

UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW  
Department of Geographical and Earth Sciences

**Research Fellow**

**Salary: £38,951 - £45,155 per annum (Grade 8)**

**Ref: 00097-6**

**FURTHER PARTICULARS**

***Geographies of Missing People: experiences, processes, responses***  
**ESRC RES 062-23-2492**

**1. Job Purpose**

To be project manager and key researcher for the ESRC grant RES 062-23-2492 '*Geographies of Missing People: processes, experiences, responses*'. To secure research excellence and maximum impact across funded and related research stakeholders in police, charity and university sectors.

**2. Key Task Summary**

You will be expected to:

1. Conduct and manage research as outlined in the ESRC funded application, and produce appropriate academic research outputs.
2. Secure user-relevant impact across a variety of academic and research user contexts (police training and continuing professional development programmes, academic seminars and conferences, European and US police networks.)
3. Develop future collaborations at UK and international levels with a view to initiating research projects beyond the life of ESRC RES 062-23-2492.
4. Contribute to the research environment, meetings and related training within both the Geographical and Earth Science and the Scottish Institute for Policing Research (SIPR)
5. Manage, organise and represent project research and knowledge transfer activities outside the Department and the University including presenting work at seminars and major conferences
6. Undertake any other duties of equivalent standing as required by the Head of Department or Line manager

The main components of the project are outlined below. The Research Fellow would be responsible for the organisation and execution of data collection, dealing with police database/records, co-organising impact events and assisting in writing (for policy, practitioner and academic audiences).

**The project**

There have been relatively few studies of going missing, and these are mostly orientated towards younger people as these are estimated to make up 2/3 of missing episodes per year (see Beihal *et al*, 2003; Hepworth and Featherstone, 1974; Mitchell, 2003; Payne, 1995). Government research has focussed on the risks associated with missing vulnerable people (Newiss, 2006), as well as analysing the development of personal and spatial profiling of 'typical' missing people (Newiss, 2005; Gibb and Woolnough, 2005). The Economic and Social Research Council and other major social archives, however, record *no research data* held about missing people ([www.esds.ac.uk](http://www.esds.ac.uk)), and

as Payne (1995, p334) argues, there is a general lack of information about adults that go missing (but see Payne, 1992), and their *spatial experiences*, especially as articulated through the voices of 'returned' missing people.

Typologies of missing people are emergent in studies across the UK, US and internationally, whereby the missing are categorised in terms of age and whether or not they constitute young 'runaways' or adult 'missing', but 'an understanding of the process of going missing is not available from most of the British studies' (Payne, 1995, p338), a situation that has remained the same since the mid 1990s. Biehal *et al* (2003) summarise typologies into a continuum accounting for different contexts/triggers for missing experiences from 'decided' to 'drift' to 'unintentional absence' to 'forced absence'. Consequently, although some things are known about missing people (age, gender, reasons for leaving, vulnerable status), *less is known* about the fuller social and spatial experience of going missing, and even less about the experience of going missing for those families left behind (Holmes, 2008). Indeed, no in-depth interview work has been yet carried out which attempts to reconstruct missing journeys/and responsive searching in the UK. There is also limited research on police decision-making processes in searching strategies (Woolnough, pers comm.; Grampian Police, 2007, Newiss 1999). This unique project seeks to address these significant gaps in understanding with the support of both charitable and police partnerships, in order to produce targeted research with both clear user value and distinctive theoretical relevance.

### **Rationale**

Our central concerns are disassembling the processes of, and responses to, going missing as a spatial exercise by engaging with the experiences of the missing, police and families. 'Going missing' will hence be conceptualised not simply as absence, but also as a spatial journey, rich with social, material and emotional dimensions little understood at present. We seek to understand *and critique* the spatial responses to absence from police and family perspectives, while still acknowledging the need for vulnerable adults to be found, and found safely, so their needs might be addressed.

