The Independent Civilian Review into Missing Persons Investigation

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Missing Persons: Identifying Best Practice, Training and Research Needs

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Disclaimer: Opinions represented in this document are those held by the author and do not represent the views of the Review.

Dr. Karen Shalev Greene is the founder and director of the [Centre for the Study of Missing Persons (CSMP)](). The Centre is based at the Institute of Criminal Justice Studies at the University of Portsmouth, UK. Recognising how under researched this area is, the aim in founding the Centre was to create a centre of excellence which will be a resource for practitioners as well as academics.

Since its foundation in 2012, staff at the centre developed research that is applied and used to improve policy and practice by law enforcement agencies, government agencies, and non-government agencies in the UK and internationally. While focusing on missing persons as a subject area, studies are carried out in all areas relevant to missing persons. This includes a wide range of topics. Dr Shalev Greene collaborates with academics and practitioners from the UK and internationally and she is the lead editor for the book Missing Persons: A Handbook of Research.

Given the body of work, the new centre offers a variety of courses regarding missing person which are open to practitioners and members of the public at different levels of study. For example, an option module on our full-time undergraduate courses, an option module on our distance learning postgraduate courses, a standalone distance learning short course which is accredited on a postgraduate level, and supervision for professional doctorate or PhD students.

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Executive Summary

'Missing persons' is a relatively new and a growing field of research, even though people have gone missing throughout human history. The bible as well as the new testament depict such incidents, for example, in the story of Moses (Exodus 2 verses 12-15) and the Parable of the Lost Son (Luke 15: 11- 32). In many ways the study of missing persons is the study of people. It relates to individuals from all countries, all ages and all walks of life.

The focus of this report is on adults who go missing. This area has received much less academic attention than missing children[1]. The report explores existing academic literature, policies and practices from a variety of countries, although most of the material explored in this report is from the UK. This is because it is the country of residence of the author and her familiarity with the material is greater. It is also because most of the academic material in this field has been published by authors from the UK. Inevitably, there will be material which is published elsewhere or is outside the awareness of the author. Therefore, this report is not claiming to be exhaustive of all literature regarding missing adults.

Following the aims of the Review the report is divided into three broad sections and will examine:

1. Best practices in defining a missing person in cases involving missing adults.
2. Best practices in the risk assessment for missing adults.
3. Best practices of police organisational responses to missing person investigations involving missing adults.

The discussion below will also identify gaps in knowledge and highlight specific needs for training and future research.

Below is a summary of key recommendations:

Best Practice

➤ Consideration should be given as to whether a missing person definition should be law or policy.
➤ There ought to be a discussion regarding the cut-off-age for a missing child/adult.
➤ Missing person investigations should be considered a priority and understood as a complex type of investigation that can escalate into a serious crime enquiry.
➤ There should be a single definition for a missing person regardless of age.
➤ The definition of a missing person should hold a common currency across different sectors, such as law enforcement agencies, Social Services, Health Services, etc.
➤ In order to ensure consistency across Canada, there should be a national definition of a missing person that all provinces abide by.

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[1] Taylor, C., Woolnough, P. S & Dickens G. L (2019). Adult missing persons: a concept analysis, Psychology, Crime & Law, 25:4, 396-419, DOI: 10.1080/1068316X.2018.1529230

- The definition of a missing person should clarify the difference between missing and absconding or going AWOL (absence without leave can be from several places, including military, open prisons, mental health units, etc.).
- The definition of a missing person should be embedded or followed by a framework or a policy which clarifies the role of the police in response to missing persons reports.
- There should be a debate about the components of a definition of a missing person. It should include an acknowledgment of risk of harm to and vulnerability of the missing person. There should not be time delay in making a missing person report to law enforcement agencies if initial efforts to locate the person have been unsuccessful by the reporting individual.
- Policies relating to missing persons should be linked to homicide investigations, domestic violence, forced marriage, sexual exploitation, human trafficking, abductions, asylum seekers and illegal immigration.
- The framework or policy should clarify the duty of care of each agency when a person goes missing and was in care or guardianship of other agencies of the state such as hospitals, mental health units, care facilities, etc.
- There should be a national competent administrative authority which will be responsible for centralising requests for tracing missing persons, collating information, sending out instructions for a search to be made and supervising the search.
- Police forces should ensure there are clear methods of contact in place to share information in relation to missing persons and there is a clear process to transfer the management and supervision of missing person reports between forces.
- Each Police force should have a nominated senior and easily identifiable strategic and tactical leads for missing person investigation work with clearly stated roles, responsibilities, and lines of accountability.
- Ownership of a missing person case should sit with the Duty Inspector (or similar rank). Importantly, this should lead to a genuine critical review of the risk assessment at each shift handover.
- On a force level, there should be a specialist missing person unit and/or missing person coordinator that will be staffed by experienced officers who receive appropriate training and adequate allocation of resources. They should review investigations done on a local level and offer support to investigators when requested or when a case is open for more than 72 hours.
- On a force level, there should be Police officers or Family Liaison Officers who communicate with families and/or members of the community regularly informing them how the investigation is progressing. If resources allow, these police officers should be trained specialists.
- The effectiveness of High / Medium / Low risk ratings should be reviewed, and a different scale should also be considered.
- A detailed guidance for risk assessment should be developed. This should include a common understanding of what harm is, in the context of missing persons.
- Current case management systems should be updated. When case management systems are able to record detailed harm information (e.g person reported being kicked by a passer-by while sleeping rough, or person was visibly shaking and crying when attended to by officers and had bruises and cuts on their arms), it could result in improved submissions of statistics locally, regionally and nationally and therefore, begin to further our knowledge about different types of harm across Canada.

- For the continuation of knowledge that can be gained from a quantitative approach, a large dataset, on a province wide or national level, is required in order to examine the variability and nuance within missing adult cases. Unless there is a single system from which big data can be obtained or where all the differing police systems can produce the same sort of information, there will remain challenges for examining cases of missing adults.
- There needs to be appropriate documentation of an adult's missing history and relevant demographic background. Knowledge of these demographic factors could help us learn more about the impact this may have on potential harm during subsequent episodes.
- Current missing person reporting forms should be updated, so that the whole document becomes the basis of an evidence informed risk assessment. Such a form should allow investigators to drill down into applicable factors, and it could bring consistency to risk reporting in a manageable format that allows the information to be assessed as the investigation progresses and compared to other cases.
- If not in existence already, efforts should be made to develop a national/province-wide information sharing tool, such as an electronic newsletter, that will celebrate positive outcomes of cases and best practices, as well as learning opportunities from cases that were problematic. See Learning the Lessons, as an example.
- There ought to be some consideration as to how successfully externally, and internally generated information can flow into and through Police forces in order to ensure new policies and relevant new research are read and understood by front line officers.
- Front line officers should have at hand manuals with clear operational definitions and guidelines.
- Families of missing persons, like victims of crime, may also benefit from getting an assessment to find out what support they need, and have their details passed to organisations that provide help and support
- Authorities should invest time in building communications and trust between those investigating the case and the relatives or friends of the missing persons. If relevant, this should be done by a police officer or civilian staff whose role is dedicated to working with families and has received training in the specific needs of families of missing persons.
- Where appropriate authorities should explore with families and friends' ways of promoting publicity to cases that do not receive much media attention. Stillman's (2007) suggested methods could be communicated to families and friends and as this will offer them an opportunity to be active and involved in the search for their loved ones.
- Authorities in charge of conducting and managing search activities should be sensitive to the needs of the families and the community and where appropriate involve them in search activities.
- The right to be forgotten or similar legislation should be put in place to allow adults whose identity was exposed in a publicity appeal regain their privacy and anonymity upon their return.

Training

➢ Front line officers should receive training in the definition, framework and roles and responsibilities of the Police in general and of missing person investigations in particular.

➢ Officers should receive training about an updated IT system so that they can use it consistently within forces and between forces.

➢ Officers should receive training in risk factors as that will improve overall attitude toward missing person investigation and understand the context of disappearances.

➢ A harm framework should be incorporated in training programmes. Training would better prepare officers to recognise different types of harm and issues around mental health in order to help to protect a missing adult when they are located.

➢ Training should include discussion about the needs of the families, friends and community and best practices in managing expectations and improving forms of communication.

➢ Training should emphasise the links between missing persons and other potentially associated investigations to ensure that staff ask the relevant questions at the reporting stage and during the investigation.

Future Research

➢ Future research should break down the definition of a missing person into each component and ask staff from law enforcement agencies to respond in more precise terms as to whether they approve of it or not. It may also be useful to ask participants from various agencies to choose from a variety of missing person definitions and explain their choice.

➢ There should be a collation of all the evidence relating to risk of missing adults (and children) into a single guide to be used to support decision making. The evidence does not necessarily require statistical prediction but should be made up of empirically based statements about risk factors.

➢ Further research should explore Canadian officers' attitude towards missing person investigations and identify key challenges that they face.

➢ It may be useful to compare officers' attitudes to current risk assessment practices between Police forces as attitudes may vary and reflect different practices across jurisdictions. It should also be used to identify key challenges officers face in delivery of service.

➢ Certain missing person vulnerability indicators have had little previous research such as autism, intellectual impairment, experiencing a relationship split or those facing allegations of sexual offences. There should also be an exploration of whether sexual minorities, homeless, racial minorities and migrants are at greater risks of harm as well.

➢ It is important to ascertain whether people who go missing from home, hospitals, mental health units, care facilities are at varying levels of risk of harm.

➢ In any study of risk factors, there also needs to be an identification of protective factors. These are factors that may prevent people from going missing in the first place or ones that prevent them from coming to harm. For example, a person with dementia living with someone and having fulltime care at home so that if they go missing they

will be reported to authorities very quickly. This issue has not received much attention within the academic study of missing persons and warrants additional study.

➢ Following on from the success of projects that interviewed missing adults, there needs to be further projects where the voice of the missing adult is heard to enable further understanding about risk and protective factors from their perspective.

➢ Future research should establish the cost of a missing person investigation in Canada as well as wider social costs involved with missing incidents.

➢ Future research should explore in more depth the portrayal of missing person in the media and identify biases and stereotypes. The content of media reports is also important to understand in order to tackle biases in publicity appeals.

➢ Future research should examine the effectiveness of publicity appeals in Canada and identify which methods of publicity (poster, social media, press, etc) lead to the best sightings and resolution of cases.

➢ Future research should examine the short- and long-term impact of publicity appeals on missing adults.

1   Best practices in defining a missing person in cases involving missing adults

Prof. Jenny Edkins contends that 'missing' is always in relation to those who know the people being reported and are concerned for their well-being and want to know their whereabouts (Edkins, 2011)[2]. Stevenson, Parr, Woolnough & Fyfe (2013)[3] found that unless adults are lost, injured or are a victim of abduction they are unlikely to identify themselves as a missing person. Therefore, being reported and recorded as a missing person should be recognised as a label, which is generated for the purpose of classification and response by agencies.

Before we begin our discussion into the appropriate responses to a missing person report, it is important to consider that while such assignment to a category may lead to positive action in search and investigation, the label can also have negative connotations. All of the sudden family and friends witness their loved one being 'reduced' into a two-dimensional image on a poster or a name in a file. This experience can be very stressful and its negative effect on them can be negated by authorities when they invest time in building communication and trust between those investigating the case and the relatives and friends of the missing person. Families and friends require reassurances that those in charge of investigating the case are interested in the missing person and take the circumstances of the disappearance as seriously as they do without prejudice. Police must engage with the families and friends with respect

2 Edkins, J. (2011). Missing: Persons and politics. Cornell University Press.
3 Stevenson, O., Parr, H., Woolnough, P., and Fyfe, N. (2013). Geographies of Missing People: Processes, Experiences, Responses. Project Report. University of Glasgow, Glasgow, UK.

and dignity[4], keep them updated about any developments in the case or explain why the investigation cannot progress and may be reviewed at a later date as a 'cold case'[5].

