



***Investigating Missing Persons: Research and Practice***

*Special interest seminar for senior delegates from the  
Criminal Investigation Bureau,  
Ministry of Public Security, China*

**Wednesday 14 September 2016**

**Room 1025**

**University of Abertay**

# ***Investigating Missing Persons: Research and Practice***

## **PROGRAMME**

- 10:00      Arrival, coffee and networking.
- 10:50      Welcome and introductions.
- 11:00      Speaker one: **Penny Woolnough**, Abertay University. Geo-spatial profiling of missing persons.
- 12:00      Speaker two: **Claire Taylor**, Abertay University. Behavioural consistency in repeat missing adults.
- 13:00      *Sandwich lunch*
- 13:30      Speaker three: **Amy Humphrey**, University of Dundee. Defining success in missing person investigations.
- 14:30      Discussion / question session with all speakers
- 15:00      Meeting closes

# ***Investigating Missing Persons: Research and Practice***

## **SPEAKERS' BIOGRAPHIES AND PRESENTATION ABSTRACTS**

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**Penny Woolnough** - Dr Penny Woolnough is a Lecturer in Forensic Psychology at Abertay University in Scotland. A Fellow of the International Academy of Investigative Psychology and a Registered Forensic Psychologist she acts as an Expert Advisor to the UK National Crime Agency and to Police Scotland in relation to missing persons. Her research interests focus on the policing of vulnerable persons and she is currently engaged in projects relating to missing persons, suicide, and public protection.

### ***Abstract***

Estimates suggest more than 300,000 people are reported missing to UK police every year. Despite the huge impact of cases on police resources, problems of risk assessment and vulnerability, as well as the emotional nature of the incident for friends and family, very little is currently known about the behaviour of missing persons: Where do they go? How far do they travel? Where will they be found? How will they be found? The results of a study involving the collation and analysis of over 2000 closed UK missing children and adult police reports suggest it is possible to produce predictive behavioural profiles, based on key characteristics (e.g., age, gender, mental condition), to facilitate the expeditious and safe location of missing persons. The research methodology and findings will be presented along with an outline of how the resulting missing person behavioural profiles are currently being used by the police.

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**Claire Taylor** - is a PhD student at Abertay University where she is studying behavioural consistencies in repeat missing adults. Her research won the annual Scottish Institute of Policing Research Postgraduate Student Award in June. She has a first class honours degree in Psychology and an MSc in Research Methods, and has practical experience supporting individuals who have mental health issues, alcohol and drug addictions and learning disabilities.

### ***Abstract***

Approximately 38% of police recorded incidents involve individuals who have previously gone missing, many of whom are considered vulnerable and/or at risk. Despite the financial and human costs associated with this behaviour, research into and theory development regarding this population is extremely underdeveloped. Whilst some attention has been applied to repeat missing behaviour in children, there is very little literature that is concerned with missing adults. This presentation will therefore discuss the aims and objectives of a research study that will directly investigate adult repeat missing behaviour for the first time. The concept 'missing person' will be discussed along with an overview of the project, which is in its initial data collection stage. Both quantitative and qualitative methods will be used in the form of database analyses and in-depth interviews to investigate the notion of behavioural, cognitive and affective consistencies across multiple disappearances. Overall, the study aims to advance our understanding of why such individuals go missing repeatedly, their vulnerabilities and experiences whilst missing, and to provide critical insights for multi-agency prevention and future safeguarding strategies.

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### **Amy Humphrey**

Amy Humphrey is PhD student at the University of Dundee with broad interests in policing practice, organisational networks and boundaries, missing persons, decision making and problem solving. Her current research project focuses on how police teams can successfully coordinate to search for, investigate and protect missing people. Amy has spent the past 9 months alongside police officers undertaking missing persons work as an active observer. Amy received a 1<sup>st</sup> class (honours) degree in Psychology from University of Wales, Bangor, also receiving the departmental award for research at graduation. Following work in young offender rehabilitation, Amy went on to the University of Liverpool where she gained an MSc in Investigative Psychology. She has since co-authored papers on police decision making, training, and media influence on offender behaviour.

### **Abstract**

Police forces in the UK are expected to provide both an immediate response to missing incidents as well as act to safeguard people, recognising and responding to where appropriate, additional risks such as CSE, gang related activity, or modern day slavery. This creates a complex, multi-agency problem solving context in which the police are often expected to take 'lead agency' role. This research project focusses specifically on the place of the police in this context, exploring how diverse inter and intra-force networks coordinate to progress missing persons work. In exploring the work of these police networks, it was first necessary to examine what constitutes good practice and to create a definition for success. National experts in the field of Police Search, Missing Persons Investigation and Safeguarding were interviewed, and responses analysed to create a framework of success for policing in missing persons. The resulting themes will be further refined following 9 months in depth research with two case study police areas. Developing a clear understanding of what constitutes a successful policing contribution to this area not only provides a clear 'gold standard' for exploring my research findings, but will also provide Police Forces with a robust framework to develop policy and practice in this area. Furthermore, it will contribute to the debate on the boundaries of responsibility, action and risk ownership of the multiple organisations working alongside the Police to search for and protect missing people.

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### **STUDENT HELPERS**



**Joseph Hamilton** is a final year undergraduate student studying Forensic Psychobiology. He is the recipient of a Carnegie Trust for Scotland Vacation Scholarship and is conducting a study exploring police use of social media in missing person investigations.



**Kayleigh Hart** is a final year undergraduate student studying Forensic Psychobiology. She is currently conducting an analysis of police missing person reports to explore patterns in missing person behaviour.