

Who's who in Forensic Investigations?

There is a lot of misunderstanding around job roles in the Forensic world. TV shows such as CSI Miami/New York and Silent Witness, etc, have not helped these misconceptions, creating this extraordinary person who does everything. A phenomenon that became known as the **CSI effect**.

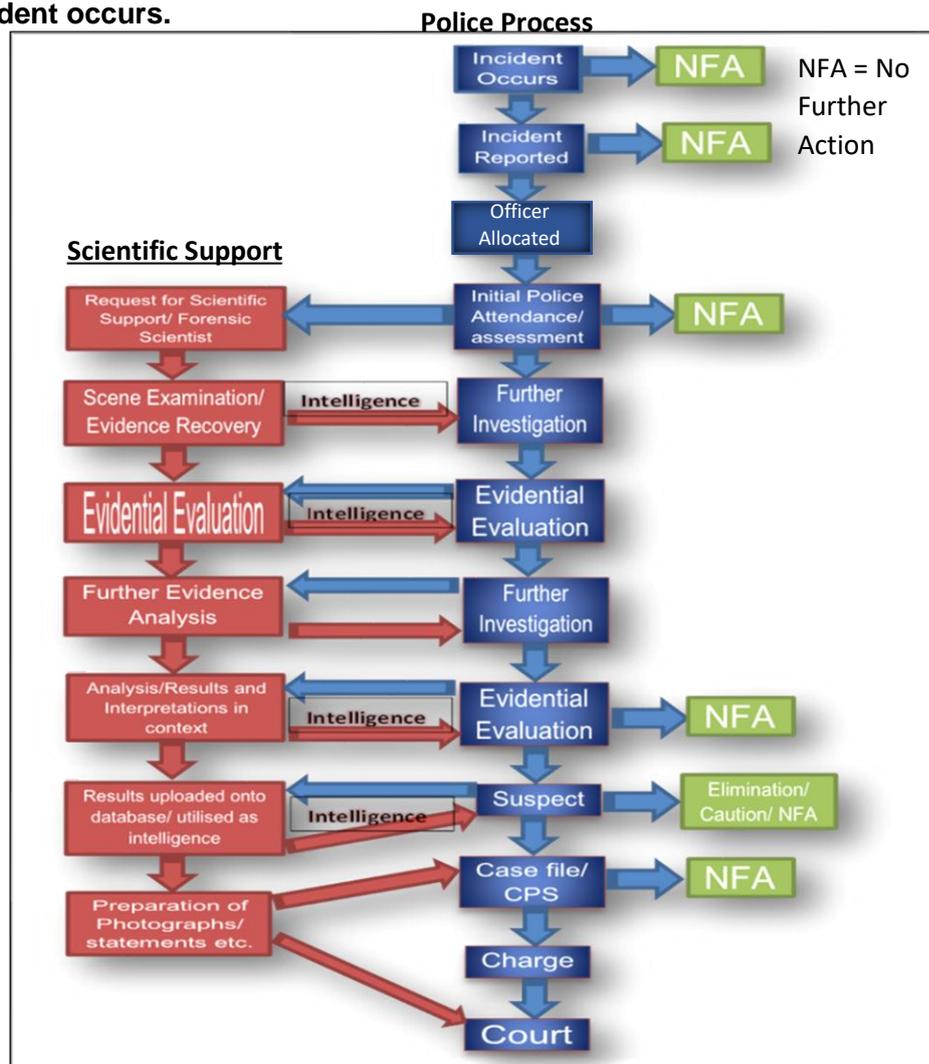
The CSI effect peaked interest in Forensic related careers, whilst giving an entirely unrealistic view of the role to the next generation. Often on TV, you will see one person carrying out all roles. They will attend the crime scene, recover the evidence, take it back to a lab, analyse the evidence, get results in super-fast time, arrest and question a suspect!

Honestly, Grissom must be exhausted!!

We are not allowed to watch these shows, we have been banned, as it is impossible to sit quietly without screaming at the TV. The truth is out there...but not in your programme 😊

The actual truth is, Forensic Investigation is the scientific process that supports police investigation.

The diagram below highlights the Police and Scientific process that takes place from the moment an incident occurs.



Created by Angela Davies for MSc Dissertation, "The Efficiency and Cost Effectiveness of Forensic Science in Police Investigation" 2012. There are other diagrammatic suggestions, but this is still comprehensive and valid even though its 10 years old.

The whole process is a collaborative effort undertaken by many different people who have different job roles and who work for different organisations. Therefore, a lot of teamwork and communication is needed to make sure that it is efficient and effective possible.

So, let us look at some of the key roles involved in investigation. We have...

Police Officers – of varying roles, ranks and experience. They work for a Police organisation (usually referred to as a Force), have been through official training and sworn an oath to the crown and public. Their role broadly speaking is to uphold law and order, protect the communities in which they work (both people and property), prevent, and investigate crime. As far as a crime is concerned the police officer is usually referred to as the First Officer Attending.

Crime Scene Investigators (CSI) – work for the Police, they can be Police Officers, but often these days it is a civilian role meaning, you do not need to be a Police Officer first. As a civilian officer, you do not have the same powers as the Police, and you do not have to swear an oath. The role of a CSI is to attend crime scenes and examine, record, and recover evidence, ensuring its integrity (this is a very brief description, there is a lot more to the role which will be looked at in a different blog).

Fingerprint Examiners – They usually work for the Police and again, it is now mostly a civilian role. They analyse fingerprints recovered from the crime scene by the CSI, and compare them to suspect fingerprints, in the hope including or excluding a person from an enquiry. They can also be requested to attend court to give evidence.

Forensic Scientists – These guys mostly work in a laboratory. Occasionally, depending on their specialism, they might also attend some crime scenes. However, they effectively analyse the evidence recovered from the crime scene by the CSI. There are a significant number of specialisms under the banner 'Forensic Scientist' (which again will be explored in more detail in a different blog). Since the closure of the Forensic Science Service in 2012, Forensic Services are delivered through police forces and private organisations.

Forensic Pathologist – someone medically trained to exam the dead - medically trained, they must be a Medical Dr first. Often, they work for themselves (self-employed), as part of a regional group (company established by a group of pathologists) or for a University. To be involved in criminal work they must be registered with the Home Office and their main role is to carry out post-mortems to establish the cause and manner of death. They are called when a body is found in suspicious circumstances and will often attend the crime scene before they carry out a post-mortem and produce their report.

All the above roles will produce reports or statements and may be required to give oral evidence in courts of law.

The type of crime committed will usually dictate the number of people involved and the amount of expertise required. Not everyone will attend every crime scene and not everyone will be involved in the investigation at the same time. It is very much a fluid process that requires excellent teamwork, cooperation, and excellent communication skills particularly when dealing with serious crime, as this is when most people will be involved.

I hope this has explained a little more about some of the key roles involved in forensic investigations and gives a more realistic overview about who does what!

It is difficult to keep this short and to the point, as there are many other roles throughout these organisations...writing for another day maybe!

Thank you for reading: Angela Davies and Dionne Watson

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