1.1   A missing person definition

Despite the fact that people go missing in every country, there is no singular definition of a missing person. Countries such as Cyprus, Denmark, France, Greece and Spain do not provide any official definition of a missing person. Thus, it is up to law enforcement agencies to decide whether and under what circumstances a certain case should be considered a missing person (European Commission, 2013)[6]. The International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (ICMEC) advocates for a UN Convention definition, explaining that the lack of a common understanding leads to the absence of a comprehensive framework, which leads to the absence of a coordinated and standardised approach to the registration, identification, investigation and location of missing persons cases[7].

This concern is also relevant once a missing person is found or identified. For example, in cases of international child abduction or human trafficking, the response by law enforcement or government agencies (in the country of origin and country of destination) may differ greatly, making it very difficult, at times, to investigate and resolve cases. Furthermore, when a person has died while missing in a country other than their own, their relatives must deal with different systems, procedures, and customs than those used in their country of

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[4] Missing Persons Act, 2018, S.O. 2018, ch.3, Sched. 7- Preamble

[5] For more information about impact of missing on families see Holmes (2008), Holmes (2016), Boss (2000, 2006, 2017).

[6] EU Commission (2013). Missing Children in the European Union. Mapping, data collection and statistics. Retrieved on 8.11.19 from, *ec.europa.eu/justice/fundamental-rights/files/missing_children_study_2013_en.pdf*

[7] https://www.icmec.org/global-missing-childrens-center/the-definition-of-missing/

residence. This can lead to much anxiety and frustration for families and enhance their experience of helplessness[8]. The lack of consensus also makes it difficult to gage the extent of the problem in each country and develop initiatives to prevent people from going missing and support them if and when they are found.

When discussing the concept of the definition of a missing person, there are three key questions that must be considered: (1) should a missing person definition be law or policy? (2) Is the missing person phenomena a welfare or penal system issue? (3) What should be the components of the definition?[9]

Should a missing person definition be law or policy?

Due to the absence of a UN definition, various countries have established their own definition either within their laws or organisation's policies. These definitions reflect a national context and cultural and social influences that are unique to each country. Most countries do not seem to have a binding legal definition of what constitutes a missing person. Definitions are provided in law in Cambodia, Estonia, Hungary, Ireland, Guatemala, Russia, South Korea, United States of America, etc. However, the legislation varies in scope. For example, Canada has provincial legislation[1011] rather than federal as in the USA[12]. Most definitions are provided

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[8] Apps, J. (2017). Missing abroad. In K. Shalev Greene & L. Alys (eds) Missing persons: A handbook of research (pp. 181-187). London: Routledge.

[9] Please note that the discussion about the definition of a missing person is adapted from Shalev Greene, Hayler & Pritchard (2019). A House Divided Against Itself Cannot Stand: Evaluating Police Perception of UK Missing Person Definition. *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10610-019-09428-0

[10] For the definition of a missing person in Ontario see S.1(2) of Ontario's Missing Person's Act S.O. 2018 c.3 Sch 7

[1111] For the definition of a missing person in Saskatchewan see part 2.1 S. 14.1 of The Missing Persons and Presumption of Death Amendment Act, *2018*.

[12] Missing children's assistance Act of 2018.

in police regulations or policy (for example, Belgium, Bulgaria, Costa Rica, Malaysia, Latvia, Philippines, Poland, Singapore, United Kingdom, etc) (EC, 2013; ICMEC, 2011, 2016a, 2016b).

The EC report (2013) recommends that the definition of a missing child (person) should be enacted in a legally binding law. However, the choice whether a definition is written in law or policy does not seem to reflect a difference in quality of response to a missing person report, only a preference of where the definition lies. What is a key issue to consider, and one which the EC report highlighted is that the definition should hold a common currency across different sectors, including the judiciary, border agencies, care institutions and welfare organisations. In order to ensure consistency and transparency the definition of a missing person has to be embedded or followed by a framework or a policy which details what is expected from law enforcement agencies responding to the report and that front-line police officers should have at hand manuals with clear operational definitions and guidelines.

Is the missing person phenomena welfare or penal system issue?

As discussed by Shalev Greene et al. (2019) [13], missing persons is a phenomenon impacting people from every walk of life, regardless of background or geographical borders. In order to act in response to this issue systematically and on a national level, it must first be recognised as a social 'problem' by political actors followed by motivation or pressure to act. The activities of the state seek to enhance the welfare of its citizens through diversion of resources

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[13] Shalev Greene, Hayler & Pritchard (2019). A House Divided Against Itself Cannot Stand: Evaluating Police Perception of UK Missing Person Definition. *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10610-019-09428-0

to and the promotion of care of dependent groups (Hobbs & Hamerton, 2014)[14]. However, there are likely to be conflicting opinions of the nature of the 'problem' and the perceived solutions. The decision whether to apply a social welfare or a criminal justice solution and/or medicalised solution is a political one that reflects a combination of ideological preferences and pragmatic considerations (Hobbs & Hamerton, 2014).

Some western countries, such as UK, have seen a rise over past few decades of the penal state, in which penal provisions are given precedence over social provisions, and the behaviour of everyday life being criminalised and the solution or policy is criminal justice led. Thus, implementing the policy will involve law enforcement agencies and perhaps the courts and the probation service.

Missing person is a perfect example of this tension between the two provisions. This is because the standardisation of a missing person definition is intrinsically linked with identifying which agency has the 'duty of care', thus impacting on the response to a missing person report in terms of prevention of harm and safeguarding activities (Hayden & Shalev Greene, 2018)[15]. For example, when a person goes missing from a hospital or a mental health unit (while not sectioned), who is responsible for their welfare, the police or the hospital? Initially, this may seem a straightforward answer in that the duty of care is of the police.

However, whose responsibility is it to prevent the person going missing in the first place and whose responsibility is it to ensure they will not go missing again? It is these areas which are often left unclear and create tension between law enforcement and other public sectors, such

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[14] Hobbs, S., & Hamerton, C. (2014). The making of criminal justice policy. London: Routledge.
15 Hayden, C., & Shalev-Greene, K. (2018). The blue light social services? Responding to repeat reports to the police of people missing from institutional locations. Policing and Society, 28(1), 45-61. https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2016.1138475

as social services, health services, etc. It is imperative that the definition of a missing person will enable practitioners to distinguish between terms such as absconders, wanderers, going AWOL and missing. However, it is the wider framework or policy that must have clear guidelines of responsibilities and actions each agency must take, and to clarify who 'owns' the case. Part of the answer is in the decision where will the definition and framework lie.

In order to develop a standardised response to missing children cases, ICMEC published in 2015 a model framework. While this is designed for cases of missing children the model offers an opportunity to adapt it to missing adults. The framework includes the following topics:

1. National legislation with a definition of "missing child.
2. A Reporting Mechanism
3. Immediate investigation of missing children's cases
4. Regulations regarding cross-border travel with children
5. A comprehensive database of missing and unidentified children
6. A case management system to organize and record case information
7. Photo distribution system
8. Responses and investigative procedures
9. Formal agreements between agencies involved in missing children investigations and child protection overall
10. Community engagement programs to educate the public on a variety of missing children issues
11. Rapid Emergency Child Alert System
12. Prevention Framework

What should be the components of the definition?

Before considering the definition of a missing person we must reflect on the distinction between a child and an adult. A 'child' is defined by The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child[16] as "a human being below the age of 18 years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier". This would seem to suggest than an adult is anyone who is 18 years of age or over. Nevertheless, the United Nations defines 'youth'[17], as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, without prejudice to other definitions by Member States.

The term 'adult' is important to determine as the age of majority is the threshold of adulthood which leads a person of that age to take control over their actions and decisions. The age of majority also dictates a change in access to support services as well as response by agencies such as social services, health services, etc. This raises the questions of when does a child truly becomes an adult and should we consider changing the cut-off age for a missing child/adult from 18 to 21 or to 24? This subject should be considered by developmental psychologists and is beyond the scope of the author to comment on. However, it is recommended this matter is given some consideration by the Review.

There is a marked divide in consideration of missing children and missing adults. Some countries do not have any definition for an adult who goes missing, only for children. Other countries have one definition that incorporates all individuals who go missing, regardless of their age. For example,

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[16] The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child- https://www.unicef.org.uk/rights-respecting-schools/the-rrsa/introducing-the-crc/

[17] This definition was made during preparations for the International Youth Year (1985) and endorsed by the General Assembly (see A/36/215 and resolution 36/28, 1981).

"Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established will be considered as missing until located, and their well-being or otherwise confirmed" ([England, Wales and Northern Ireland, 2019](#)).

"Anyone who is reported missing to police, whose whereabouts are unknown, and there are fears for the safety or concern for the welfare of that person." ([Commonwealth of Australia, 2017](#)).

Due to the absence of international standards and guidelines on protecting children from going missing, ICMEC initiated in 2011 a series of regional reports titled the 'Global missing children research initiative'. It examines laws, national strategies and country-specific mechanisms that exist for addressing missing children around the world ([ICMEC, 2011, 2016a,b](#)). In 2013, the European Commission published a study that analysed statistical data from EU Member States on missing children, together with clear information on the definition according to which they are collected, the circumstances in which data are collected, by whom and from whom ([p. 7](#)).

These studies focus on missing children. Shalev Greene et al. (2019) advocate for having a single definition that includes all missing persons, regardless of their age. It is important to ascertain what purpose distinguishing between missing children and missing adults serves. This author's view is that the distinction between the age groups only benefits categorisation and systemic response, as is likely to lead to different responses by law enforcement agencies whereas an objective risk response will lead to different prioritisation of cases. The challenging question is 'should there be a different response to a missing child and a missing adult?' For example, should there be a difference in response to a 17-year-old who has been groomed and sexually exploited than to an 18 or 19-year-old who is experiencing the same

process? In the existing framework a 17-year-old is more likely to receive better protection from public services, whereas an 18 year old may not. This issue is particularly poignant given the UN's definition of youth.

Moreover, this taps into a wider debate about intentionality and the right of adults to go missing, which we will discuss in detail below. Missing persons as a phenomenon also forces us to examine each country's social fabric and social values and be mindful of which social issues are prioritised. Therefore, it is important to consider how cases are prioritised and on what basis. The author's view is that prioritisation of cases should be based on the assessment of risk of harm to the missing person, rather than simply their age group. This is, of course, except for extreme cases, where a 2-year-old or an 87-year-old go missing. In such cases, age is an indication of vulnerability and potential risk of harm.

Shalev Greene et al. (2019) also argue that we must also evaluate what are the components that ought to be included or excluded from such a definition. Their study examined 406 participants from England, Wales and Northern Ireland (i.e. police officers and civilian staff) who were asked for their viewpoint on (a) the suitability of the current definition, (b) the limitations of the definition, and (c) components that should be included in a future definition. 65% of participants did not consider the current definition suitable and identified components they considered inappropriate as well as components they wished to add to a missing person definition.

The authors offer six key recommendations to policy makers, some of which the Review should consider. First, an explicit distinction needs to be made between a missing person and a person who absconds. The construction and deployment of separate definitions of these terms should be considered. Second, a definition should include the following components:

acknowledging the risk and vulnerability of the missing person, and that initial efforts were made by the person reporting someone missing to locate them. There should be no time delay such as 24 or 48 hours between reporting and when police consider them to be missing. Third, policy makers should consider clarifying the role of the police in response to missing person reports within the broader context of police roles and responsibilities. Fourth, policy makers should also consider clarifying the duty of care of each agency when a person goes missing and was in the care or guardianship of other agencies or the state. These recommendations should be considered within a revised definition of missing persons as well as offering additional guidance within a national policy framework.

Future research should break down the definition into each component and ask participants to respond in more precise terms as to whether they approve of it or not. It may also be useful to ask participants from various organisations to choose from a variety of missing person definitions, possibly from the UK and other countries, and explain their choice. This type of multi-agency voting on a definition of a missing person from several options was carried out by Shalev Greene (2019)[18] in Northern Ireland via an online survey and can be adapted or replicated internationally.