Geographers argue that people and places, selves and spaces, are mutually constitutive, that they come into being relationally, produced and performed in interaction with each other (Davidson, Bondi and Smith, 2005). For people who go missing these relations become disrupted, threatened, in crisis, although little is understood of how this process occurs *in practice*. By paying attention to reconstructed journeys of missing events as practiced biographical disruptions, the relation between emotional health, geography and absence will be brought to the fore. Attention will be focused on the practice of missing journeying, the component parts, timings and spacings of these particular trails. Building on research concerning disrupted selves (Parr, 1999, 2008) and relocated witnesses (Fyfe, 2001), this project will further elaborate the mutual constitution of selves in relation to 'crisis geographies' and crisis-led mobility.

Theoretically, this project seeks to critically analyse the contradictory relations between absence and presence, uncertain mobility and (re)location, grief and unresolved loss, as these components are implicated in the experience of going missing for multiple interested actors. These conceptual hooks are supplemented by a commitment to socially useful research forged in participatory relationships with police and charities in order to find ways to help understand potentially life-threatening, crisis-led mobility.

### **Aims/research frames**

1) **To examine the scope, capabilities and capacities of search agents to track missing adult people (aged 18 or over) over space and through time.** The project will examine how different agents involved in searching for missing people mobilize their different knowledges, skills and resources to intervene in missing 'events' and 'processes'. In particular, the project will investigate the spatial/geographical strategies employed by the police and families to track missing people at local, national and international levels and how such strategies change and develop over time. This will involve critically considering the nature, meaning and scope of

searching for different agencies and agents and explore the distinctions between traditional search strategies (physically looking for people in the 'real' world) and those searching via virtual space, private detection, electronic databases, and social networking sites. The project will also seek to identify and interrogate how spatial typologies of missing people are mobilised across these agents and how they work together to maximise competent spatial intervention in missing events. Insights gained will be of value in the development of co-ordinated and effective operational responses to missing people, the wider policy response to 'missingness,' and to critical debates about the nature of surveillance in contemporary societies.

**2) To investigate the experiential geographies of missing people and their families**

The project will interview 'returned' missing people via relevant agencies in order to understand more about the experiences of going and staying missing and particularly identifying intentional/unintentional uses of space and place in short and long term missing processes, while paying attention to implications for self and identity formation and maintenance. This qualitative information on 'experiential geographies' will be used to critique and update current spatial profiling techniques used by police and other agencies involved in formulating search strategies. The project aims to add value to existing quantitative data held by police researchers on missing events in ways that potentially enable practical actions via search interventions in ways sensitive to the voices of the (formally) missing. Interviews with families would also illustrate the impact of missing events with a view to identifying needs and social dimensions of restructured place-relations.

**3) To advance conceptual understandings of geographies of 'missingness'**

There is a lack of attention given to the *adult* missing in the social science and policy literature and this project would address that. Conceptually, we would link processes of going and staying missing to human geographical thinking about losing and rebuilding place-based identities and the implications of different forms of mobility. Specifically, we would add to the literature on geographies of policing, emotional geographies and geographies of mental health. In all three of these areas there is a lack of attention to missing people. Although homeless geographies have been discussed at length, different geographies of experience, policing and intervention are relevant here. We will thus update the conceptual basis of 'missingness', as defined not just by those 'left behind', and therefore contribute new ideas about crisis-led mobilities in human geography.

**4) To advance policy and operational understandings of 'missingness'**

The project will contribute findings with potential operational relevance in relation to subjective spatial memory and knowledge that will complement/critique the use of police quantitative spatial behaviour profiles. Working jointly with the police as co-applicants and a specialist expert steering group will ensure that research results are channelled to be operational relevant where possible and effective. The research also seeks to make interventions and contributions to strategy and policy and a strong dissemination strategy will ensure this. The product of this will be development of new conceptual and policy tools for understanding and responding to missingness as a particular kind of spatial expression of vulnerability and crisis.

These aims *are supplemented by specific questions* which also drive the qualitative analysis.

