

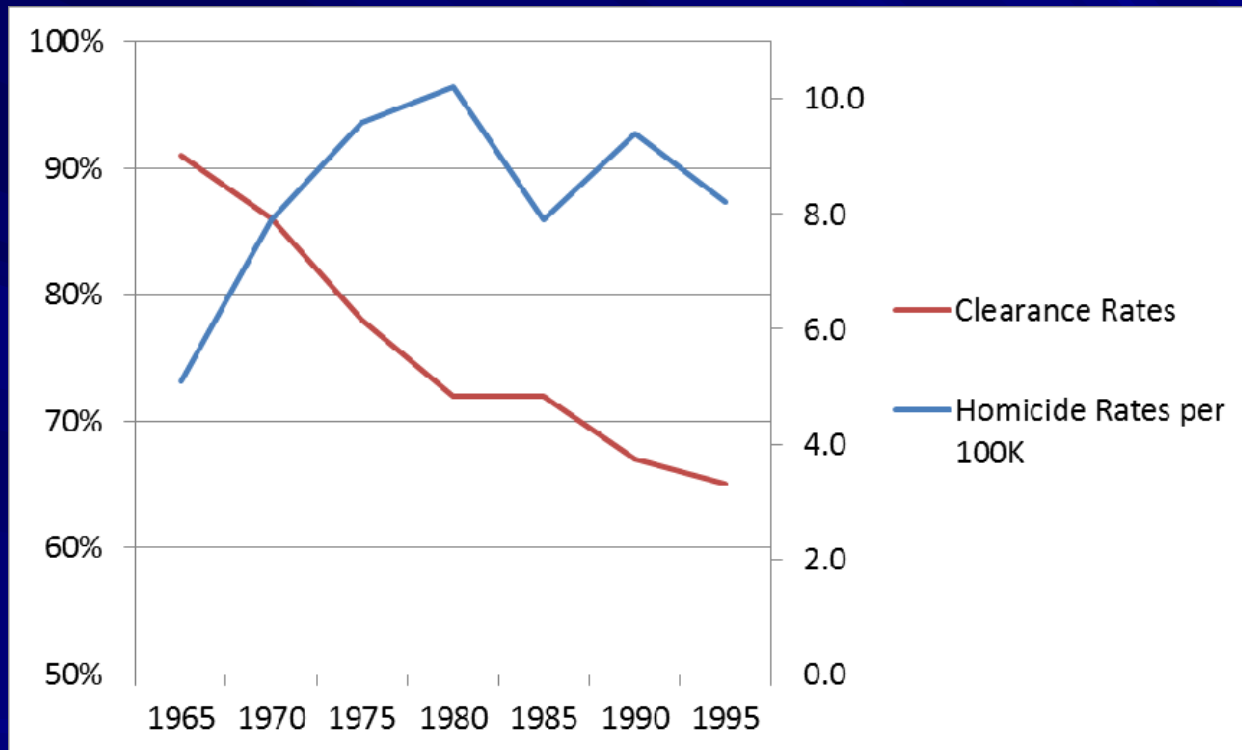
IDENTIFYING BEST PRACTICES FOR SOLVING COLD CASES

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Police Foundation

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Large Backlogs Spurred Cold Case Interest



Homicides Got Harder to Solve

- By 1992, 54% of homicides committed by strangers
- More killings involved guns
- “No snitching” culture



Forensic Science Created New Ways to Attack Unsolved Cases

- Blood splatter analysis, NIBIN, IAFIS
- DNA technology developed and advanced
- Feds created CODIS in late 1980s, more than 5 million profiles as of 2007



