Crime scene investigation in Pakistan: A perspective

Abstract

Crime scene investigation is an important tool in criminal investigation process. Proper processing of crime scene is a prerequisite for successfully solving a criminal case. In Pakistan, local policemen are not properly trained and equipped with the necessary items required for systematic processing of crime scene including proper identification and collection of evidence. Certain capacity building measures and improvements must be needed for proper processing of crime scene in Pakistan. This article focuses the current situation and strategies being practiced in Pakistan followed by suggestions for capacity building measures in this field.

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1. Introduction

Crime scene processing is one of the most crucial aspects of active and successful criminal investigations. True crime scene investigations which primarily deal with the identification, collection, proper packaging, transport and analysis of evidence material is the result of forensic science. If schematically searched and properly handled, various tentative evidences found on the crime scene can become effective forensic evidences [1]. The difference between a local policeman and trained crime scene investigator is that the latter being aware of sensitivity of crime scene puts serious efforts to identify and collect forensic evidence from the scene. Crime scenes which are not managed well would lead to either loss of evidence or poor quality evidence resulting in erroneous exonerations or convictions in a criminal justice system [2]. In the past, it was practiced that it is duty of the local policemen to manage and process a crime scene followed by evidence collection for downstream forensic investigations. It has been speculated for a long time that forensic analysis begins at the laboratories and not from the crime scene [3,4]. However, in recent years, courts are relying heavily on the forensic analysis of evidences collected from the crime scene thus adapting more objective approach for final verdict [5]. As the importance of crime scene is appreciated, its role in modern day policy making and model buildings has also been evaluated to reduce the risk of crimes and for also crime prevention. Evidence documentation and reason of its collection is also considered an important part of intelligence-led policing, which further necessitates the requirement of properly trained and experienced crime scene personnel to process the crime scene. Intelligence-led policing is an outcome of proper crime scene analysis and manifestation so that the information extracted could be used to develop forensics intelligence. Traces or information collected from crime scenes are also helpful in building future security models based on these intelligence [6,7]. Some proceedings examples from past are evident that proper crime scene investigation may also help judicial procedures to prevent wrong convictions [8]. The evidence collected from the crime scene plays an important role in identification and individualization of a criminal present at the crime scene [9]. So there is a need of application of proper techniques and protocols for evidence collection, handling, storage and subsequent delivery to the forensic laboratory necessary for downstream testing of evidence material. Most of the time, due to non-availability of suitable techniques and training, the evidence may go unrecognized so not collected at all or if collected but not preserved by using right protocol it may get compromised so render no value for laboratory procedures [10].

2. Importance of crime scene investigation

There are examples in past where lack of expertise and poor handling of evidence at crime scenes lead to negative impact on final verdict. Poor handling, preservation and incomplete crime scene investigation left gap in evidence in O.J. Simpson famous trial leading to fail in getting conviction. In spite of mountain of evidence given by prosecutor, serious doubts had been created by defense on evidences [11,12]. Impact of lacking proper training also influenced the crime scene processing including evidence collection and subsequently case investigation as well. For example, in the case of O. J. Simpson, both the first responder and crime scene supervisor were not properly trained and were lacking basic information of crime scene technicality. So it also has proven to loss the conviction in spite of pile of evidences [13].

3. Crime scene processing in Pakistan—A much neglected area

Crime scenes are often investigated poorly in developing countries like Pakistan because forensic science is rarely considered a part of the process. Importance of crime scene investigations has not only been neglected but has also been trivialized in past...
decades. One reason of substandard crime scene processing in Pakistan is lack of many crime-solving technologies which have already been utilized in developed nations. However, the nature and magnitude of terrorist attacks, activism in judicial institutions, extensive media engagement and growing public awareness have put pressure on police force to look beyond traditional methods of investigation. Though forensic methodologies are not infallible but going forensic is unavoidable if the police are to respond to the innovations taking place in the field of crime [14]. Capacity of the policing in Pakistan to deliver on cracking a case is severely diminished by the lack of forensic services, inadequate training and equipment. As we know an efficient functioning police service is required for solving many hideous crimes [15].

Punjab Forensic Science Agency (PFSA), Lahore has well established Crime Scene Units (CSU) with satellite stations located at Lahore, Bahawalpur, Dera Ghazi Khan, Gujranwala, Multan, Sahiwal, Sargodha, Rawalpindi and Faisalabad division of Punjab comprising professionally trained forensic scientist. Whenever there is an unfortunate event of crime, CSU approaches the area of crime scene and after processing the crime scenes, retrieves the evidence materials transporting to their relevant laboratory housed in PFSA, Lahore [https://psfa.punjab.gov.pk/]. National Forensic Science Agency (NFSA) has its own CSU working at Islamabad covering most of the city and its nearby areas like Rawalpindi district and some part of Attok district. In Balochistan province, crime scene investigations are mostly accomplished by the local policemen who are not well trained and also lack equipment necessary for the tedious task. Recently United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC) has provided two modern mobile CSU to Balochistan province of Pakistan for capacity building of crime scene investigation process in the province [https://www.unodc.org/pakistan/en/handing-over-of-two-mobile-crime-scene-investigation-units-to-balochistan-police.html]. Same scenario is in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province where crime scene investigation process is also handled by the local policemen. Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL), Peshawar, has well established crime scene investigating units for proper processing of scene of crime, but it does not cover whole Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province [http://www.kfpsl.gov.pk/contentid=163]. In Sindh province of Pakistan, crime scene investigation units are not yet available and crime scene processing is mostly done by the local policemen, however, significant efforts are being made by the local government in this regard.

4. Suggestions

In order to survive as crime-control agents and answer to a more vigilant society, police organizations must focus on comparatively testable and hence more reliable means such as material evidence and crime scene evidence. In addition it is critical for counterterrorism efforts in Pakistan that the evidence obtained from the crime scenes are well handled and preserved for downstream forensic laboratory examination so that identification process is accomplished.

PFSA, established merely more than a decade ago, being the only complete forensics setup in Pakistan is not sufficient to cover the 200 million population so it is a cry-need to develop more forensic labs at provisional level with their functional CSU via regional satellite station in every province. Though PFSA CSU is modernized and up-to date for effective processing of crime scene in case of any unfortunate incidence, it is further suggested that satellite stations of CSU must be established at each district of Pakistan for prompt and timely access at the scene.

Proper training of law enforcement agency prioritizing police force could prove a good strategy as first responders at the crime scene is highly important. It could have done by designating a department in police to such personnel’s which are trained in this respect.

Police must be provided with CSI vans supplemented with modern day forensics technology like evidence collection kits, UV flashlights, laser bullet trajectory devices, protective suits, latent print supplies, gunshot residue kits, blood stain evidence kits along with presumptive blood detection kits, potable and remote area lights among other equipment and supplies.

5. Conclusion

As technology progresses, criminals adopt new technologies more quickly and in innovative ways, especially digital technologies. Crime scene management and investigation are key parts in the criminal investigation process. Local police who handle crime scenes may not be familiar with the latest techniques in crime scene processing or have inadequate resources; this may result in contamination of evidence or loss of precious evidence material. There is an immediate need of crime scene investigation units in Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces of Pakistan. It is true that crime scene investigation units are now established in PFSA, Lahore and NFSA, Islamabad but due to large population size in Pakistan most of the crime scene processing is dealt by local policing who do not have proper equipment and training to process the scene according to forensic needs. Establishment of crime scene units at district level is required along with capacity building of the already established crime scene units in Pakistan for proper pursuit of justice.

Conflict of Interest

Author declare conflict of interest.

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