

Missing Women Commission of Inquiry

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Vancouver, BC
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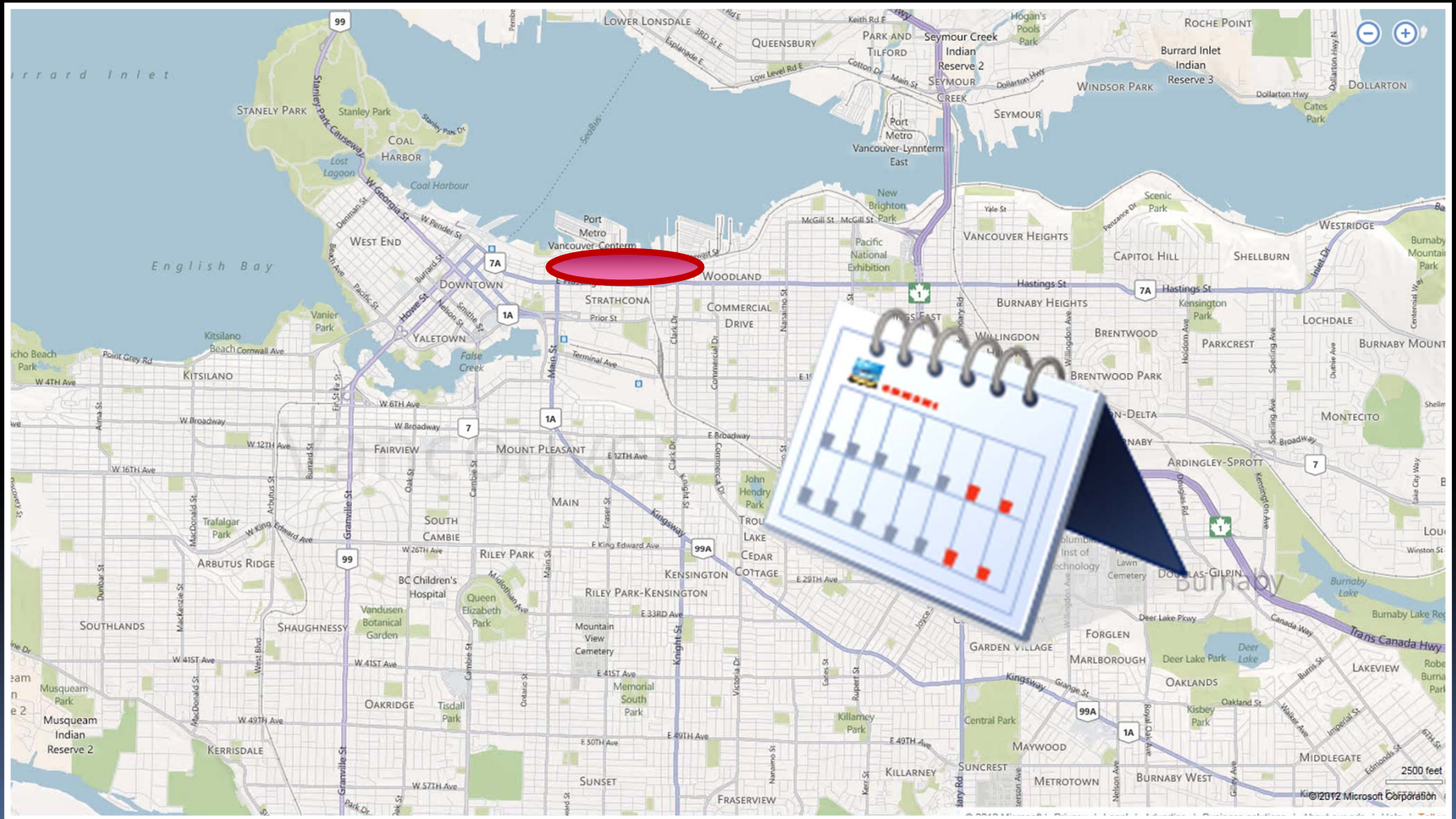


