



Homicide Investigation Tracking System
(800) 345-2793



CASE MANAGEMENT for Missing Children Homicide Investigation

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Attorney General of Washington

&

U.S. Department of Justice
Office of Juvenile Justice and
Delinquency Prevention

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INVESTIGATIVE CASE MANAGEMENT FOR MISSING CHILDREN HOMICIDES: REPORT II

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Cases of abducted and missing children found murdered continue to traumatize victims' families and friends and the public. While these cases are still quite rare, with the amount of national and international media attention they are given, we too quickly recognize the victims' names.

Our first research into this subject was “undertaken in an effort to better understand these types of murders and to identify investigative techniques and strategies that will improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the criminal investigations and the apprehension rate of murderers who abduct children.” This follow-up research continues that effort.

We collected 175 solved cases and added them to the original data set. We obtained the new cases from agencies of all sizes in the United States and even went to some states not included in the original survey.

The additional cases are reflective and supportive of the original report with several significant and definite differences between the first study and this one. With more killers identified, we find that the relationships between them and their victims change from strangers to an almost equal likelihood of being friends/acquaintances. The probability of the killer's name coming up during the first week of the investigation decreases. Another significant change is the increase of the use of pornography by killers as a trigger. This should not be surprising, given the overwhelming sexual motivation of killers in these cases.

Victims continue to be females slightly over 11 years of age, leading normal lives and living with normal families – typical low-risk victims. The initial contact between the victim and killer is still within ¼ mile of the victim’s residence.

The killers remain around 27 years old and are predominately unmarried, with half of them living either alone or with their parents. Half of them are unemployed, and those who are employed work in unskilled or semi-skilled occupations.

More than half of these cases are initially reported to a law enforcement agency as a “missing child.” Fast action is necessary since there is typically over a two-hour delay in making the initial missing child report, and the vast majority of the abducted children *who are murdered* are dead within three hours of the abduction.

One question answered by this research is this: What can we tell parents to help them protect their children? Even though child abduction murders are rare, parents must eliminate, or minimize, the opportunity for their children to become victims. We need to tell parents that if their child is unaccounted for, *call the police immediately*.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Child abduction murder is every parent's worst nightmare. To compound the problem, child abduction murders are incredibly difficult to solve and deeply impact law enforcement officials involved in the investigation. According to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), abductions resulting in a child's death present many investigative and emotional obstacles for law enforcement officers (National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, 2000). Hanfland, Keppel, and Weis (1997) state that the rarity of child abduction murders, even among criminal homicides, and their complex, emotion-laden, high profiles, make them extremely difficult to investigate.

The 1979 abduction of seven-year-old Etan Patz and the 1981 abduction and murder of six-year-old Adam Walsh terrified parents throughout the nation. As a result of the notoriety of these cases, inflated and unsubstantiated numbers of missing children were widely reported to be over 2 million per year. The number of children who were abducted and then murdered was erroneously reported to be as high as 5,000 per year (National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, 2000).

The public outcry over concern for the safety of America's children contributed to the establishment of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children by the United States Congress. To the contrary, careful research has shown that between 40 and 150 incidents of child abduction murder occur each year, which is less than one half of one percent of the murders committed nationally. On average, there is one child abduction murder for every 10,000 reports of a missing child (Finklehor, Hotaling, & Sedlak, 1992).