What We Set Out to Learn

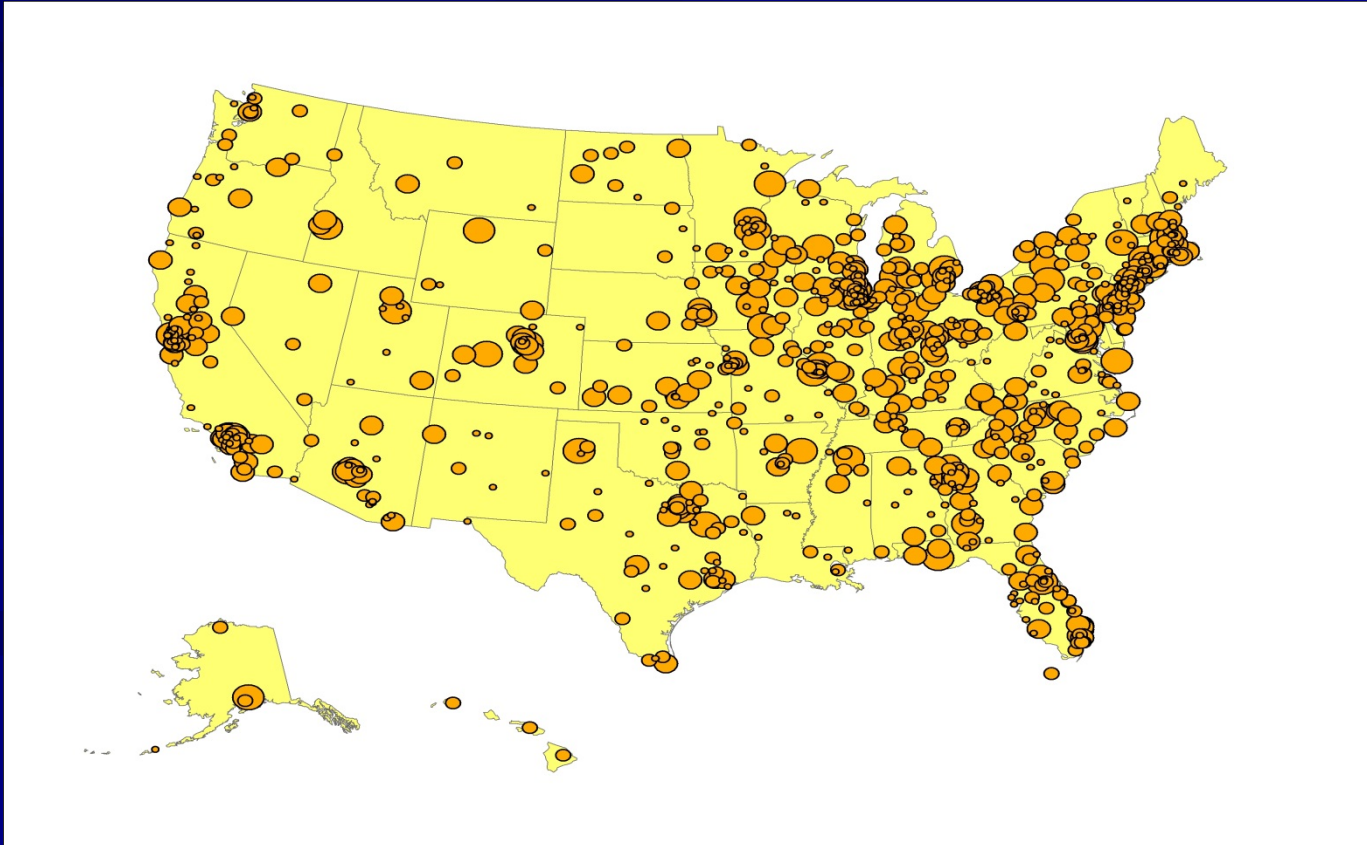
Research Questions	Methods
How is cold case work organized?	National survey of LE agencies
Which types of cold cases have the greatest potential of being solved?	Case file samples in 3 cities
Is a DNA match in sexual assault cold cases dispositive?	Sample of Denver CODIS hits

How Is Cold Case Work Organized?