1999 Analysis

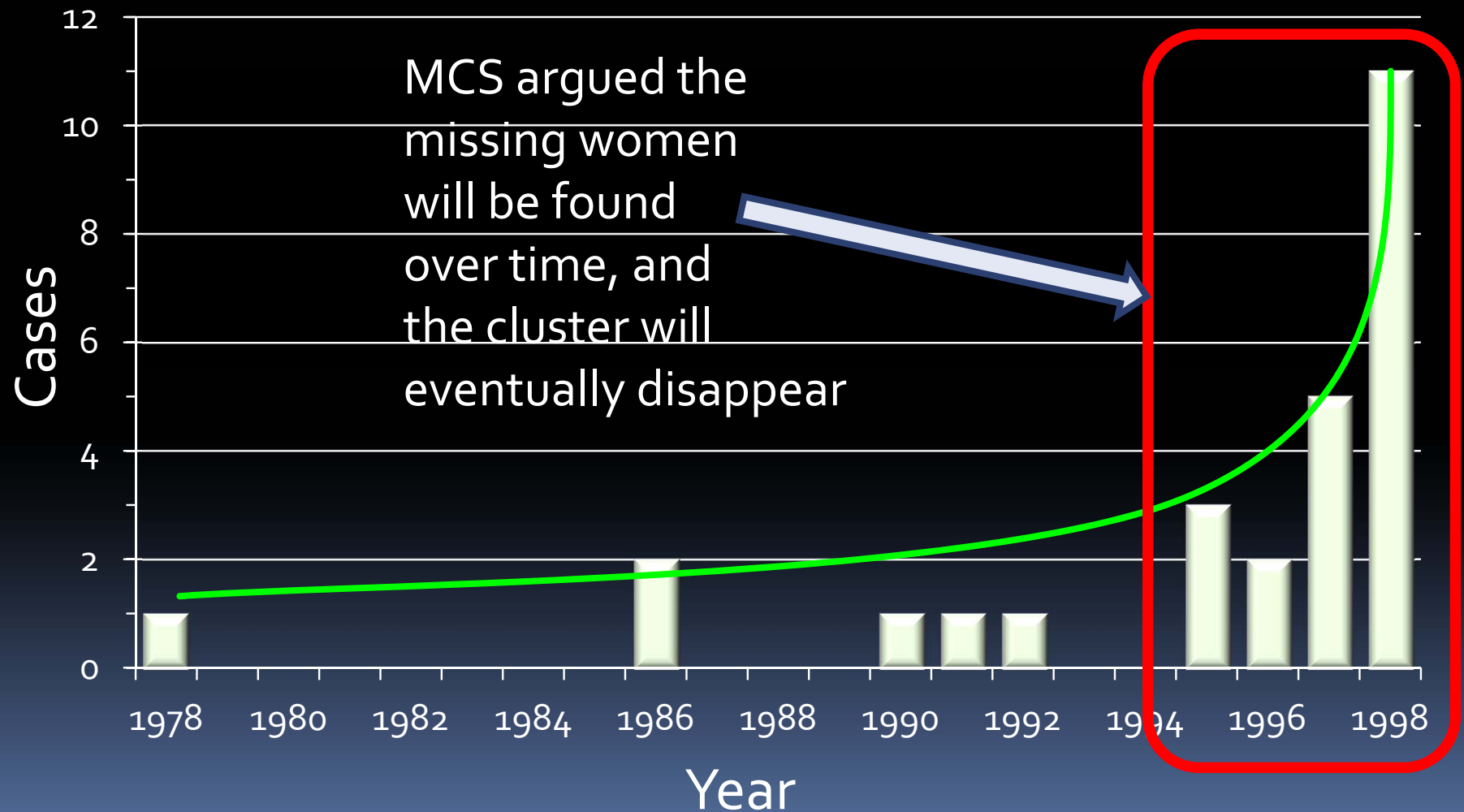
Missing Women

- In 1998, community activists reported a number of missing women to patrol officers of the Vancouver Police Department
- The women were all sex trade workers who worked the Low Track area; about half of them were First Nations people
- As of early 1999, there were 27 women on the VPD list of known missing women