1.2   Intentionality

The notion of intentionality, the degree to which people go missing deliberately, has long been used as a framework to understand missing person incidents. It is an important issue to consider because unlike children, adults are not legally prohibited from 'disappearing' if they

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[18] Shalev Greene, K. (2019). *A multi-agency evaluation of the definition of a missing person in Northern Ireland*. Belfast: Northern Ireland Joint Working Group.

decide to do so. To some extent, this freedom of choice may have detracted authorities from the vulnerability of missing adults before they go missing, while they are missing and following their return.[19] There is a range of reasons why adults disappear. For example, dementia, mental health, 'men missing on a night out', forced marriage, exploitation (human trafficking and modern slavery) and homicide. Guidance for police officers in the UK, for example, emphasises that going missing should be treated as an indicator that the individual may be at risk of harm and that a missing person report should be recognised as an opportunity to identify and address risks [20][21].

There is a substantive difference between cases in which family members have realised that they are unable to contact another family member following a history of sporadic or infrequent contact, and cases where someone who is usually in regular contact (or whose patterns of whereabouts are normally known) disappears very suddenly. Arguably, if the missing person is unaware that they are missed, it may not be at all helpful to consider their intent; if they were to become aware, and then to choose to resume contact or to stay away, then intent becomes relevant. This is addressed in the missing continuum by the 'drifted' category (Biehal, Mitchell and Wade., 2003, p.3[22]; Holmes, 2017[23]).
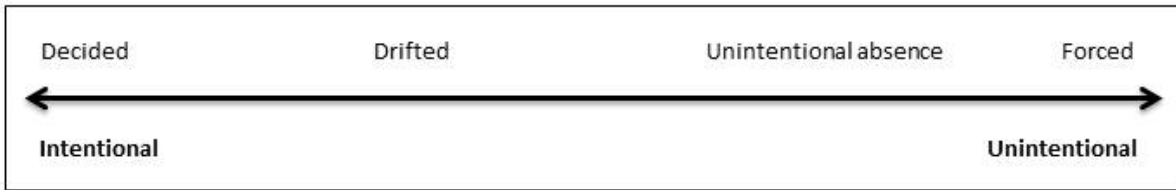
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[19] For more information about adults and intentionality see Holmes, L. (2017). Intentionality and missing adults. In K. Shalev Greene & L. Alys (eds) Missing persons: A handbook of research (pp. 71-78). London: Routledge

[20] Authorised Professional Practice (2019). Major investigation and public protection. Missing persons. College of Policing.

[21] National Crime Agency (2014). Missing from care- A multi agency approach to protecting vulnerable adults. Retrieved on 8.11.19 from, http://library.college.police.uk/docs/APPREF/Protecting-Vulnerable-Missing-Adults-Framework-FINAL.pdf

[22] Biehal, N., Mitchell, F., and Wade, J. (2003). *Lost from View*. Bristol: The Policy Press.

[23] Holmes, L. (2016). Intentionality and missing adults. Holmes, L. (2016). Intentionality and missing adults. In *Missing Persons* (pp. 91-98). Routledge.

Decided	Drifted	Unintentional absence	Forced
Intentional			Unintentional

The continuum has been applied to some empirical work, leading to estimates of the proportion of adults who go missing intentionally and unintentionally. Biehal et al found that, in a sample of nearly 200 formerly missing adults from the UK, 64 per cent had 'decided' to go missing, 19 per cent had 'drifted' out of contact, 16 per cent had gone missing 'unintentionally' and the remaining 1 per cent had been forced away (Biehal et al., 2003, p.14).

While this is a seminal study, the past 16 years have led to a better understanding of the complexity of the concepts of 'intention' and 'decision'. As Holmes (2017) points out, during a disappearance it is not possible to consult the missing person about what caused them to go missing. Holmes goes on to explain that there are four reasons why assessing intention to go missing is troublesome:

➢ The tension between individual agency and structural factors may render the assessment of intent debatable.

➢ The concept of intentionality is reliant on the missing person's mental capacity, which is difficult to assess in their absence.

➢ Unless there is evidence left behind, there is no proof of intent until the missing person is found.

➢ Intent may change over time so a correct assessment may become incorrect.

The last point is particularly important to consider, as a person may leave on their own accord but may later be a victim of crime, such as abduction, trafficking or homicide. This may also be true in cases where there is no crime involved. For example, a person who is living with dementia and intentionally goes out for a walk, may get confused and disoriented and will be unable to return home on their own. Furthermore, the assumption of intent by authorities may lead to different investigative actions being taken if they assume intentionality on the part of the person who went missing.

Discussion of intentionality has generally relied on the construct of missing adults as rational actors, who weigh up potential costs and benefits. Reliance on the concept of intentionality requires assumptions that a person who appears to have gone missing deliberately not only has the capacity to make a choice but may also ignore the externally imposed factors that contribute to the likelihood of disappearance: for example, an adult who decides to leave a violent home, or to flee a perceived threat of violence. The decision to leave may indeed be rational and deliberate, but it doesn't mean that the departure from home is voluntarily chosen.

Furthermore, some work has been undertaken to explore the links between going missing and social exclusion. A recent Canadian paper found that groups at risk of social exclusion are also at risk of going missing. Social exclusion refers to 'structural processes that prevent particular people and groups from participating in the economic, social, cultural, and political activities that other people in that society access thereby resulting in a poor quality of life' (Percy-Smith 2000 cited in Kiepal, Carrington & Dawson, 2012, p.141)[24]. The Canadian findings

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[24] Kiepal, L. C., Carrington, P. J., & Dawson, M. (2012). Missing persons and social exclusion. *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 37(2), pp 137- 168.

suggest that structural factors, over which individuals have little or no control, may influence the likelihood of going missing, therefore throwing doubt on the framing of the 'intentionally' missing person as a rational actor.

1.3　The 'missing missing'/'unmissed'

Edkins (2011) calls those who are missing but not reported to authorities as 'unmissed'. There are diverse reasons why this may occur. Some people are alone, uncared for, with no ties to people who know them or worry about them. In some of these cases, there is no one who is aware they are missing. Edkins also refers to them as the missing missing, or the doubly missing. For example, people with mental health issues and/or addictions who can 'drop of the radar'; a child who is born without being registered in any system; people who are homeless; people who are illegal immigrants, living without proper documentation, etc. (Outpost for Hope, n.d[25]).

There is also a large subset of those who are invisible in the political arena and receive little recognition from governments, media, scholars, etc. Their absence is a more fundamental one as we don't realise they are missing from our "parochial picture of the world" (pg. 6). Edkins offers the example of asylum seekers who disappear before they are deported. Guzman Guberek, Hoover & Ball (2007)[26] discuss the number of unreported missing persons in Columbia during 1986-2007, suggesting that between 30%-40% of missing persons went unreported at that time period.

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[25] OutPost for Hope (n.d) *Who are the Missing Missing?* Retrieved 30.10.19 from,
http://www.outpostforhope.org/who-are-the-missing-missing.html
[26] Guzmán, D., Guberek, T., Hoover, A., & Ball, P. (2007). Missing people in Casanare. *Human Rights Data Analysis Group, Palo Alto, California*.

There are also social groups who are so reticent about interacting with the authorities, they are often unwilling to file a missing person report and are likely to be underrepresented in official data. For example, Kiepal et al. (2012) refer to cases of Indigenous people in Canada who go missing but are not reported for that reason.

Some people lose touch with their family but are searched for. For many people it may not be necessary or appropriate to contact the police, although they consider their relatives as 'missing'. Thus, these individuals are not counted by any agency (Holmes, 2014, pg. 7)[27]. This is important factor for professionals to consider as many services that aim to support young people who are vulnerable and go missing rely on police reports as a primary or sole referral source.

Lack of reporting may be due to authorities not collecting relevant information about disappearances. For example, according to Ambler (2014), in Canada, police officers do not often collect information on Aboriginal identity because of the operational difficulties of definitively establishing a victim's background and conflicts between privacy legislation and policing policies (Ambler, 2014[28]). In the US, Indian Country Today reports that unlike Canada, where indigenous leaders and advocates have pressured the government to begin to confirm the numbers of missing and murdered indigenous women, the U.S. has done little to address the issue. Currently, there is no adequate information on the numbers of missing Native

[27] Holmes, L. (2014). *When the search is over: Reconnecting missing children and adults*. Retrieved 30.10.19 from, https://www.missingpeople.org.uk/about-us/about-the-issue/research/904-missing-adults.html

[28] Ambler, S. (2014) *Invisible women: A call to action. A Report on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women in Canada* (House of Commons). Retrieved on 30.10.19 from, http://www.ourcommons.ca/DocumentViewer/en/41-2/IWFA/report-1/page-ToC

women in the U.S (Pember, 2016[29]). In 2018 and 2019 some US states, including Washington, Minnesota, and Arizona have begun to take steps toward passing legislation to increase awareness of this issue and take steps toward building databases to reflect accurate statistics regarding missing and murdered indigenous women and girls[30][31][32].

The lack of consistent and accurate recording across the national population leads to deficiency of accurate information about the extent of the problem on a local as well as national level. It can prevent learning from cases that reach a successful conclusion. (Ambler, 2014). Quinet (2007) explores the number of 'missing missing' in relation to those who become victims of serial murder in the US. She points out that the fact they are likely to not be reported missing to authorities may make them an ideal target and may allow for serial killer go undetected for long periods of time.

1.4   Recommendations

Based on the discussion above the author recommends that

- ➢ Consideration should be given as to whether a missing person should be law or policy.
- ➢ There is ought to be a discussion as to the cut-off-age for a missing child/adult.
- ➢ The components of a definition should be examined and include an acknowledgment of risk of harm to and vulnerability of the missing person and that there should not be time delay in making a report if initial efforts to locate the person have been unsuccessful.

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[29] Pember, M. A. (11th April 2016). Missing and Murdered: No One Knows How Many Native Women Have Disappeared. Indian Country Today. Retrieved 30.10.19 from, https://rewire.news/article/2016/04/14/missing-murdered-no-one-knows-many-native-women-disappeared/
[30] HF 70
[31] House Bill 2570
[32] Washington State House Boll 2951

- Authorities should invest time in building communications and trust between those investigating the case and the relatives or friends of the missing persons. If relevant this should be done by a police officer or civilian staff whose role is dedicated to working with families and has received training in the specific needs of families of missing persons.

- There should be a single definition for a missing person regardless of age.

- The definition of a missing person should hold a common currency across different sectors and should be on a national/federal level in order to ensure consistency.

- The definition of a missing person should clarify the difference between missing, wandering, going AWOL and absconding.

- The definition of a missing person should be embedded or followed by a framework or a policy which clarify the role of the police in response to missing persons reports.

- The framework or policy should clarify the duty of care of each agency when a person goes missing and was in care or guardianship of other agencies of the state such as hospital, mental health units, care facilities, etc.

- Front line officers should have at hand manuals with clear operational definitions and guidelines.

- Front line officers should receive training in the definition, framework and roles and responsibilities.

- Future research should break down the definition into each component and ask participants to respond in more precise terms as to whether they approve of it or not. It may also be useful to ask participants from various organisations to choose from a variety of missing person definitions, possibly from the UK and other countries, and explain their choice.

2　　Best practices in the risk assessment for missing adults

The complexity of missing person cases cannot be overstated. Risk assessment of missing persons forms an important role in an investigation to determine which missing adults are vulnerable and the type of response that is needed. Risk is defined as 'the possibility of something bad happening at some time in the future; a situation that could be dangerous or have a bad result' (Oxford Learner's Dictionary, 2019[33]). Risk assessment is a method to describe the probability of a specific event occurring in a given situation as well as making a judgment regarding the severity of that event. In any decision-making situation, risk assessment will form an integral element of that process (National Research Council, 2008[34]; Eales 2017a[35]).

Risk assessment in the context of missing persons involves two separate phases in a missing incident: (1) risk of going missing; (2) risk to wellbeing while missing. The area which received more attention from academic literature as well as practitioners is the phase prior to a person going missing as well as the needs of those who go missing once they return. The focus of existing literature is almost completely in relation to missing children[36][37]. The discussion often focuses on identifying risk factors leading to people going missing and suggesting prevention activities which can reduce missing incidents taking place for the first time as well as

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[33] https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/risk_1

[34] National Research Council. (2008). *Science and decisions: Advancing risk assessment*. Washington DC, USA: National Academies Press.