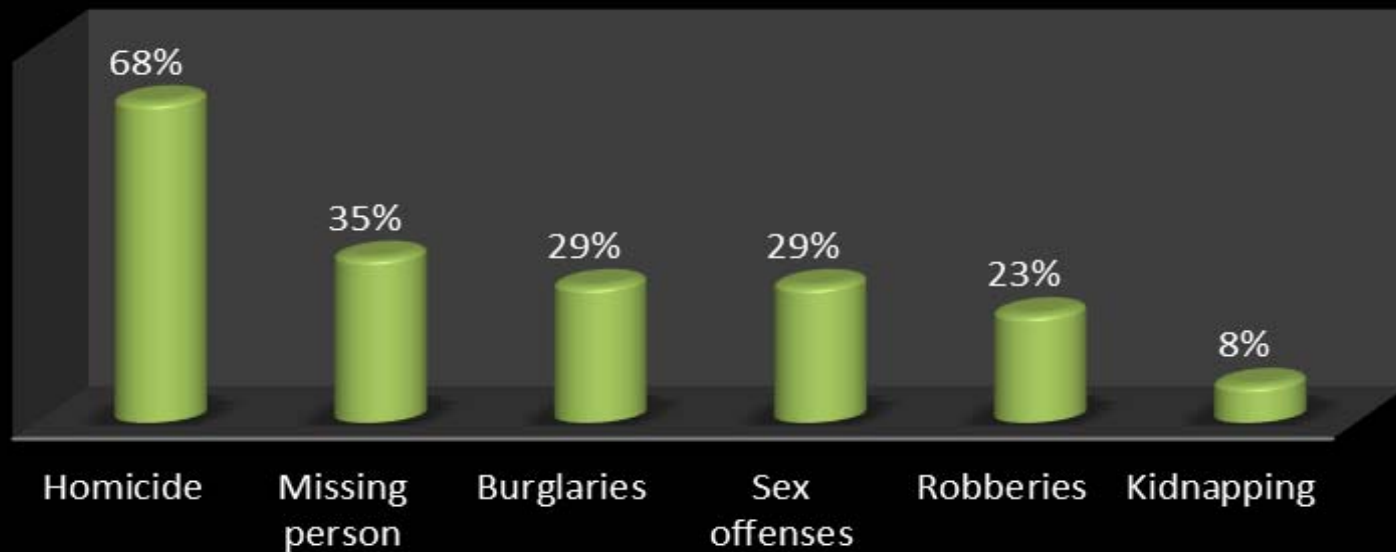
Law Enforcement Survey

Survey of LE Agencies to Determine State of Cold Case Investigations

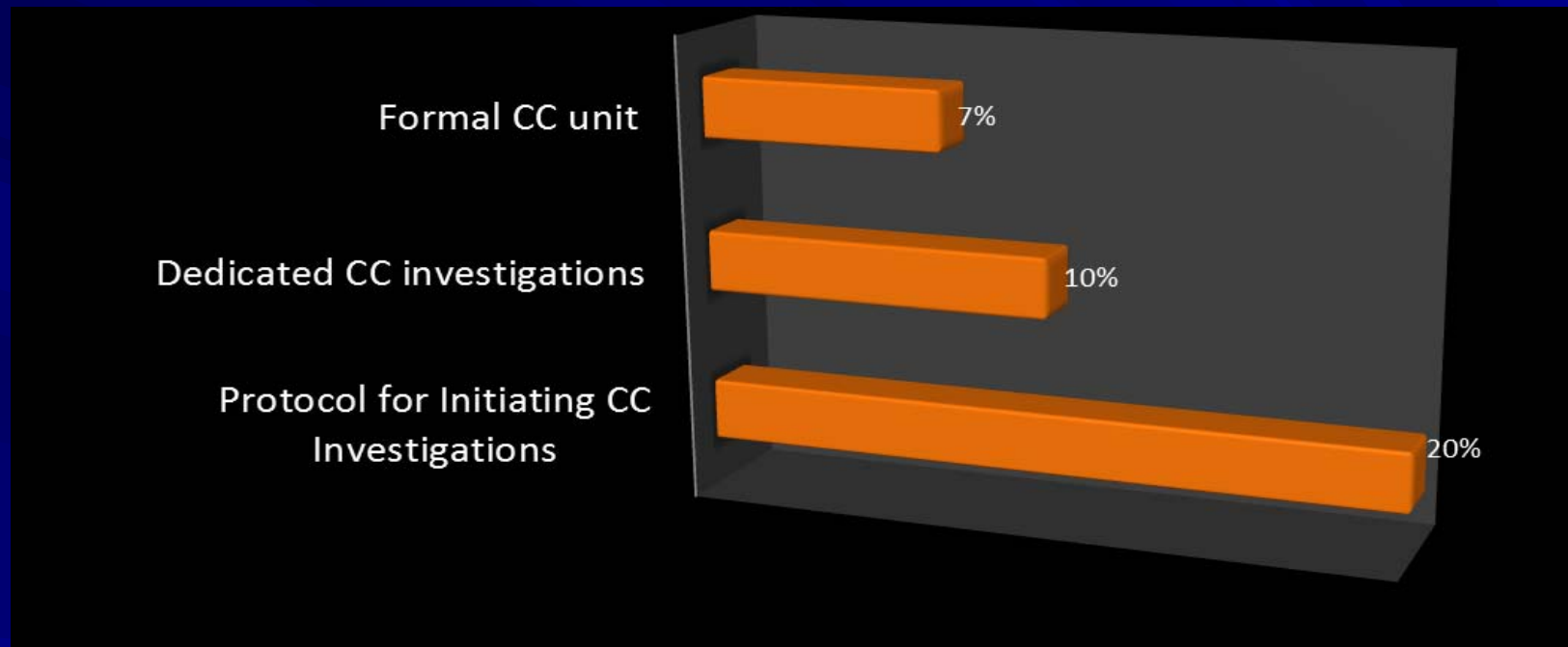
Survey of 1,051 LE agencies, stratified by agency type and size