Spatial-Temporal Cluster



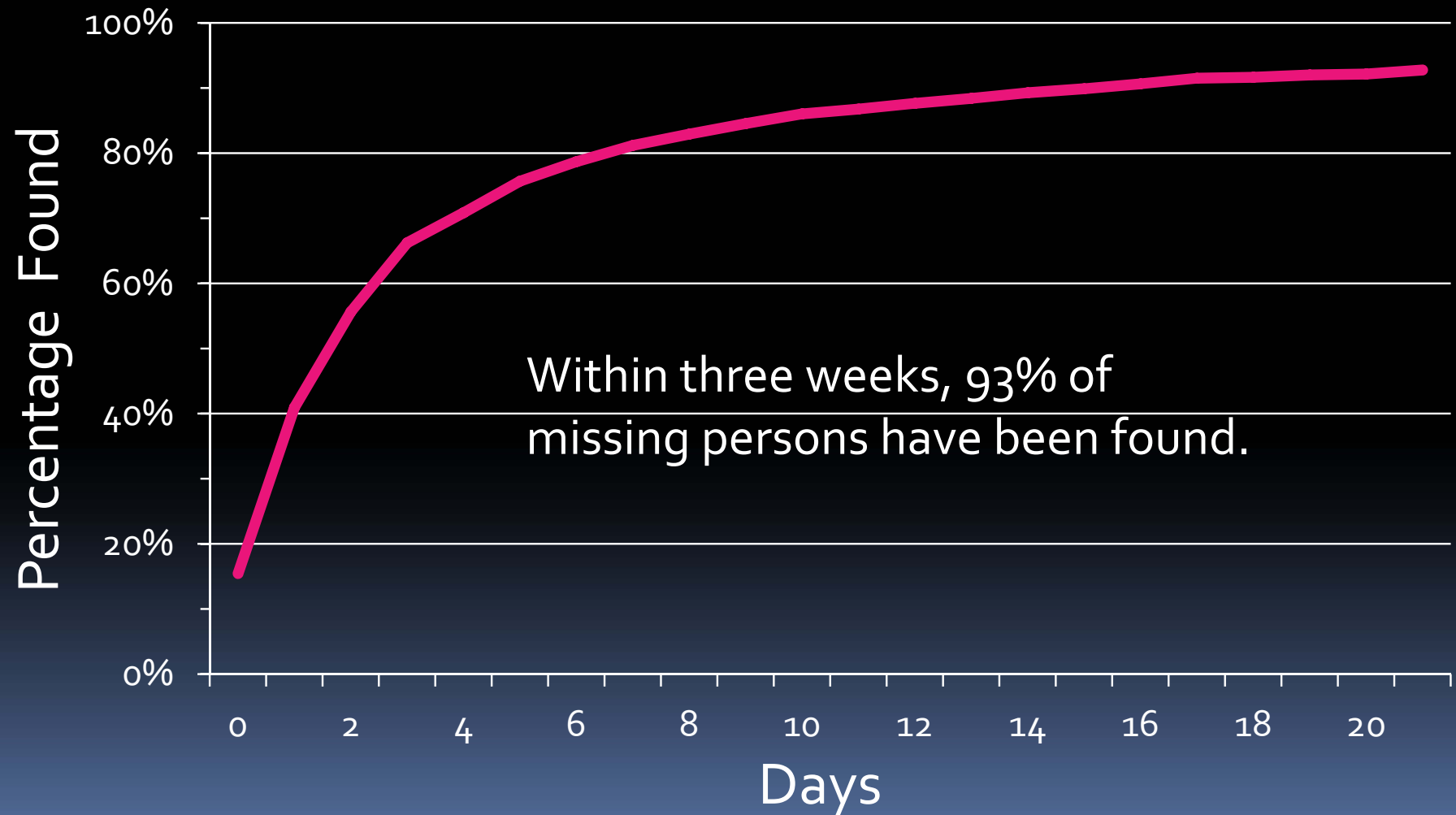
Downtown Eastside Missing Persons: 1978-1998



Length of Time Missing



Missing Persons Found over Time



Analytic Questions

Why have so many sex trade workers from one area disappeared in a short time period?

- Why now and not before?
- Why only women, not men?
- Why in Vancouver and not elsewhere?
- Why no bodies?

Major Crime Section Theories

- Missing (and can be found)
- Pimp murders
- Drug murders
- Drug overdoses
- Sudden deaths (hospital records)

None of these theories explained the large number of women missing from the DTES

So What Went Wrong?

No one wants a killer to go free,
or a murder victim to be unavenged

But would the same thing have
happened if these women had gone
missing from Vancouver's West Side?