[35] Eales, N. (2017a). *Risky Business?: A Study Exploring the Relationship Between Harm and Risk Indicators in Missing Adult Incidents* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Portsmouth). Retrieved on 31.10.19 from, https://researchportal.port.ac.uk/portal/files/11009886/Naomi_Eales_Thesis_final_copy_Risky_Business.pdf

[36] https://www.missingpeople.org.uk/about-us/about-the-issue/research/903-research-publications.html

[37] https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/runaway_return_interviews.pdf

prevention activities to reduce repeat incidents. However, for the purpose of this review the discussion will focus on the second phase, which is assessing the risk to a person reported as missing. Despite risk assessment being so crucial to a missing person investigation, there is very little information that is publicly available about risk assessment policies and practices in other countries. Therefore, the discussion will focus on literature published primarily in the UK.

2.1   Identifying risk and harm

Risk assessment provides the basis for how cases are prioritised and how resources are allocated. It takes place at regular intervals throughout a missing person investigation from the initial call to police through to case conclusion. Forces in the UK vary in their evaluation of cases, but it is often done every 6-8 hours as new information is likely to come in. Such information may be from new evidence, information from family, friends, CCTV, etc. It can also be from other agencies who have been in previous contact with the missing person. Such information may include details about addictions, health issues, recent mental health checks, etc. The challenge is recognising those cases that require immediate and urgent action out of the many that are reported to the police. Although most people who are reported as missing to the police, return safe and well relatively quickly, there is no doubt that going missing exposes an individual to risk of harm.

Harm can be in the form of physical harm in cases of exploitation and abuse, injury and death. It can also be in the form of psychological and emotional harm. For example, when an adult with autism is missing and is taunted by passers-by or feels overwhelmed by people and traffic

around them. Or when a person with dementia gets lost and is frightened or feels embarrassed or humiliated by the experience and refuses to go out on their own again. In addition, Eales (2017a) advocates that there needs to be a category of 'mental health harm' with respect to missing adults.

Hedges (2017) argues that identifying harm suffered while missing is challenging, as only the missing person knows what has happened to them. For them to reveal that information can be difficult and may only happen when a trusting relationship has been formed with another person. Official records of harm suffered are mainly based on what the victims are willing to share or what has been witnessed by others, together with police crime and incident reports but these are not always linked to missing person reports.

This information can be captured by (1) having an effective return home interview/prevention interview process which is most likely to give a more comprehensive picture of what happens to a missing adult and the harm they suffer. It is also the best way to understand support needs in order to prevent repeat missing incidents[38]. (2) Harm needs to be defined and recorded accurately and consistently if police are to seriously look at how best to prevent and reduce harm.

Identification of risk factors for harm are key to an effective risk assessment of missing adults. To illustrate, the UK Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC)(now known as the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC)) have highlighted instances where risk factors have not been properly recognised, thus resulting in inappropriate operational activity (for

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[38] In the UK all missing children should have a return home interview. However, this is now being discussed to extend to adults as well (Department of Education, 2014; All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG), 2018)

example, South Wales Police, 2017; West Yorkshire Police, 2018[39]). Gathering information is essential to assessing risk correctly. Families, friends and the local community can be a key source of information that can assist and advance an investigation. Information should also be shared between police forces, when a missing person lives in one area but is likely to be in another area while missing. Information sharing has been found to be also problematic in cases that ended up being reviewed by the IOPC.

In order to ensure 'cross border' collaboration that will improve risk assessment, the report recommends that police forces ensure there are clear methods of contact in place to share information in relation to missing persons and there is a clear process to transfer the management and supervision of missing person reports[40]. In December 2019 the IOPC published a special issue about common areas where police struggle in missing person cases. For more information see issue 36.

2.2   Risk assessment process

In her review of existing literature, Eales (2017a,b[41]) explains that risk assessment and management are complex processes for three main reasons (Haimes, 2005[42]): (1) There is the a   lack of information about the missing person; (2) The decisions will be influenced by inclusion of demands from a multidisciplinary environment

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[39] IOPC published in December 2019 an issue of 'Learning the Lessons 36' focusing on missing person cases.
[40] https://policeconduct.gov.uk/news/learning-adopted-two-police-forces-following-missing-person-death-lincolnshire
[41] Eales, N. (2017). Risk assessment. In K. Shalev Greene & L. Alys (Eds.), *Missing persons: A handbook of research*. London: Routeledge.
[42] Haimes, Y. Y. (2005). *Risk modeling, assessment, and management* (Vol. 40). New York: John Wiley & Sons.

; (3) There will be a need to make a trade-off between competing costs and benefits without assigning undue weight to any of the risk variables.

Risk factors are frequently described in terms of being static and dynamic. As the name suggests, static factors are those which cannot be changed or are not amenable to intervention, for example, age and, historical events. Dynamic risk factors are those which are potentially changeable and can fluctuate over short periods of time (e.g. substance abuse, associates and health). Oftentimes, the effects of static and dynamic risks can be mitigated by protective factors which enable a person to be more resilient at times of stress. These can come from the person themselves in terms of coping strategies and self-esteem, and families, by way of support and boundary setting or community by way of safe neighbourhoods (Vanderbilt-Adriance and Shaw, 2008[43]; Eales, 2017a).

Clinical and Actuarial Factors

Newiss (2004[44], 2005[45], 2006[46]) explains that there are two types of risk assessments. The *clinical* risk assessment is where the decision maker or clinician formulates a judgement based on their knowledge and experience. This approach has been critiqued as 'informal' and

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[43] Vanderbilt-Adriance, E., & Shaw, D. S. (2008). Conceptualizing and re-evaluating resilience across levels of risk, time, and domains of competence. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, *11*(1-2), 30-58.

[44] Newiss, G. (2004). Estimating the risk faced by missing persons: A study of homicide victims as an example of an outcome-based approach. *International Journal of Police Science & Management*, *6*(1), 27-36. https://doi.org/10.1350/ijps.6.1.27.34460

[45] Newiss, G. (2005). A study of the characteristics of outstanding missing persons: Implications for the development of police risk assessment. *Policing and Society*, *15*(2), 212-225. https://doi.org/10.1080/10439460500071655

[46] Newiss, G. (2006). Understanding the risk of going missing: estimating the risk of fatal outcomes in cancelled cases. *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies & Management*, *29*(2), 246-260. https://doi.org/10.1108/13639510610667655

'subjective' and lacking interrater reliability, i.e. the extent to which two or more 'raters' agree on an observation, coding, assessment, etc. (Grove and Meehl, 1996[47]; Singh, Grann and Fazel, 2011[48]).

The *actuarial* risk assessment occurs when the decision maker arrives at a judgement using an evidence informed tool based on static factors. This numerical approach assigns values to risk variables associated with the area of interest, such as, reoffending, violence and child abuse, to arrive at a probability of some outcome. This approach has been described as 'consistent' and 'formal' (Kemshall, 2003[49]; Grove and Meehl, 1996). Whilst this method has been considered an improvement, especially in interrater reliability, the actuarial approach has also been criticised for its 'rigidity and lack of sensitivity to change' (Douglas, Ogloff and Hart, 2003[50]; Eales, 2017a).

Hedges (2017) draw attention to the fact that despite risk assessment being the starting point of a missing person investigation, and the source for deciding how to allocate resources, there is currently no actuarial risk assessment model available. At best, there is a decision-making guide and a suggestion of relevant questions to guide an investigator to assess the level of risk to the missing person (for example, Centre for Missing and Exploited Children, 2011[51]). In

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[47] Grove, W. M., & Meehl, P. E. (1996). Comparative efficiency of informal (subjective, impressionistic) and formal (mechanical, algorithmic) prediction procedures: The clinical–statistical controversy. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, *2*(2), 293. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/1076-8971.2.2.293

[48] Singh, J. P., Grann, M., & Fazel, S. (2011). A comparative study of violence risk assessment tools: A systematic review and metaregression analysis of 68 studies involving 25,980 participants. *Clinical Psychology Review*, *31*(3), 499-513. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2010.11.009

[49] Kemshall, H. (2003). *Understanding risk in criminal justice*. McGraw-Hill Education (UK).

[50] Douglas, K. S., Ogloff, J. R., & Hart, S. D. (2003). Evaluation of a model of violence risk assessment among forensic psychiatric patients. *Psychiatric Services.* 54(10), 1372-1379. https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ps.54.10.1372

[51] Law-Enforcement Policy and Procedures for Reports of Missing and Abducted Children: A Model. National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children.

the UK the [College of Policing (2019)](#) offers the national guidance on gathering information, the initial assessment and decision-making guide for risk classification. The current classification of risk in the UK is divided by low risk, medium risk and high risk. The policy also offers some guidance on appropriate police response by level of risk classification (see table below)[52].

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[52]The policy also includes a forth classification of 'absent'. This is not discussed here because it is not 'missing' per se. This classification drew criticism and is not being consistently used across the UK.

Low risk	
The risk of harm to the subject or the public is assessed as possible but minimal.	Proportionate enquiries should be carried out to ensure that the individual has not come to harm.

Medium risk	
The risk of harm to the subject or the public is assessed as likely but not serious.	This category requires an active and measured response by the police and other agencies in order to trace the missing person and support the person reporting.

High risk	
The risk of serious harm to the subject or the public is assessed as very likely.	This category almost always requires the immediate deployment of police resources – action may be delayed in exceptional circumstances, such as searching water or forested areas during hours of darkness. A member of the senior management team must be involved in the examination of initial lines of enquiry and approval of appropriate staffing levels. Such cases should lead to the appointment of an investigating officer (IO) and possibly a senior investigating officer (SIO), and a police search adviser (PolSA).
	There should be a press/media strategy and/or close contact with outside agencies. Family support should be put in place where appropriate. The Missing Persons Unit should be notified of the case without undue delay. Children's services must also be notified immediately if the person is under 18.

2.3   Limitations of current process

Despite the importance of risk assessment there does not seem to be one system that can be used to showcase best practice. Therefore, the discussion below will highlight some key limitations of current practices in order to identify future areas for improvement.

Eales (2017a,b) highlights a number of key challenges regarding the current risk assessment process, the first being the sheer volume of cases. Hayden & Goodship (2013)[53] question whether it is possible to respond and meaningfully risk assess every missing case, given the high volume of reports outside of working hours, the lack of readily shared data between agencies and the different conceptions of risk across police, health services and social services. Moreover, investigations benefit from an individual having oversight of a missing adult case (Hedges & Shalev Greene, 2017[54]). Due to the volume of cases, this is not always possible. Therefore, cases are subsequently managed by officers on a rotating shift pattern. If missing adult cases are not managed effectively there is a danger of tasks not being actioned, delayed or duplicated. This can have serious implications for both an accurate risk assessment and resources. When resources are minimised (e.g. annual leave, night shifts and sickness or budget cuts) , forces are at risk of making classifications to reflect reduced capability in order to manage the workload.

Alternatively, some incidents potentially could be awarded a higher level of assessment in order to make use of extra resources available to that category (e.g. financial checks or telecommunications.) Access to these resources may enable a missing person to be located

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[53] Hayden, C., & Goodship, J. (2013). Children reported 'missing' to the police: is it possible to 'risk assess' every incident?. *The British Journal of Social Work*, *45*(2), 440-456. DOI: 10.1093/bjsw/bct150
[54] Hedges, C., & Shalev Greene, K. (2017). Managing a missing person investigation. In K. Shalev Greene & L. Alys (Eds) *Missing persons: A handbook of research* (pp. 137-147) London: Routledge.

quicker than through other channels of enquiry. With competing demands on officer's time and limits to the number of enquiries that can be made exists, the assignment of a the low risk category to case will result in a reduced police response. There is a danger of interpreting this as 'low risk means no risk'. This could potentially put the missing person in jeopardy and bring discredit to the police force should serious harm come to a person deemed low risk.