Homicides Most Common Cold Cases



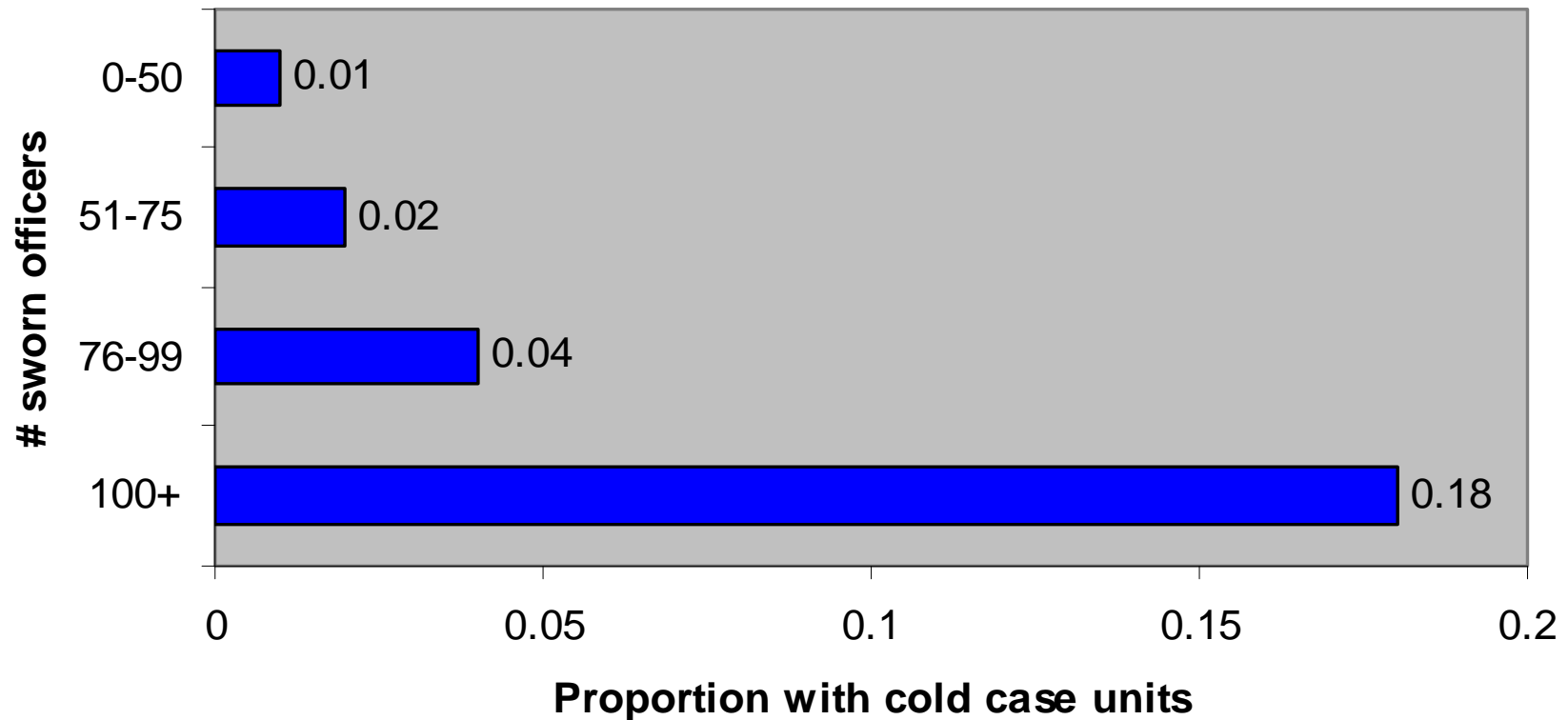
Most Agencies Do Little Cold Case Work



- Cold case funding is tenuous: 20% of CC work is funded though line items in budget – most funded by federal grants