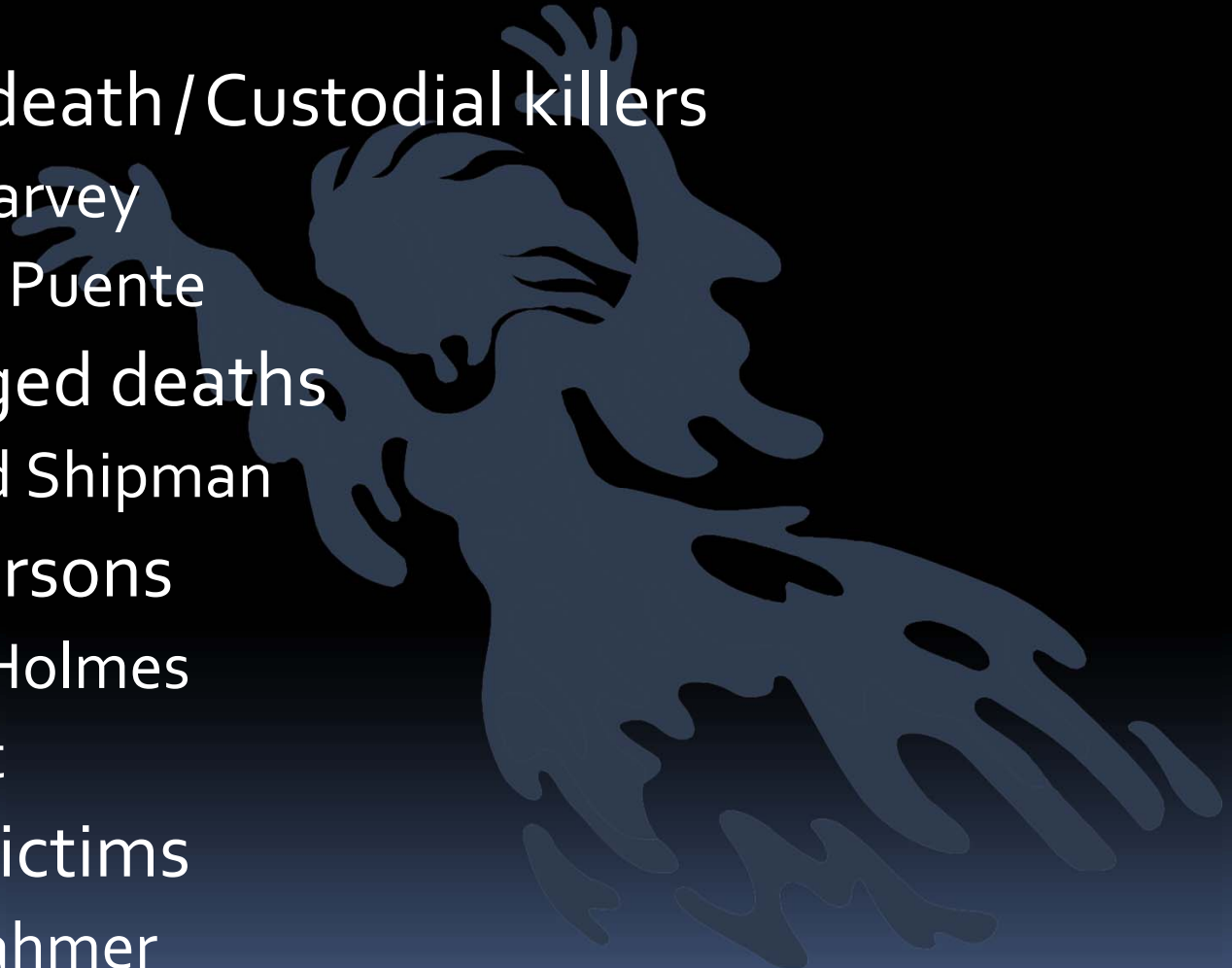
No

Investigative Difficulties

1. Victims were sex trade workers
2. Victims' bodies were not discovered
3. Victims murdered in a different police jurisdiction from where they went missing

Stealth Predators

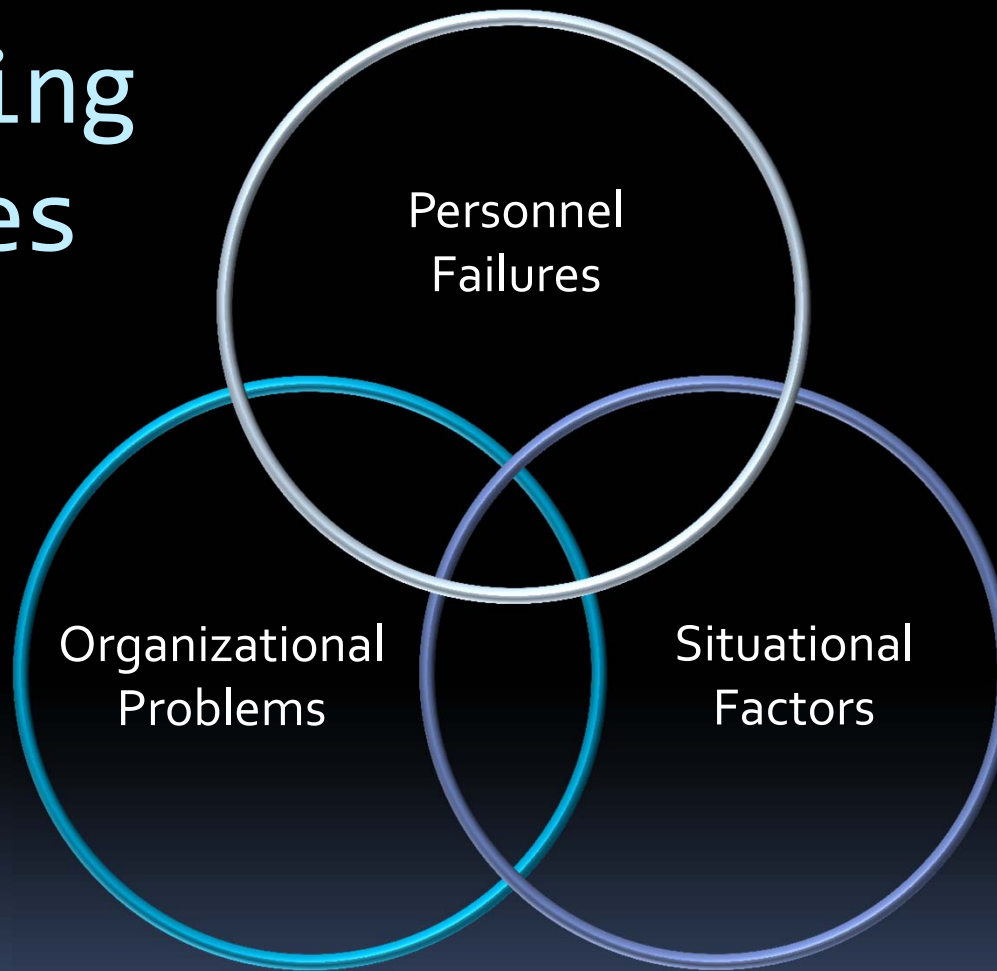
- Angels of death / Custodial killers
 - Donald Harvey
 - Dorothea Puente
- Camouflaged deaths
 - Dr. Harold Shipman
- Missing persons
 - Dr. H. H. Holmes
 - Fred West
- Marginal victims
 - Jeffrey Dahmer
 - John Wayne Gacy