In order to ensure consistency, the criteria of risk classification, in official framework, must be very clear. National statistics in the UK reveal that nearly 80% of cases are classified as medium risk, approximately 10% as low and 10% of cases classified as high risk (National Crime Agency, 2018[55]). Considering the variety of cases, there is likely to be profound differences between the risk factors for those classified as medium which calls to question as to whether this should be split into possibly 'medium-high' and 'medium-low'. In order to simplify the classification an alternative to increasing the number of risk categories could be reducing it to two with perhaps just 'standard' and high risk or 'low' and 'high', which the Dutch police operates.

Furthermore, at officer level, there is empirical evidence from the Netherlands and UK of inconsistencies between investigators in how missing persons are classified (Schouten & Van den Eshof, 2006[56]; Smith & Shalev Greene, 2015[57]). Despite the existence of the current risk assessment system, officers involved in the process are still required to use their professional judgement (Hayden and Goodship, 2013).

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[55] National Crime Agency (2018). Missing Persons Data Report 2016/2017. UK Missing Persons Unit. Retrieved 31.10.19 from, https://missingpersons.police.uk/en-gb/resources/downloads/missing-persons-statistical-bulletins

[56] Schouten, S. A., & Van den Eshof, P. (2006). *Police investigations of missing persons*. Netherlands: Netherlands Police Agency/National Criminal Intelligence Department, in cooperation with the Utrecht University.

[57] Smith, R., & Shalev Greene, K. (2015). Recognizing risk: The attitudes of police supervisors to the risk assessment process in missing person investigations. *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*, *9*(4), 352-361.

There is no doubt police officers have a wealth of individual and collective experiences to draw from. However, relying on informal experiential working practices will lead to the development of heuristics. Heuristics are simple, efficient rules which people often use to form judgments and make decisions. They are short cuts to decision-making, which we all use in our everyday lives, as we cannot spend every moment evaluating the laws of probability and statistical principles, when we make decisions (Kahneman, Slovic, & Tversky, 1982). [58]

The limitations of heuristics are that they can rely on stereotypes based on anecdotal evidence from personal experience that officers encounter most frequently, or personal biases towards certain populations within society, and lead to erroneous decisions. For example, undocumented immigrants who may be viewed as making a choice to enter the country illegally and therefore may be regarded as offenders, whereas they may be at particular risk of abuse or exploitation through human trafficking or modern slavery. Heuristics can also lead to resistance to learning and lack of an established body of knowledge. As Alys, Massey & Tong (2013)[59] argue, being dependent on heuristics alone can bring disastrous results, because as the complexity of an investigation increases, so does the capacity for error.

Conversely, Alys et al. (2013) point to the fact that police decision-making is rarely the subject of praise and cases that have been handled successfully are not used often enough as

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[58] Kahneman, D., Slovic, S. P., & Tversky, A. (Eds.). (1982). *Judgment under uncertainty: Heuristics and biases*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
[59] Alys, L., Massey, K., & Tong, S. (2013). Investigative decision making: Missing people and sexual offences, crossroads to an uncertain future. *Journal of Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling, 10*(2), 140-154.

examples of effective police responses. It is therefore important to develop consistent and constructive learning experiences for law enforcement personnel which identifies success stories and good practices as well as some learning opportunities.

Recording of information can also test current systems in terms of adequacy and accuracy. In some forces a case may pass from officer to officer as shifts change. Therefore, it is key that all information is recorded properly, especially for when risk reviews need to be carried out. There can be additional issues dependent upon the system/s used for missing person investigations. A dedicated case management system that allows for the available information to be held in one place will make a review easier. However, several systems in addition to a dedicated missing person system may be in place. This will require an officer to consult multiple systems in their review. Regardless of where the information is held, the quality of the information is key to enabling a senior officer to assess the information available and be aware of all facts to determine the correct classification for that missing person.

A further challenge to the current approach to risk assessment is lack of training. Smith & Shalev Greene (2015) examined the attitudes and experiences of police supervisors to the UK risk assessment process in missing person investigations. A total of 334 police officers, from three police forces were surveyed. The results highlight concerns in relation to the utility of existing risk assessment tools. The findings also show that half of those surveyed had not read the national or the force guidance in relation to missing persons and did not receive specific training in how to implement the policy. Therefore, should a risk assessment instrument be developed, or a new policy put in place, it is essential that law enforcement personal involved with missing person investigation receive training that will equip them in implementing the

policy and understand how to use the risk assessment instrument and when. It is also imperative that such a system is empirically tested for its validity and reliability and is regularly updated.

Furthermore, one of the key areas of risk assessment are risk variables. Risk variables form the basis upon which risk questions are asked. Therefore, these are important for determining the number of questions asked and their quality. At the point of initial reporting, a call handler will gather basic information about the missing person such as name, age, description, location missing from and circumstances of going missing, etc. Currently, the national reporting form for missing persons includes a list of twenty-one risk questions[60][61]. The form is a suggested template for use when the full missing report is being taken. However, many of the UK police forces have adapted it to suit various aspects of their police force area. The responses to these questions inform an initial assessment in order to ascertain the risk level of the missing person and determine the immediacy of a police response.

As part of Eales's Doctoral thesis (2017a), police forces across the UK were requested to provide a copy of their list of risk questions. When these were collated, they amounted to more than eighty questions. Naturally, some forces had questions relating specifically to their area, for example, their geography and the popularity of outdoor pursuits such as hiking or skiing. The variety of questions highlights the non-standard approach to risk assessment currently being carried out within UK policing. In view of the volume of cases it would be unreasonable to expect a questionnaire of this length to form the basis of a risk assessment

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[60] ACPO 2005 Appendix 4- reporting form template- http://library.college.police.uk/docs/acpo/Missing-Persons-2005-ACPO-Guidance.pdf
[61] Reporting form from Nottinghamshire, UK- https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/390683/response/949951/attach/3/Blank%20Compact%20Booklet.pdf?cookie_passthrough=1

for every missing adult case. Thus, the APPG (2018)[62] rightly recommends that the standard risk assessment questions should be empirically validated, and the guidance updated accordingly.

Finally, in order to understand the possible reasons for going missing and potential risks, the police must speak to the most relevant people to understand the missing person's situation, circumstances and needs. For many, in the first instance this will be the person's family and friends. They will most likely have the best understanding of their wellbeing and what may have happened (APPG, 2018). When there is concern about the missing persons health or mental health, it is vital that the police can access information from mental health/ health professionals, social services or other public agencies who can check medical records and provide invaluable insight into what a mental health/health condition or associated behaviour might mean for the level of assessed risk and lines of inquiry for the investigation. Therefore, it is essential that any framework or policy should clarify the need and permission for agencies to share information about the missing persons, where there is identified concern to their wellbeing.

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[62] All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) (2018). APPG for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults: Inquiry into safeguarding missing adults who have mental health issues. Retrieved 31.10.19 from, https://www.missingpeople.org.uk/files/InquiryReport-Safeguardingmissingadultswhohavementalhealthissues.pdf

2.4   Risk indicators

Newiss (2004, 2005, 2006, 2011[63]) and Tarling and Burrows (2004[64]) suggest that the next stage would be to develop a quantifiable measure of risk which will enable officers to ascertain objectively how cases should be graded. This will be achieved when we are able to develop a reliable risk prediction score based on clearly identifiable factors and characteristics in relation to different case outcomes. Yet, before developing a predictive tool, Tarling and Burrows (2004) argue that it is imperative to know what outcomes are required to predict. Should we only measure whether a person was found alive or deceased? Do we look at categories such as lost, suicide, homicide, etc? Do we only register visible physical harm when a person is found? Or include different types of harm? (Eales, 2017b)

This actuarial approach is likely to be more accurate. However, there will be, inevitably, cases that prove to be exceptions to the aggregate probabilities. In addition, a reliance on statistical probabilities may lead some officers to miss vital information that will suggest a different outcome to the case than first seems. Academic literature has sought to provide insight into risk indicators by examining different categories of missing. For example, Bantry White and Montgomery (2015)[65] examined risk factors for dementia-related missing adults and Sveticic, Too and De Leo (2012)[66] and Woolnough, Magar & Gibb (2019)[67] examined risk indicators between non-missing and missing adults prior to a suicide outcome. This type of evidenced

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[63] Newiss, G. (2011). *Learning from fatal disappearances*. London: Missing People.

[64] Tarling, R., & Burrows, J. (2004). The nature and outcome of going missing: the challenge of developing effective risk assessment procedures. *International Journal of Police Science & Management*, *6*(1), 16-26. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1350/ijps.6.1.16.34459

[65] Bantry White, E., & Montgomery, P. (2015). Dementia, walking outdoors and getting lost: incidence, risk factors and consequences from dementia-related police missing-person reports. *Aging & Mental Health*, *19*(3), 224-230. https://doi.org/10.1080/13607863.2014.924091

[66] Sveticic, J., San Too, L., & De Leo, D. (2012). Suicides by persons reported as missing prior to death: A retrospective cohort study. *BMJ Open, 2*(2), e000607. DOI: 10.1136/bmjopen-2011-000607

[67] Woolnough, P., Magar, E., & Gibb, G. (2019). Distinguishing suicides of people reported missing from those not reported missing: Retrospective Scottish cohort study. *BJPsych Open*, *5*(1).

based research is identified as a major gap into the study of risk assessment of missing adults (Stevenson et al., 2013) and resources should be made available to examine this issue further. This type of study should be country specific as geographical and cultural differences are likely to impact findings.

Eales (2017a) is the first study to focus on the risk of missing adults within the context of different harm outcomes. Eales (2017a) sought to provide a conceptual model for missing incidents, based upon demographic factors, which she hoped would help investigations with unknown vulnerability indicators. This study utilised a quantitative approach and used content analysis to examine 1712 closed missing adult cases. Harm outcomes were analysed and categorised into no harm, non-fatal and fatal harm. Non-fatal harm was further subdivided into mental health, self-harm, physical, emotional and third party. Fatal harm was further classified as suicide, accidental, natural causes and third party. These were used to create a harm framework.

In terms of harm, non-fatal was more likely than fatal harm. The demographic factors of gender and age were shown to have some predictive power, as did not being in care and not having a history of missing. Neither mental health, sexual orientation or newcomer status were, however, measured as demographic variables. A demographic model was shown to be a useful tool which potentially could be operationalized for risk assessment when information about vulnerability factors is not known.

Vulnerability factors of depression and intention of suicide were shown to have some predictive power. The non-fatal harm was mental health harm and self-harm while fatal harms were likely to be suicide. Missing adults with psychological conditions such as schizophrenia and bipolar tended not to come to harm but if so, were more likely to

experience non-fatal harm. This study also found that alcohol/drug issues reduced the likelihood of harm. These findings highlighted that protective factors may exist which have not been well researched in relation to missing adults but are a necessary part of studying risk.

2.5 Current research

There are several ongoing studies the author is aware of that relate to risk assessment in missing person investigations:

First, risk indicators are currently being further examined by colleagues at the University of Liverpool, UK. Giles et al. (2017)[68] are developing the CASPER system. CASPER is an interactive geo-spatial decision support system that aims to assist police decision-making in adult 'missing from home' (MFH) cases. The CASPER software will combine map technology with findings from primary research and will present this trend data to end users to help prioritise search areas, support investigative lines of enquiry and to examine 'what-if scenarios' in new MFH cases. A key anticipated outcome of this work is that this evidence based approach will help police teams to identify those who are most likely to come to harm and to help police forces find vulnerable individuals who are MFH safer and faster.

Second, Giles, O'Brien, Awford, & Jack (2019)[69] aim to utilise a large sample of missing person cases from one police force taken over a one-year period and inferentially investigate the

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[68] Giles, S., Jarman, I., Reilly, D., Etchells, T., Walters, L., Bayley, J., Smith, A., O'Brien, F., & Wren, C. (2017). *'Proof of Feasibility' studies to develop an interactive geo-spatial decision support system for police forces.* Report prepared by the School of Psychology, UoL and Liverpool John Moores University for a UK Police Force.