Dedicated CC Units Are Only Found in Larger Agencies

Figure 3: Formal Cold Case Units by Agency Size



Success Rates For CC Investigations Are Low

- About 1 in 5 cases cleared



- Respondents estimated 1 in 10 CC investigations resulted in arrest



**Which Cold Cases Have the
Best Odds of Being Solved?**

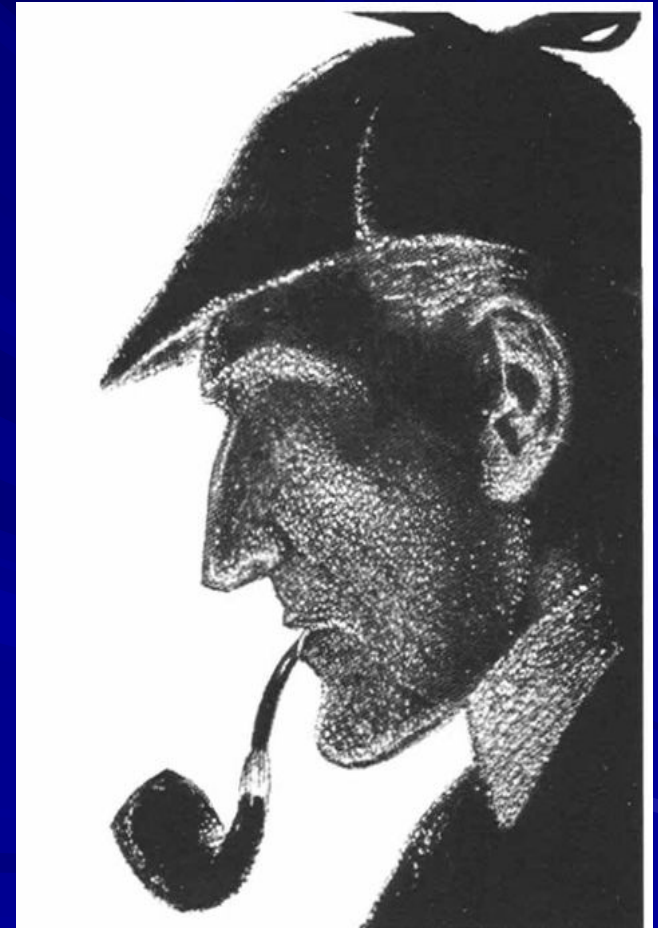
The 3-City Study

Case File Work Was Conducted in 3 Cities with Different CC Approaches

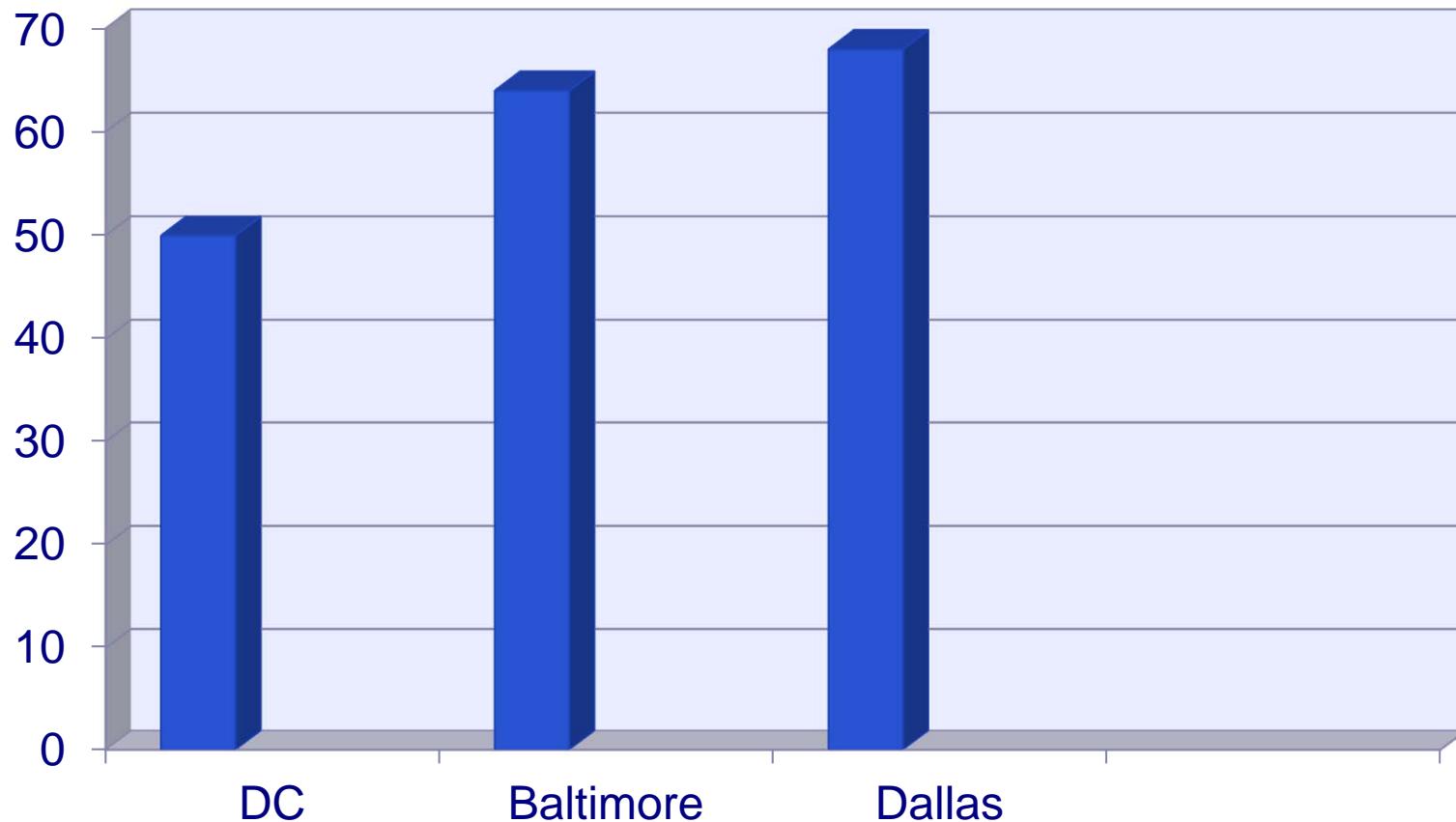
- **Washington:** Systematic review of all unsolved homicides for DNA potential
- **Dallas:** Review all unsolved homicides after 3 months
- **Baltimore:** Wait for “break”