Investigative Breaks

- Pickton was identified as a prime suspect early in the investigation
- Pickton was a prolific serial killer
- Pickton was not very smart
- There was a surviving victim
- There were witnesses to Pickton's crimes
- Pickton left physical evidence in plain view in his home

Framework: Analyzing Failures



Most investigative failures involve multiple causes

Personnel Failures

Personnel failures are individual-level problems; these often involve poor decision making or flawed judgment

- Did detectives have the necessary knowledge, experience, and training?
- Did personnel follow correct procedures and legal requirements?
- Did investigators logically analyze the evidence, or was too much weight placed on “gut feelings” and the opinions of a few personalities?
- Were distinctions made between assumptions, hypotheses, and facts?
- Did detectives suffer from cognitive biases (tunnel vision)?
- Did investigators move too quickly from following the evidence to chasing suspects?

Personnel Failures

- Did personnel suffer from stress, undue pressure, or lack of sleep?
- Were there problems of incompetence or laziness?
- Did investigators understand the correct implications of case uncertainties and evidence probabilities?
- Did detectives exhibit problematic ego or stubbornness?
- Were experts consulted as required?
- Did personnel fail to share information or cooperate with others?
- Were supervisors and managers kept properly informed of the investigation's progress and difficulties, and did they fully understand all the problems and challenges?

Organizational Problems

Organizational problems are those inherent in the structure, procedures, policies, training, or resources of the police agency