[69] Giles, S., O'Brien, Awford, J., & Jack, H. (2019). *Predicting harm in missing children and adults.* Presentation at the Fourth International Conference of Missing Children and Adults. Liverpool, UK.

homogeneity of multiple characteristics in those who suffered harm and specific types of harm (physical, sexual, self-harm, accidental and emotional), providing a robust and systematic approach. Data from 8408 missing person incidents were extracted including repeated cases. Of the 8408 incidents, 235 resulted in a harm outcome (110 children, 1.7%; and 125 adults, 6.3%). A case-control design was used to consider factors related to general harm amongst matched samples. 110 harmed children were randomly matched by age and gender with 110 non-harmed children. 125 harmed adults were randomly matched by age and gender with 125 non-harmed adults. Range of 22 demographic, clinical, situational and risk factors were examined to see if any factors were disproportionately present amongst those that come to harm. Adults were found more likely to come to harm if they have a high initial risk assessment and were deemed likely to commit suicide or had exhibited out-of-character behavior.

Third, Shalev Greene, Collie, Bayram, Parsons & Gioliani (2019) conducted an evaluation of a new missing person database, piloted by one UK police force. This project has been undertaken as a response to a local understanding that Police were often left to respond to missing person cases with the minimum of understanding as to the triggers and antecedents of the individual reported missing. This is a multi-agency database designed to facilitate the real-time sharing of information pertaining to a missing person, including the circumstances of their missing incident and their return, their needs and vulnerabilities, and any work undertaken by partner agencies. Each agency (eg. Police, Social Services, National Health Service, etc.) can contribute information about a subject that is known historically and at the time of their missing episode. Partner agencies are also able to see information provided by

other agencies. This project was evaluated via three MSc dissertations which were submitted in September 2019 to the force for review.

2.6   Recommendations

Based on the discussion above the author recommends that,

- ➢ A structured professional judgement should be used as a revised method of risk assessment. This would require the collation of all the evidence relating to risk of missing adults (and children) into a single guide to be used to support decision-making. The evidence does not necessarily require statistical prediction but should be made up of empirically based statements about risk factors.

- ➢ A detailed guidance for risk assessment should be developed. This should include a common understanding of what harm is, in the context of missing.

- ➢ Current case management systems should be updated. When case management systems are able to record detailed harm information, it could result in improved submissions of statistics locally, regionally and nationally and therefore, begin to further our knowledge about different types of harm across Canada.

- ➢ There needs to be appropriate documentation of an adult's missing history. Knowledge of this demographic factor could help us learn more about the impact this may have on potential harm during subsequent episodes.

- ➢ The effectiveness of the High / Medium / Low risk ratings should be reviewed, and a different scale should also be considered.

- ➢ Current missing person reporting forms should be updated, so that the whole document becomes the basis of an evidence informed risk assessment. Such a form should allow investigators to drill down into applicable factors, and it could bring

consistency to risk reporting in a manageable format.

➢ The Review should consider how successfully externally, and internally generated information can flow into and through the organisation respectively in order to ensure new policies are read and understood by front line officers.

➢ Police forces should ensure there are clear methods of contact in place to share information in relation to missing persons and there is a clear process to transfer the management and supervision of missing person reports between forces and other public service agencies such as social services and health services.

➢ Ownership of a missing person case should sit with the Duty Inspector (or similar rank). Importantly, this should lead to a genuine critical review of the risk assessment at each shift handover.

➢ Officers should receive training of the updated framework and updated IT system so that they can use it consistently within forces and between forces.

➢ Officers should receive training in risk factors as that will improve overall attitude toward missing person investigation and understand the context of disappearances.

➢ Provision of a harm framework should be incorporated in training programmes. Training would better prepare officers to recognise different types of harm, issues around mental health, which will help to protect a missing adult when they are located.

➢ If not in existence already, efforts should be made to develop a national/province-wide information sharing tool, such as an electronic newsletter, that will celebrate positive outcomes of cases and best practices, as well as learning opportunities from cases that were problematic. See Learning the Lessons, as an example.

➢ It may be useful to compare officers' attitudes to current risk assessment practices

between Police forces as attitudes may vary and reflect different practices across jurisdictions.

➢ For the continuation of knowledge that can be gained from a quantitative approach, a large dataset is required to examine the variability and nuance within missing adult cases. Unless there is a single system from which big data can be obtained or where all the differing police systems can produce the same sort of information, there will remain challenges for examining cases of missing adults. This is not to say clinical judgment will not be essential for any case. It is the author's view that the two systems should co-exist and support each other.

➢ Certain vulnerability indicators have had little previous research such as autism, intellectual impairment, experiencing a relationship split or those facing allegations of sexual offences. It is also important to ascertain whether people who go missing from home, hospitals, mental health units, care facilities are at varying levels of risk of harm.

➢ In any study of risk factors, there also needs to be an identification of protective factors. This has not received much attention within the academic study of missing persons and warrants additional study.

➢ Following on from the success of projects which interviewed missing adults, there needs to be further projects where the voice of the missing adult is heard to enable further understanding about risk and protective factors from their perspective.

3 Best practices of police organisational responses to missing person investigations involving missing adults

Responding to reports of missing persons represents one of the biggest demands on the resources of law enforcement agencies (Fyfe, Stevenson & Woolnough, 2015)[70]. Police in the UK investigate over 280,000 missing person reports relating to over 140,000 missing individuals per year. This means that each police force will need to respond to a new missing person every day[71]. Shalev Greene & Pakes (2013)[72] estimate that the annual cost of missing person investigations, in the UK, is well over £700 million and equates to 14% of the total number of full-time police officers across the UK, costing more than burglary or assault investigations[73].

The demand on police resources is also qualitative as missing person investigations pose particular challenges to investigating officers. Police face a range of dilemmas with each report as they must quickly establish whether a person went missing voluntarily or whether they are lost or have been a victim of crime. Missing person investigations share the same 'moral ambiguity' of other aspects of police work, as officers are expected to secure a positive outcome in often confused, difficult and emotionally challenging circumstances (Innes, 2002[74]; Fyfe et al., 2015). The lack of clarity in ethical decision-making in missing person

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[70] Fyfe, N. R., Stevenson, O., & Woolnough, P. (2015). Missing persons: the processes and challenges of police investigation. *Policing and Society*, *25*(4), 409-425. https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2014.881812.

[71] Missing persons data report 2016-2017

[72] Shalev Greene, K., & Pakes, F. (2013a). The cost of missing person investigations: Implications for current debates. *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*, *8*(1), 27-34. https://doi.org/10.1093/police/pat036

[73] The author is not aware of cost estimates in other countries.

[74] Innes, M., (2002). The process structures of police homicide investigations. *The British Journal of criminology*, 42 (4), 669–688. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/42.4.669

investigations was discussed by Kim, Leach Scully & Huston Katsanis (2016)[75]. They explore issues such as dealing with sensitive information, remaining respectful of a person and family cultures, and the ethical challenges to society of resources sharing, truth-telling and responsible governance.

3.1   Area of investigation: local/regional/national levels[76]

Several noted sources from the US[77][78][79], Australia[80] and the UK[81][82][83] suggest that people who go missing do not travel far from the place they were last seen. Therefore, most Police forces will receive information about a missing person who disappeared in their area, and the investigation will remain localised. However, other cases involve movement of people between jurisdictions: for example, a case where a depressed person left their home and travelled to another area in order to take their own lives. Cases may also include criminal activity such as cases of human trafficking, abduction or homicide. In these instances, it is important to determine the 'ownership' of the case and having a named police force and persons in charge of the investigation. This is because effective governance structures are important elements in supporting delivery of high-quality service to missing persons, their families and those who may be responsible for their care (College of Policing, 2019).

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[75] Kim, J., Scully, J. L., & Katsanis, S. H. (2016). Ethical Challenges in Missing Persons Investigations. In S. J. Morewitz & C. Sturdy Colls (Eds.) *Handbook of missing persons* (pp. 163-175). Springer International Publishing.
[76] For a discussion regarding people who go missing abroad please see Apps (2017)
[77] Young, C. S., & Wehbring, J. (2007). *Urban search: Managing missing person searches in the urban environment*. DbS Productions.
[78] Koester, R. J. (2008). *Lost Person Behavior: A Search and Rescue*. dbs Productions LLC.
[79] https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0143622813002506
[80] https://esf.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/RobertGatt2002VicPol.pdf
[81] https://missingpersons.gov.au/sites/default/files/PDF%20-%20Publications/Research/International/Missing%20Persons%20Understanding%20Planning%20Respondi.pdf
[82] https://missingpersons.police.uk/en-gb/resources/downloads/iFIND
[83] Shalev, K., Schaefer, M., & Morgan, A. (2009). Investigating missing person cases: how can we learn where they go or how far they travel?. *International Journal of Police Science & Management*, *11*(2), 123-129. https://doi.org/10.1350/ijps.2009.11.2.116

As far as the author is aware, governance over missing person cases has not been subject to research. However, there are different policies and practices which we can examine. In order to ensure unity between member states the Council of Europe published a number of recommendations in 1973[84] and 1979[85] which call for each member state to have a competent administrative authority which should be responsible for centralising requests for the tracing of missing persons, collating information, sending out instructions for a search to be made and supervising the search[86]. This was further explored in the Council of Europe 2012 publication which focuses on missing persons who are presumed dead[87].

In order to ensure better consistency of delivery of service within the country, the UK national policy recommends that Police forces should have nominated senior and easily identifiable strategic and tactical leads for missing person investigation work with clearly stated roles, responsibilities and lines of accountability. Some Police forces have placed the responsibility for missing persons at a strategic level. This is considered good practice. The policy notes that such governance means the force will be more effective in dealing with the challenges posed by missing persons and in encouraging innovative solutions (College of Policing, 2019).

The UK also introduced the role of a 'missing persons coordinator' and/or a missing persons specialist unit. Missing persons coordinators fulfil important responsibilities and can assist the

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[84] CE/SOC (73)- Recommendation no. 646 (1971) on action to be taken in tracing missing persons.
[85] R (79) 6- Of the committee of ministers to member states concerning the search for missing persons. Retrieved on 4.11.19 from, https://rm.coe.int/09000016804e37af
[86] See for example, UK Missing Persons Unit.
[87] CM/REC (2009)12- Principles concerning missing persons and the presumption of death. Retrieved on 4.11.19 from, https://rm.coe.int/16807096bd

force in understanding the challenges associated with this work. According to the College of Policing (2019)[88] the role of the missing person coordinator is to:

> - collate information relating to missing reports to identify indicators or patterns of absence which raise concern that the individual may be at risk
>
> - identify safeguarding priorities/considerations
>
> - assist in the independent oversight of cases at force and/or local level
>
> - act as a point of contact for partners, and ensure an effective working relationship is maintained, encouraging the two-way exchange of information
>
> - liaise with other agencies and care providers to ensure that protocols are in place and are being applied by all parties
>
> - assist the force to understand the nature of risk and demand associated with missing people.

The coordinator should not be involved in investigating cases but focus on more strategic problem solving with partner agencies. Missing person coordinators should ensure proactive engagement occurs with care homes, healthcare establishments, and social services to help promote a better understanding of the role of the police in missing person cases. They can also help to identify potential issues and risks surrounding missing persons at an early stage. This work may be complemented by neighbourhood policing, which is a scheme aiming to connect UK communities directly and seamlessly to specialist policing services at local, regional and national level[89].

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[88]https://www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/major-investigation-and-public-protection/missing-persons/strategic-responsibilities/#child-abduction-warning-notices-

[89] For more information about Neighbourhood Policing please see: https://www.college.police.uk/What-we-do/Standards/Guidelines/Neighbourhood-Policing/Pages/definition-of-neighbourhood-policing.aspx

The policy also recommends that (1) where possible, forces should ensure that there is some continuity in relation to the individual who has overall strategic responsibility for missing persons issues; and (2) Police forces should, where possible, have integrated recording and intelligence systems that support those involved with the risk assessment in missing persons cases to make informed decisions. It is imperative that where a pattern of going missing has been established, relevant information is shared with partner agencies. However, consideration should also be given to creating intelligence reports in relation to repeat and vulnerable missing individuals, using information from return interviews where available, in order to make this intelligence available to other forces directly.