What Do Cold Case Investigators Do?

- Typically not “Sherlock Holmes”
- Largely follow up on potential DNA evidence or information from suspects in custody wanting to make a deal
- Bereavement work – follow up with families of victims
- Test potential DNA material in Innocence Project or appeals cases
- Cold case investigations are way to boost homicide clearance rates



Clearing A Cold Case Is Not Synonymous With An Arrest



% Cleared cases Resulting in Arrest

Case file Work to Determine Factors Associated with Successful Outcomes

- Basis for opening CC investigation
- Victim characteristics
- Crime context
- Witnesses
- Method of death
- Physical evidence

What Predicts Cold Case Success?

Odds of solving case better if:	Odds of solving case worse if:
Struggle preceded death	Victim is drug user
Victim is gang member	Victim is prostitute
Prime suspect identified in initial investigation	Case opened at family request

The New Bedford Murders

- Between July 1988 and April 1989, nine bodies were found in nine months in wooded areas of Southeastern Massachusetts, along Interstate 195, Route 140 and Route 6
- Most had a transient lifestyle because of drug addiction.
- Little forensic evidence
- “Twenty years later, it still keeps me up some nights,” says Detective Richard Ferreira



Is DNA Evidence Enough?

**The Denver Sexual Assault
Study**

DNA Enabled Push to Solve Cold Case Sexual Assaults

- Investigators preserve forensic & physical evidence from sexual assaults in “rape kits”



- In 2002, Justice Department study estimated 180,000 rape kits sat on shelves untested
- Since then, Justice Department has promoted testing of backlogs of rape kits in cold cases