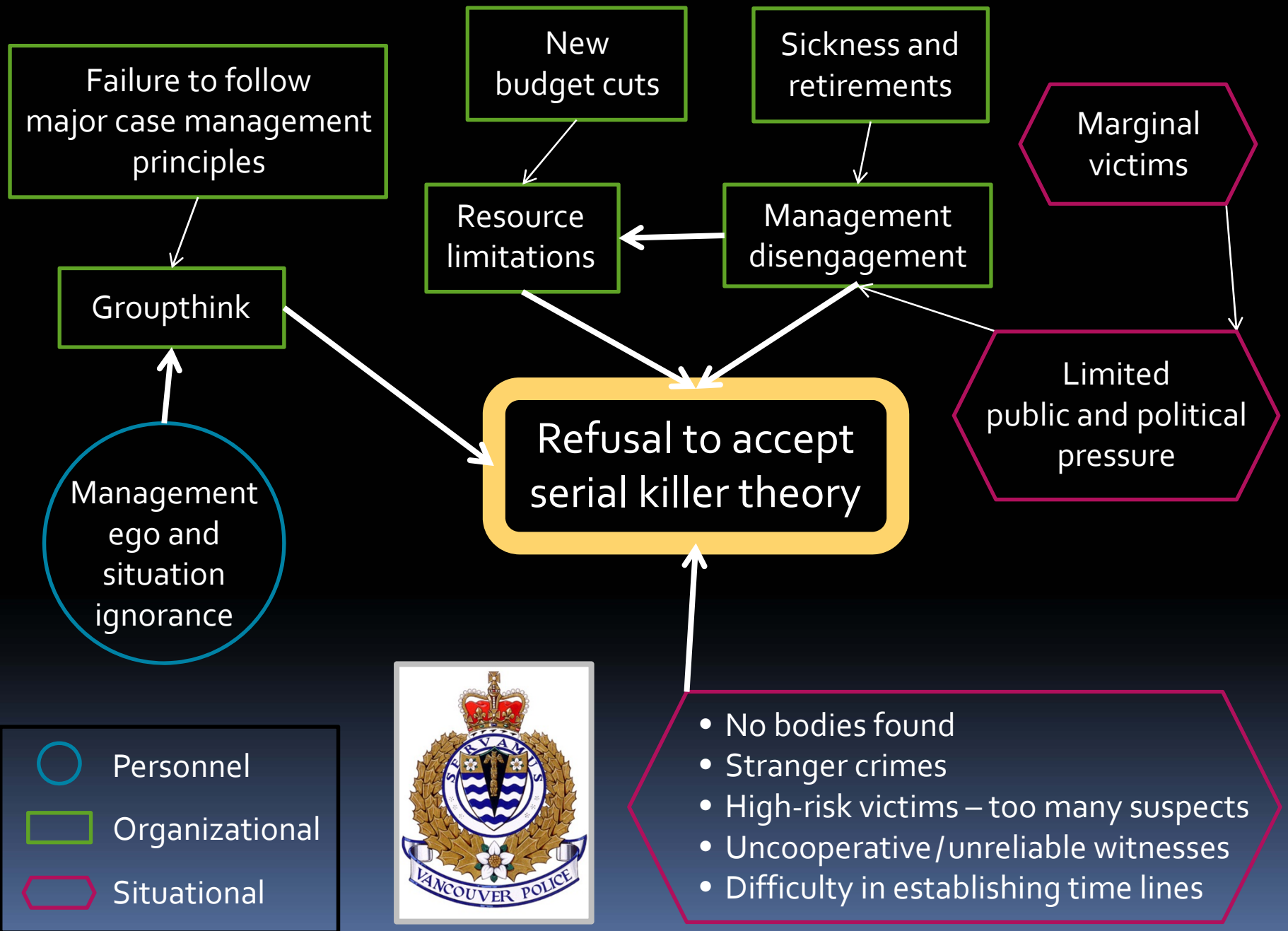
- Were there overlapping police jurisdictions and unclear responsibilities?
- Were the proper people selected for the investigation?
- Were there sufficient resources (personnel, equipment, support) to properly and fully investigate the crime and its suspects?
- Were there problems with the organization's policies or procedures?
- Did groupthink occur?
- Was the investigation properly supervised and management engaged?
- Did personnel transfer or replacement practices cause problems?
- Were there internal conflicts or conflicts between agencies?
- Does agency culture value justice and law, or "getting the bad guy"?

Situational Factors

Situational factors are external to the control of police or government; they are often characteristics of the crime

- What was the offender-victim relationship?
- What was the investigative difficulty of the crime?
- Did any victim, witness, informant, media, or community factors create investigative challenges?
- Did chance or bad luck play a role?

The role of situational factors should be understood, but they should not become excuses for investigative deficiencies



PUHU
situation
ignorance

Resource
limitations

Suspect
tunnel
vision

Marginal
victims

Limited
public and political
pressure

Groupthink

Transfer of
key investigator

Failure to properly
investigate Pickton

Divided
jurisdictions &
responsibilities,
poor coordination

- No bodies found
- Uncooperative /unreliable witnesses
- Difficulty in establishing time lines



What About Next Time?

Because there will be a next time....

MWCI Terms of Reference

- Inquire into and make findings respecting the conduct of the missing women investigations
- Recommend changes respecting the initiation and conduct of investigations of missing women and suspected multiple homicides
- Recommend changes respecting homicide investigations by more than one investigating organization, including their coordination

Investigative Difficulties

1. Victims were sex trade workers

- ❑ The victims' marginal social status minimized political and community pressure and allowed police management to remain disengaged
- ❑ Some police investigators and managers did not properly understand the lifestyle of these victims, and did not consult or listen to those who did