The author believes that a central unit that specialises in missing person cases in each Police force as well as a national competent administrative authority can be an asset to Police, given adequate training and resources. Such units can offer consistency of service, deep knowledge of the community and understanding of its customs and needs and make long lasting links with other agencies. However, the risk of centralising missing person cases is that poor staffing choices, lack of resources and training can result in poor service to those reported missing. Much depends on police culture and the attitude of senior police officers towards missing person investigations and how they value them as part of police work.

3.2   Attitude towards missing person as part of understanding the role and values of police

Because a missing person investigation is an everyday experience for most Police officers (in the UK, at least), it may be overlooked as an investigation which requires a considered and complex police response. Some officers may view missing persons investigations as less

important than other policing responsibilities, or that it is an administrative exercise, or that the repeat cases of missing persons are not the police's duty to safeguard but belong with other agencies. As a result, missing person investigations have not always received the attention they deserve (Alys et al., 2013). This takes us back to the earlier discussion regarding the definition of a missing person and clarifying which cases are regarded as 'missing' and which are not. It also relates to the tension between the welfare system and penal system.

Kelling & Moore (1988, cited in Kappeler & Schaefer, 2018)[90] wrote that policing, like all professions, learns from experience. The core questions that missing person investigations raise in context of Police work are: (1) what is the function of police? And (2) what role do the Police serve? Should the Police only focus on crime control and criminal apprehension or are the Police also expected to resolve other types of 'community problems'? The authors refer to a common line from police officers from the 1950's and 1960's saying: "if only we didn't have to do social work, we could really do something about crime" (pg. 10).

The author would argue this quote is still being adopted by many Police officers and is at the core of some of key frustrations Police officers express in relation to missing person investigations. Smith & Shalev Greene (2015), Harris & Shalev Greene (2016) examined the attitude of police officers to some of the most central activities in missing person investigations, such as risk assessment and return home interviews. It is evident from these studies, as well as Shalev et al. (2019), that Police officers question the need for their involvement in a large proportion of missing persons cases. Such discontent and disbelief in one's role is problematic and is likely to cause disengagement, as well as lead to burnout. It is therefore recommended that future research should explore officers' attitudes towards

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[90] Kappeler, V. E., & Schaefer, B. P. (2018). *The police and society: Touchstone readings*. Waveland Press.

missing person investigations in depth. An updated framework and training should discuss the role and responsibilities of the Police in general and in missing person investigations specifically.

Alys et al. (2013) counsel that missing person investigation should be considered a priority. This is supported by an earlier version of the UK national policy. It, rightly, states that while most missing persons enquiries are quickly resolved, in a few cases the report of a missing person is the first step in a major crime case, namely homicide or abduction. Therefore, the initial stages of any missing person enquiry should commence on the basis that the case may escalate into a serious crime enquiry. In cases where the circumstances are suspicious or are unexplained, the guidance suggests using the maxim: 'If in doubt think murder' (ACPO, 2005[91]).

Experience has taught us that failure to apply such thinking has led to the loss of valuable investigative opportunities and could ultimately result in failure to locate the missing person or to secure a conviction of the perpetrator. The status of the relationship between the missing person and the person making the initial report can also be important. Experience suggests that it would be wrong for investigators to always assume such relationships are stable. There have been some cases where the person reporting the crime and/or the missing person has been found to be the perpetrator of the crime (ACPO, 2005).

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[91] Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO)(2005). Guidance of the management, recording and investigation of missing persons. Retrieved on 7.11.19 from, http://library.college.police.uk/docs/acpo/Missing-Persons-2005-ACPO-Guidance.pdf

3.3   Attitude towards members of the public

While cautious dealings may be necessary at times, it is imperative to remember that in most cases, the disappearance of a loved one is a stressful loss for families and friends of those who are missing (Boss, 2006[92]; Lenferink, 2017[93]). Families and friends have emotional and practical needs that when met, can make profound difference in supporting them and improving their quality of life.

One of the most important and complex processes is how families and friends relate to the authorities. As Boss (2007)[94] said, the lack of information about their loved one leaves members of a missing person's family and friends in the paradox of absence and presence (i.e. the person is physically absent but emotionally present). There is often no information to clarify their loss or to offer them a cause for the disappearance, give it a meaning or lead to closure. It is therefore a fundamental need for the families and friends that police officers or liaison officers communicate with them regularly and inform them how the investigation is progressing. It is also important for Police to establish key relationships in the missing person's life as there are instances where friends are more familiar with the day to day routines and lifestyle of the missing person than the person's family. Families of missing persons, like victims of crime, may also benefit from getting an assessment to find out what support they need, and have their details passed to organisations that provide help and support (Ministry of Justice, 2015)[95].

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[92] Boss, P. (2006). Loss, trauma, and resilience: Therapeutic work with ambiguous loss. WW Norton & Company.
[93] Lenferink, L. I., de Keijser, J., Wessel, I., de Vries, D., & Boelen, P. A. (2017). Toward a Better Understanding of Psychological Symptoms in People Confronted With the Disappearance of a Loved One: A Systematic Review. Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838017699602
[94] Boss, P. (2007). Ambiguous Loss Theory: Challenges for Scholars and Practitioners. Family Relations, 56: 105–111. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3729.2007.00444.x
[95] Ministry of Justice (2015). Code of practice for victims of crime. Retrieved 7.11.19 from, https://www.supremecourt.uk/procedures/victims-code.html

One of the coping strategies families, friends and even members of a community resort to is to search for the missing person. Parr, Stevenson & Woolnough (2016)[96] explain that a search for a missing person is an emotional process. The search activity may be on their own, it may involve friends and neighbours, and it may include the authorities and search and rescue volunteers. Given the emotional responses to the trauma of a person going missing, families will often be involved in search activity as a key mode to handle their emotions.

For members of the public who care for (but not necessarily are related to) the missing persons, a search activity is not just a practical activity in a geographical and/or cyber space to locate the missing person. The search is also an emotional search for meaningful answers to the questions that cause the ambiguity itself, i.e. 'why?', 'how', 'when', and 'where'. Thus, authorities carrying out official search activities should be sensitive to the needs of the family, friends and the community and offer them as much support and information as possible and appropriate. Such involvement can include Police requesting information about the missing person, understanding routine as well as unusual behaviours taking places at the time of the disappearance and being willing to learn about the local area, and community relevant to that missing person incident.

A very powerful and important coping strategy for dealing with ambiguous loss is to find meaning in that experience, as it helps families develop their resilience to 'not knowing'. Finding meaning can take many shapes and people may turn to religion and spirituality

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[96] Parr, H., Stevenson, O., & Woolnough, P. (2016). Search/ing for missing people: Families living with ambiguous absence. *Emotion, Space and Society*, 19, 66-75. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2015.09.004

(Wayland, Maple, McKay & Glassock, 2016)[97]. For some it may include sharing their experiences with others.

Another way families and communities can find meaning is by becoming activists. Activism is when an individual or a group of people take action in the public sphere and 'push' against the system'. Activists take action to challenge the status quo. Activism can increase the visibility of a social or political issue, challenge norms and advocate for community and health resources (Macdonnell et al., 2017)[98]. It is important to consider that while families and friends may need support, similarly to victims of crime, they may have resources and the experiences that can both assist the police and given them a sense of empowerment. . For example, following Loren O'keefe brother's disappearance she founded the Missing Persons Advocacy Network (MPAN) in Australia. MPAN offers a world-first practical guide of what to do when someone goes missing for the benefit of families and friends.[99]

3.4   Media bias and publicity appeals

Not all victims of crime receive equal attention in the news media, also known as 'the press'. Media resources are often allocated to those victims who can be portrayed as 'ideal victims', who are individuals who can be given the complete and legitimate status of being a victim (Greer, 2007)[100]. This group includes those who are considered as particularly vulnerable, defenceless, innocent and worthy of empathy and compassion. Elderly women and young

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[97] Wayland, S., Maple, M., McKay, K., & Glassock, G. (2016). Holding on to hope: A review of the literature exploring missing persons, hope and ambiguous loss. *Death Studies*, *40*(1), 54-60. https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2015.1068245

[98] MacDonnell, J. A., Dastjerdi, M., Khanlou, N., Bokore, N., & Tharao, W. (2017). Activism as a feature of mental health and wellbeing for racialized immigrant women in a Canadian context. *Health care for women international*, *38*(2), 187-204. https://doi.org/10.1080/07399332.2016.1254632

[99] See https://mpan.com.au

[100] Greer, C. (2007). News media, victims and crime. In. P. Davies, P. Francis, & C. Greer (eds). *Victims, crime and society*, (pp. 20-49).

children are often described as 'ideal victims'. On the other hand, those who are on the margins of society (e.g. homeless, addicts, prostitutes, etc.) as well as young men can find it difficult to receive a legitimate status of victimhood. Greer (2007) discusses the 'hierarchy of victimisation', which is often reflected in the media and in official discourses. Greer suggests that some victims never receive a victim status and are considered 'undeserving victims' and will go unnoticed in the wider social world (Greer, 2007). Those who are considered 'ideal victims' and have 'the right image' are likely to receive intense media attention that can also lead to significant changes to social policy and practice (Greer, 2007; Jewkes, 2015[101]).

The portraits of people as presented by the media, often contain stereotypes about social groups. This can promote bias, fear, prejudice and gross over-simplification of the facts (Altheide, 1997[102]). Thus, stories become 'infotainment'- the blurring of entertainment and information. This serves the purpose of creating an emotional consensus about crime (Kohm, 2009[103]).

Media bias in coverage of missing persons is exhibited in two forms: (1) bias in media attention and (2) the content of the coverage itself.

Jeanis & Powers (2017)[104] rightly argue that media coverage of missing person cases is possibly more important than other types of crime. This is because the recovery of the missing person may hinge on identification by members of the public. The relationship between a

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[101] Jewkes, Y. (2015). *Media and Crime*. Sage. 3rd Edition.

[102] Altheide, D. L. (1997). The news media, the problem frame, and the production of fear. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 38(4), 647-668. DOI: 10.1111/j.1533-8525.1997.tb00758.x

[103] Kohm, S. A. (2009). Naming, shaming and criminal justice: Mass-mediated humiliation as entertaining and punishment. *Crime, Media Culture*, 5(2), 188-205. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741659009335724

[104] Jeanis, M. N., & Powers, R. A. (2017). Newsworthiness of missing persons cases: An analysis of selection bias, disparity in coverage, and the narrative framework of news reports. *Deviant Behavior*, 38(6), 668-683. https://doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2016.1197618

missing person's demographic characteristics, situation factors surrounding the incident, and the likelihood of receiving media attention are now well documented.

Gwen Ifill of PBS coined this form of media bias as 'the missing white girl/woman syndrome'. It references media's fascination with females who are white, young, physically attractive, and from middle- or upper-class background (Jewkes, 2004[105]; Liebler, 2010[106]; Stein, Carlan & Nored, 2016[107]).

The content of media reports in cases of missing people has not been well examined and research focuses mostly on child abduction cases. Studies found that female victims are more likely to receive more words per story than male children who have been abducted (Taylor, Boisvert, Sims, Garver, 2013)[108]. The female victim is almost always portrayed as 'having a fairy-tale life turned into a nightmare' (p. 155). Thus, the poster child, the 'ideal' child represents all children.

On the other side of the spectrum, are missing person cases that receive little, if any, media attention. The attention these cases receive often promotes pre-existing stereotypes. Jiwani & Young (2006)[109] and Gilchrist (2010)[110] examined media reports of missing/murdered

[105] Jewkes, Y. (2004). Media representation of criminal justice. In J. Muncie & D. Wilson (eds.). *Student handbook of criminal justice and criminology* (pp. 67-80). Cavendish Publishing Press.

