lighter and then watch strap. In the USA, the criminal justice system uses CODIS (Combined DNA Index System) for forensic casework. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. In the UK, the Home Office developed seven principles of investigative interviewing as far back as 1992, some 31 years ago, which continue to underpin UK practice. All police jurisdictions all over the world need to formulate bespoke lists of principles understood and taught to all their police officers. They must all contain one essential element-ethical interviewing. There has since been the PEACE model for interviewing victims. Can it be that these are just words on paper and not applied? [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See Hoyle, C. and Young, R. (2003) ‘Restorative justice, victims and the police’, in Newburn, T. (ed.) *Handbook of Policing,* Devon, UK: Willan Publishing.

   See Walklate, S. (ed.) (2007) *Handbook of Victims and Victimology*, Devon, UK: Willan Publishing. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)