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## Large-Scale Forensic Investigations into the Missing: Challenges and Considerations

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### Highlights

- Challenges and considerations in managing complex forensic investigations.
- Dealing with the dead and missing from mass violence and disaster contexts.
- Addressing cultural beliefs of the affected society regarding the dead and missing.
- Forensic investigations within prescribed political, economic and time constraints.
- Large-scale vs. small-scale forensic investigations.

### Abstract:

Large-scale forensic investigations may follow episodes of mass violence and disasters where hundreds or thousands of people have died or are missing. A number of unique challenges for forensic science, different from domestic investigations, arise in these contexts. The setting and situation of these investigations regularly force forensic scientists into practices not regularly encountered while working in a standard criminal justice system. These practices can entail activities not specific to a practitioner's particular field or necessarily be scientific in nature, but are still needed in order for the investigation to move forward. These activities can include (1) establishing the number of and who exactly is missing after mass violence and disaster, (2) the creation of working protocols to deal with the scale of the loss of life that often overwhelm domestic practices and institutions, (3) negotiating the form that the investigation will take with various stakeholders, (4) addressing cultural beliefs of the affected society regarding the dead and missing, and (5) working within prescribed economic, political, and time constraints, among others. Forensic scientific responses to these challenges have proven to be flexible, innovative, and continually evolving.

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