[106] Liebler, C. M. (2010). Me(d)ia Culpa?: The "missing white woman syndrome" and media self-critique. Communication, Culture & Critique, 3, 549-565. DOI: 10.1111/j.1753-9137.2010.01085.x

[107] Stein, S. L., Carlan, P. E., & Nored, L. S. (2016). Media construction of missing white woman syndrome: A cultural complex of innocence. *International Journal of Ethics, Trauma and Victimology*, 2(1), 10-24. DOI: 10.18099/ijetv.v2i1.11130

[108] Taylor, J., Boisvert, D., Sims, B., Garver, C. (2013). An examination of gender and age in print media accounts of child abductions. *Criminal Justice Studies*, 26(2), 151-167. https://doi.org/10.1080/1478601X.2012.724683

[109] Jiwani, Y. (2009). Symbolic and discursive violence in media representations of Aboriginal missing and murdered women. *Violence in hostile contexts e-book*, 45-63.

[110] Gilchrist, K. (2010). "Newsworthy" victims? Exploring differences in Canadian local press coverage of missing/murdered Aboriginal and White women. *Feminist media studies*, *10*(4), 373-390. https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2010.514110

aboriginal women in Canada. Kiepal, Derrington & Dawson (2012)[111] found that disadvantaged youth, women, Aboriginal people, people who are not in the labour force, unemployed people, and homeless people in Canada are all overrepresented among people reported missing. These groups of people can be linked with the concept of 'social exclusion' and are likely to be relevant to similar groups in other countries as well.

Social Exclusion refers to structural processes that prevent particular people and groups from participating in the economic, social, cultural, and political activities that other people in that society access thereby resulting in a poor quality of life. According to Kiepal et al. (2012) Aboriginal people experience social exclusion in many areas of their lives, including poverty, spatial segregation on Aboriginal reserves, labour market exclusion, and isolation from family and communities. Thus, they can be views as 'unworthy victims' and receive less or unfavourable media coverage.

Gilchrist (2010) compares local press coverage of matched cases: three missing/murdered Aboriginal women from Saskatchewan and three missing/murdered White women from Ontario. The analysis indicates stark disparities in the amount and content of coverage between groups. The Aboriginal women received three and a half times less coverage; their articles were shorter and less likely to appear on the front page. Depictions of the Aboriginal women were also more detached in tone and scant in detail in contrast to the more intimate portraits of the White women.

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[111] Kiepal, L. C., Carrington, P. J., & Dawson, M. (2012). Missing persons and social exclusion. *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, *37*(2), 137-168.

Sarah Stillman (2007)[112] was outraged by the disparity in media coverage of missing children cases in the USA. Her article explores three methods that can lead to media engagement with a missing person story. These three methods may be useful for practitioners and family and friends of missing persons who wish to promote an appeal for a missing person.

1. *The Diagnostic*- The naming of atrocities, the naming of victims, and the naming of violence. This can often come in cases where a large number of people goes missing. Naming introduces a language through which journalists and activists can connect personal trauma and loss with local and regional struggles. Recently, blogging and online citizen journalism led to publicly addressing the 'missing white girl/woman syndrome', and raised questions about who profits from such stereotypes, and how we can counteract the myth of minority groups disposability.

2. *The Theatrical*- The second act is to tell a story. An anonymous corpse will not lead to the development of a social movement. A named person who was a victim of senseless violence can bring the violence into public imagination and mobilise resources for their protection. There also needs to be 'a stage' that can capture symbolic social space. This can be by using visual images, such as photographs, reconstruction of events, props that symbolise each missing person.

3. *The Archaeological*- When there is almost no information to begin with, the best way is to start 'digging'. By building information through consistent and persistent requests for information, use of police or public records, interviewing neighbours, friends, work colleagues, the 'story' will emerge. For example, Sylvia Pettem is a historian and a

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[112] Stillman, S. (2007). The missing white girl syndrome: disappeared women and media activism. *Gender & Development*, 15(3), 491-502. https://doi.org/10.1080/13552070701630665

researcher who has written a number of books on cold cases of missing persons, using this method.

While the media may pursue their own story, missing person cases are often actively publicised by law enforcement agencies, in the form of publicity appeals. A publicity appeal is "communication by those searching the missing person to a wider network of people who may be able to locate that person and to the missing person directly" (Holmes, 2016, p. 20). Publicity appeals contain information about the missing person that will allow people who may encounter the missing person to recognise and identify them as well as information about the action they should take in that event.

According to Drivsholm, Moralis, Shalev-Greene & Woolnough (2017)[113] and Holmes (2016)[114] the aims of publicity appeals are to:

> ➤ Receive new information about the missing person as well as reports of sightings
>
> ➤ Reassure the family, informant, police, public that everything is being done to find the missing person
>
> ➤ Raise awareness of the issue of missing persons and the services offered
>
> ➤ Encourage the missing person to get in touch so they can be safeguarded
>
> ➤ 'Make real' or memorialise the person, ensure they are not forgotten

Given the frequent use of publicity appeals and the variety of communication methods used (e.g. posters, news, social media, etc), their effectiveness in locating missing persons and

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[113] Drivsholm, M., Moralis, D., Greene, K. S., & Woolnough, P. (2017). Once missing, never forgotten? Results of scoping research on the impact of publicity appeals in missing children cases. Retrieved 7.11.19 from, https://researchportal.port.ac.uk/portal/files/7514950/Once_Missing_Never_Forgotten_final.pdf

[114] Holmes, L. (2016). Missing persons appeals: A UK prespective. In S. J. Morewitz & C. Sturdy Colls (eds.) Handbook of Missing Persons. Springer, 19-36.

assisting the police in solving cases is not well established. So far, existing research points to some notable limitations (see below). However, publicity appeals can have a profound effect on the course of a missing person investigation and there are well documented cases where a publicity appeal directly led to the identification of a missing person and their safe return.

Holmes (2016) reports that 25% of families the charity Missing People surveyed stated that they felt the publicity played a part in resolution of the incident. 18% felt the publicity had influenced the outcome. For example, a person saw their own poster and made contact either with the charity or with their family. One of the arguments in favour of using publicity appeals is that if it saves one life, it is worth it (Griffin, 2016)[115].

Where effectiveness of publicity appeals has been measured extensively is in the field of facial recognition. This area is linked with eyewitness's testimony. Publicity appeals require members of the public to recognise the missing person and/or suspect (in cases of abduction or suspected murder) when they encounter them. A large body of research repeatedly questions people's ability to process, remember, and recognise information related to the identification of other persons (for example, Gier et al., 2011[116]; Lampinen, Curry and Erickson[117], 2015; Lampinen & Moore, 2016[118]).

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[115] Griffin, T. (2016). The rhetoric and reality of the AMBER alert: Empirical and public discourse considerations regarding the child abduction phenomenon. In S. J. Morewitz & C. Sturdy Colls (eds.) Handbook of Missing Persons. Springer, 37-48.

[116] Gier, V. S., Kreiner, D. S., & Hudnell, W. J. (2012). AMBER Alerts: Are School-Type Photographs the Best Choice for Identifying Missing Children?. *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*, *27*(1), 9-23. DOI: 10.1002/acp.1520

[117] Lampinen, J. M., Curry, C. R., & Erickson, W. B. (2015). Prospective Person Memory: The Role of Self-Efficacy, Personal Interaction, and Multiple Images in Recognition of Wanted Persons. *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*, 1-12. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11896-015-9164-7

[118] Lampinen, J. M. & Moore, K. N. (2016). Prospective person memory in the search for missing persons. In S. J. Morewitz & C. Sturdy Colls (eds.) Handbook of Missing Persons. Springer, 145-162.

The possible intense media/social media coverage of a missing person case and areas of concern as to its effectiveness in locating a missing person raise questions about its use. It is important to remember that the decision to release a publicity appeal will be instigated by the police and/or the families of those missing, after careful consideration of the risks this may pose to the person while they are missing. Furthermore, the decision to launch a publicity appeal is always made without the consent of the missing person, and with little understanding of the impact this may have on them when they return. It is the person who was missing who must live with the aftermath of their loss of privacy and possible loss of anonymity. Despite this issue being of such importance, there is almost no research in this area. To date, it has only examined in relation to missing children and their families. Drivsholm et al. (2017) surveyed 107 staff from 19 European hotlines for missing children and examined the positive and negative, short-term and long-term impact publicity appeals have on children and their families (pg. 33-34). This should be extended to study the impact publicity appeals have on adults who go missing.

One of the main problems publicity appeals now pose is that they can leave lasting digital footprints. This ties into the so-called 'Right to be Forgotten', which is a ruling by the European Court of Justice[119]. The ruling requires search engines to delete embarrassing or out-of-date information, when requested by the individuals concerned. Under data protections laws in Europe a person can request that links to their personal information are removed. This is done on a case by case basis, balanced against other fundamental rights and is not automatic. It is

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[119] https://gdpr-info.eu/art-17-gdpr/

important to note that the "right to be forgotten" online does not extend beyond the borders of the European Union[120].

The other key issue to contemplate is about ownership of personal details and one's 'image'. Once personal information, including photos of a missing person have been placed on the internet or released to the media, they are in the public domain. This means that any material that was shared with or by the public about the missing person is not protected by intellectual property laws such as copyright, or trademark. Thus, upon their return the missing person has no control over their own image or story, or a straightforward legal ability to restore their privacy and anonymity, other than to apply under 'the right to be forgotten'. This can lead to further abuse and trauma, not only to the person who was missing but to their family and friends.

3.5 Recommendations

Based on the discussion above the author recommends that,

- Policies relating to missing persons should be linked to homicide investigations, domestic violence, forced marriage, sexual exploitation, human trafficking, abductions, asylum seekers and illegal immigration.
- Missing person investigations should be considered a priority and understood as a complex type of investigation that can escalate into a serious crime enquiry.
- Police forces need to determine the 'ownership' of cases that include more than one Police force and have an identifiable person in charge of that investigation.

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[120] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-49808208

- Each Police force should have a nominated senior and easily identifiable strategic and tactical leads for missing person investigation work with clearly stated roles, responsibilities, and lines of accountability.

- There should be a competent administrative authority which will be responsible for centralising requests for tracing missing persons, collating information, sending out instructions for a search to be made and supervising the search. This should be on a national level.

- Authorities in charge of conducting and managing search activities should be sensitive to the needs of the families and the community and where appropriate include them in search activities.

- Where appropriate authorities should explore with families and friends' ways of promoting publicity to cases that do not receive much media attention. Stillman's (2007) suggested methods could be communicated with families and friends as this will offer them an opportunity to be active and involved in the search for their loved ones: e.g. the naming of atrocities, the naming of victims, and the naming of violence; tell a story. A named person who was a victim of senseless violence can bring the violence into public imagination and mobilise resources for their protection; when there is almost no information to begin with, the best way is to start 'digging'.

- The right to be forgotten or a similar legislation should be put in place to allow adults whose identity was exposed in a publicity appeal to regain their anonymity should they wish to.

- On a force level, there should be a specialist missing person unit and/or missing person coordinator that will be staffed by experienced officers who receive appropriate training and adequate allocation of resources.

- There should be Police officers or Family Liaison Officers who communicate with families and/or members of the community regularly and inform them how the investigation is progressing.

- Training should emphasise the links between missing persons and other potentially associated investigations to ensure that staff ask the relevant questions at the reporting stage and during the investigation.

- Training should explicitly discuss the role and responsibilities of the Police in general and in missing person investigations specifically.

- Training should include discussion about the needs of the families, friends and community and best practices in managing expectation and forms of communication.

- Future research should establish the cost of a missing person investigation in Canada as well as wider social costs involved with missing incidents.

- Further research should explore Canadian officers' attitude towards missing person investigations and identify key challenges that they face.

- Future research should explore in more depth the portrayal of missing person in the media and identify biases and stereotypes. The content of media reports is also important to understand in order to tackle biases in publicity appeals.

- Future research should examine the effectiveness of publicity appeals in Canada and identify which methods of publicity (poster, social media, press, etc) lead to the best sightings and resolution of the case.

- Future research should examine the short- and long-term impact of publicity appeals on missing adults.