Street Prostitution is Dangerous

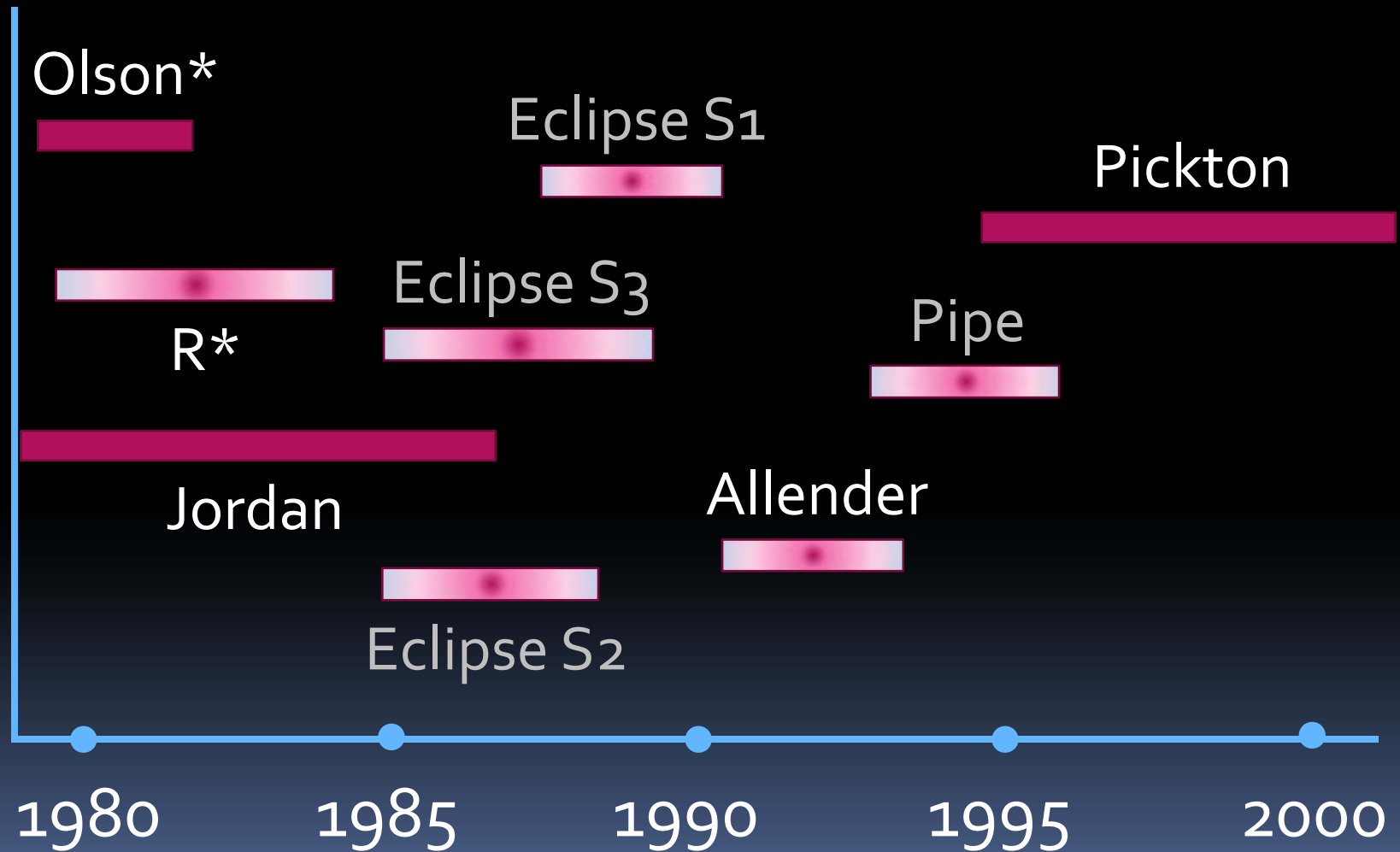
- Overall murder risk rate estimated in Vancouver at approximately 100 times greater than average
- One study of serial murder in the US showed 39% of victims were known prostitutes
 - Mean number of victims was 6
 - Offenders active for 3 to 4 years
- Project Eclipse examined the murders of 25 women, 15 of whom were prostitutes from Vancouver killed from 1985 to 1991

Vancouver Serial Killers

- Clifford Olson* (1980-1981)
- Gilbert Jordon (1980-1987)
- R* (early 1980s)
- Project Eclipse series 2 (1985-1988)
- Project Eclipse series 3 (1985-1989)
- Project Eclipse series 1 (1988-1990)
- Brian Allender (1992)
- Pipe, Olajide, Younker (Lidguerre, Spence?) (1995)
- Robert Pickton (1995-2001)

