A Comparison of 1,600 Property Crime Cases from Miami, Florida and Charleston, South Carolina

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Abstract

According to The Federal Bureau of Investigation, there were an estimated 9 million property crimes in the United States in 2010. These crimes constituted an estimated $157 billion dollars worth of loss and damage. The Marshall University Forensic Science Center (MUFSC) worked on a property crime project in conjunction with the National Institute of Justice (NIJ). The project dealt with three sites or regions: Miami-Dade, Florida, the Lowcountry Region (Charleston area) of South Carolina and the Washington, DC region. The following poster focuses on two of these areas, Miami-Dade, Florida and the Lowcountry Region of South Carolina.

The Miami-Dade portion of this project consisted of 1,227 cases submitted. A total of 1,752 questioned samples were analyzed. Roughly 3.4 questioned samples were tested per case. In comparison, the Lowcountry Region submitted 382 cases with a total of 901 questioned samples. This equates to 2.5 questioned items submitted and analyzed per case.

The samples were collected and accessioned, the laboratory procedures were performed, and DNA profiles were obtained. These cases were then tracked through the adjudication process. For the cases from Miami-Dade, the Clerk of Court’s website was utilized to track adjudication. In contrast, to track adjudication for the Lowcountry Region of South Carolina, the submitting jurisdiction was contacted and they utilize their database to determine when the case was in the judicial system and what the result and sentence was, if any.

In Miami-Dade at the time of publication, roughly one hundred defendants had been sentenced to a total of 548 years in prison and 217+ years of probation. The court fines totaled over $75,000 and restitution equaled to more than $442,000. The Lowcountry Region of South Carolina had similar sentences. In South Carolina, approximately eighty defendants have been sentenced to a total of 411+ years in prison and 121+ years of probation. In South Carolina, no restitution was sentenced and due to the method of adjudication collection, the court fines were not tracked for this portion of the project.

Discussion

Blood produced the largest amount of DNA profiles with greater than 90%. Touch-prints of the saliva samples produced a DNA profile. Touch samples resulted in roughly one out of three producing a DNA profile. It was expected that this amount would produce the highest percentage of resultant DNA profiles followed by saliva and blood. These samples generally produced a DNA profile with a three or more pattern. In the Miami-Dade category, one could determine that the higher than hypothesized amount of results produced were because many samples were not just touch samples. These samples include items like hats that are in direct contact with a person also and may also contain sweat.

Each specific site determined their own number of samples submitted for each case. Miami-Dade averaged 1.43 questioned samples per case submitted. Charleston, South Carolina averaged 2.36 questioned samples per case submitted. No pattern was seen regarding the number of questioned samples submitted per case and the percentage of DNA profiles being submitted. Submitting more or less samples was not relevant to producing DNA profiles as the actual biological substances being sampled and submitted.

Out of the number of samples submitted, Miami-Dade had 56.5% of its submitted cases result in DNA profiles. Charleston, South Carolina had a higher rate of DNA results at 62.07%.

It was noted that all offenders were guilty of committing more than one property crime. As a result, many plea to one case and the other cases were wrapped into the plea deal. When it came to cases that resulted in prison time, 90.4% of the Miami-Dade cases that had been adjudicated and 87.1% of the Lowcountry Region cases that had been adjudicated were a result of a guilty plea. To the best of the authors’ knowledge, only four cases went through to court and all of them ended up in a conviction. In all, at the time of completion of this poster, approximately ninety defendants in the Lowcountry Region had been sentenced to a total of 451 years, 25 months, and 28 days of imprisonment. Also, the sentences resulted in 121 years and 217+ years of probation. In South Carolina, no restitution was sentenced and due to the method of adjudication collection, the court fines were not tracked for this category. In all, at the time of publication, roughly one hundred defendants in Miami-Dade had been sentenced to a total of 548 years, 7 months and 16 days in prison and 217+ years of probation. The court fines totaled over $75,000 and restitution equaled to more than $442,000.

Acknowledgements

MUFSC would also like to thank the following organizations for their cooperation:

Miami-Dade, Florida:
Forensic Services Bureau Commander Stephanie Stoloff and the Crime Scene Section at the Miami-Dade Police Department

Charleston, South Carolina:
Forensic Services Director Judith Gordon and the Charleston Police Department, The South Carolina State Law Enforcement Division, The Lowcountry Regional Property Crimes DNA Initiative, The National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center – South Carolina, The Charleston County Sheriff’s Office, North Charleston Police Department, and The Mount Pleasant Police Department

Literature Cited