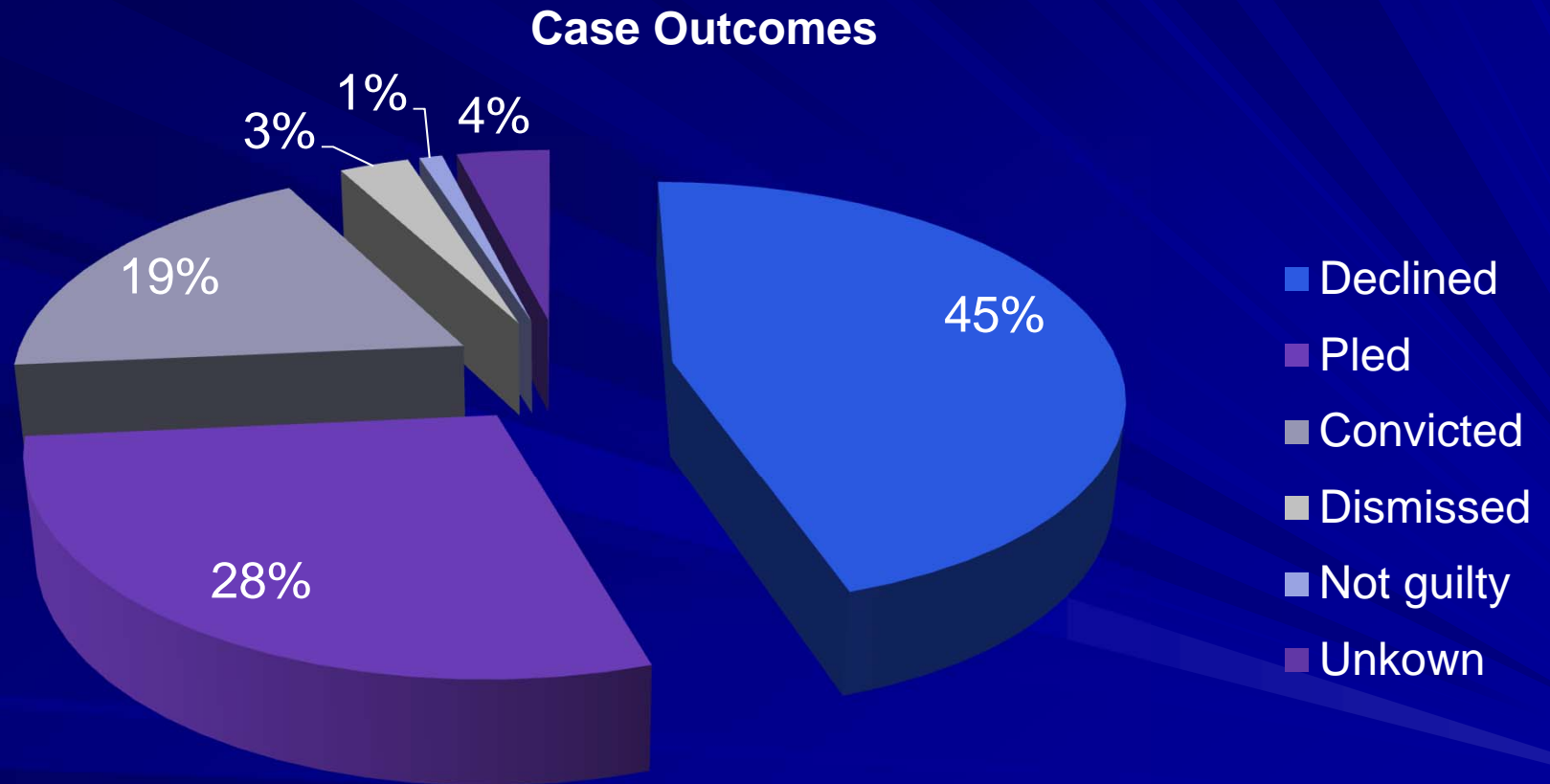
... But Questions Remain

- Lab testing of DNA evidence is expensive
- DNA testing only supplies a name: Victim cooperation still needed to convict
- Dallas Police experience suggests that victims of old sexual assault cases may not be interested in testifying

Denver Study: What Happens in Cases with DNA Suspect ID

- Denver DA reviewed 4,200 rape kits to find 1,220 with testable DNA
- Prosecutors identified 600 where DNA likely to be probative
- DNA testing yielded 103 cases with CODIS hits

Half of Cases with DNA Match Declined for Prosecution



Victim Issues Main Reason for Declining to Prosecute



What Did We Learn?

- Cold case work is poorly funded
- Solving cold cases is less “Sherlock Holmes” and more often adventitious
- Investigations most often done in slow times, often seen as a way to “plus up” clearance rates
- Poor tracking of successes or time spent or what happens after clearance
- The success rate is low, but it is possible to predict which cases are worth pursuing

Questions to be Answered

- What proportion of cold case investigations result in convictions?
- Would closer cooperation between police & prosecutors during cold case investigations improve conviction rate?
- What is the cost of a clearance? Of a conviction?