* Not prostitute murders

Vancouver Serial Killers



Possible Solutions

1. Victims were sex trade workers

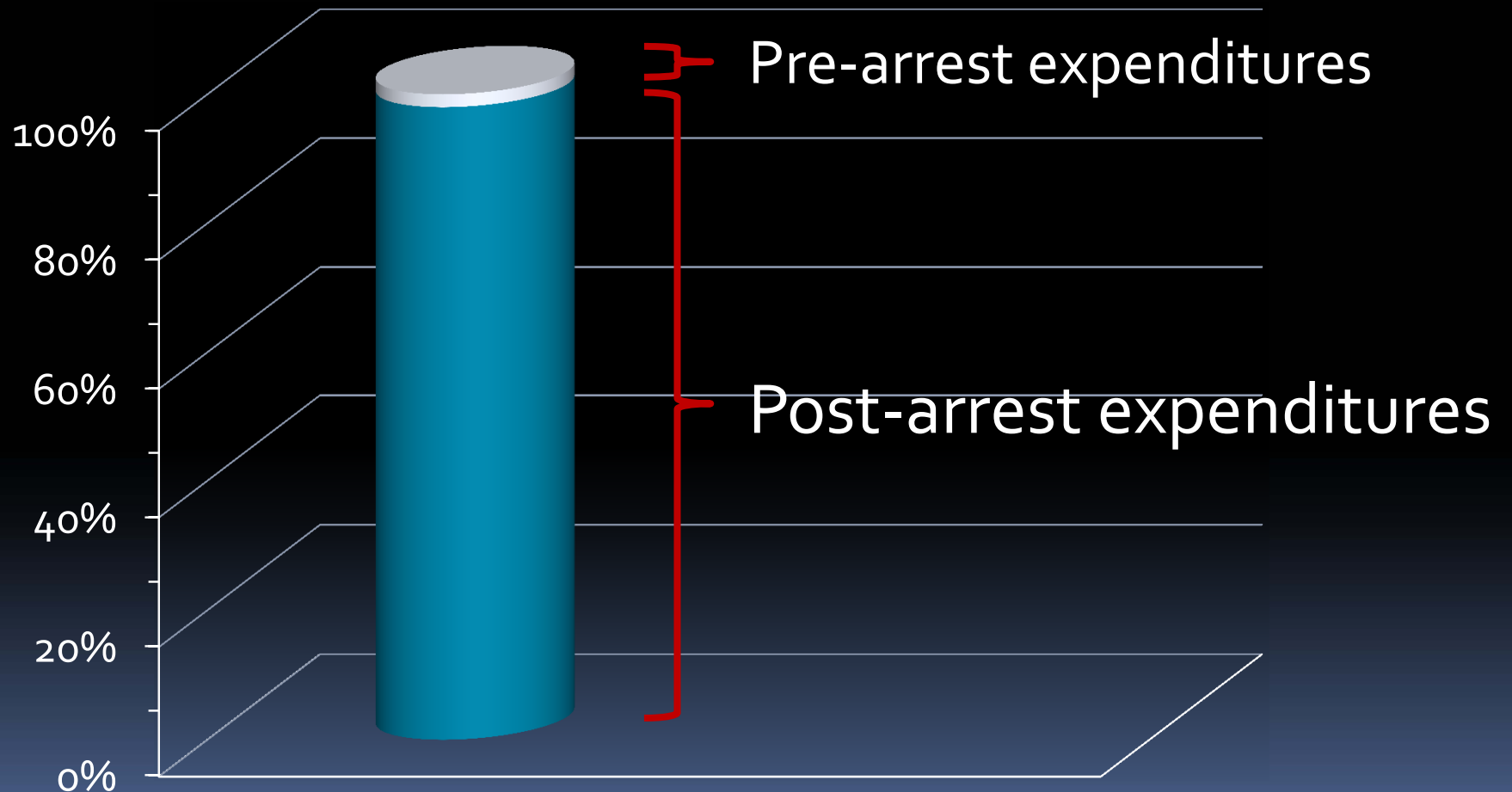
- Training in the background, life, behavior, and dangers of sex trade workers
- Consultation with police officers who have experience with the victims and the area
- Better communication with sex trade workers
- Proper supervision and management
(Major Case Management Principles)

Investigative Difficulties

2. Victims' bodies not discovered

- ❑ The failure to find any bodies permitted police management to delay committing to the serial murder scenario
- ❑ In turn, this allowed them to avoid spending the resources needed for this type of investigation

Investigation Cost Breakdown



Possible Solutions

2. Victims' bodies not discovered

- Better investigation of missing person reports
- Provincial missing persons database
- Analyses of case trends, patterns, and potential problems
- Risk-based response (investigative onus shift)

Investigative Difficulties

3. Victims were murdered in a different police jurisdiction from where they went missing
 - ❑ This jurisdictional split allowed both the VPD and the RCMP to avoid responsibility
 - ❑ The problem was exacerbated by the lack of bodies

British Columbia *Police Act*

The provincial police force/municipal police department ... must perform the duties and functions respecting

- the preservation of peace
- the prevention of crime and offences against the law
- the administration of justice

Possible Solutions

3. Victims murdered in a different police jurisdiction from where they went missing
 - Metropolitan Vancouver Police Department
 - Formal protocols for investigative coordination
 - Political and legal institution of mutual accountability and responsibility
 - Procedures to prevent such cases from falling between the cracks

Government Needs to Act on MWCI Recommendations

- Campbell Inquiry Report (1996)
- Green River analysis (1993)
- RCMP Olson case review (mid-1980s)
- Byford Report (1981)