**Research design and methods**

Data collection is driven by partnership work with key stakeholders and anchored around the participation of two police forces where data on missing people and their families are held. Two police forces have been selected with the advice of the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) and by the Missing People charity: the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) and Grampian Police (where a co-applicant is based). This selection is driven an interest in comparison between the experiences of, and responses to, missing people in different social and geographical environments (eg urban London and Aberdeen and the rural Cairngorm region of NW Scotland). The sections below explain how the aims will be met by the research design:

**Aim 1):** A combination of key informant interviews and case reconstruction will be used. The search advisory structure of UK policing will be used as a framework for interviews with a range of officers including the NPIA National Search Advisor. NPIA Crime Investigation Support Officers, a selection of force based Police Search Advisors (PolSAs) as well as uniformed and detective officers. PolSAs, uniform and detective officers involved in searching will be interviewed from 2 case study police forces (Grampian and MPS), and the remainder from a random sample of 52 forces across the UK. A selection of 5 case files (using the sampling strategy identified below) for each force will be examined in detail and the specific officers involved interviewed for context-specific commentary on decision-making in the search process. Approximately 25 interviews in total will generate data for an in-depth understanding of how police resources are deployed in response to missing persons cases, decision-making processes within police organisations, and focus on what spatial assumptions are made and acted upon during missing events. Interviews will also focus on knowledge and application of predictive spatial behaviour profiling and constructions of missing journeys. Interviews with families (for sampling see below) will focus on more experiential knowledges of the personal geographies of the missing and how these influence informal search strategies. Understanding how and whether police and family searching co-exist or over-lap will be the focus of analysis. Documentary research on *virtual* search pathways and private search agencies will add diversity to this analysis and will be referenced in interviews with police and family searchers. Interviews with key partners in the Missing People charity (n=5) will evaluate the range of search strategies available to the general public.

**Aim 2):** In each force the researchers have been allocated a designated police point of contact / administrator to send a standardised letter to a relevant sample of *returned* missing persons within a pre-defined period (e.g., 500 closed cases in each of 2008 and 2009). The sampling frame would exclude those under 18 years old and dementia cases. We would sample for those missing for less than and more than 14 days (a police-led time frame relating to data capture) and for particular time frames within this (eg, 1-3 days (approximately 75% of police cases fall into this category: Tarling and Burrows, 2004) 3-7 days, 7-14 days, and proactively sample for 100% of a post-14 day cases to ensure that the project has opportunity to potentially interview longer-term missing persons. This sample would be cross-referenced with age and gender, and across risk categories to ensure representativeness. Based on an anticipated response rate of approximately 2%-5%, the researchers aim to interview at least 25 returnees in each force for the period (generating a maximum of 50 interviews across the project). The sampling framework has been deemed appropriate by participating forces and would be adapted further if the project is funded.

A letter, written and distributed by the relevant force, will be sent to the selected random sample introducing the project and project researchers, and noting compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998. This letter will contain an Information Sheet and Consent Form on University-headed note paper and an SAE for direct return to the research team if respondents are willing to participate. Sample documents have already been approved by Glasgow University LBSS Faculty Ethics committee (letter attached). The names and addresses of the persons receiving the invitation to research will not be known nor held by the researchers in the first instance. The selection of families (of returned missing people) for interview will be generated in exactly the same way as above, via each force. Family members who report people missing and across a variety of time frames (see above) will be randomly selected and sent invitations to participation. Members of 15 families in each force will be interviewed (and be unrelated to the respondents above). Precise numbers to be sampled and contacted via letter will be agreed with each force upon funding, but is likely to be 100, given an anticipated higher return rate of 10-15%. A selection of families of missing persons (both people returned and those still missing) will also be administered by the Missing People Charity (n=10). Precise numbers to be sampled and contacted via letter will be agreed with the charity upon the receipt of funding but is likely that circa 30 families will be sent letters inviting participation to generate a final sample of 10 families

for interview. A higher response rate is anticipated because of the working relationship between families and the charity.

The interviews will be 1-1.5 hours in length and recorded with permission. The research team are very experienced in working with vulnerable people (people with mental health problems and relocated witnesses under protection schemes) and interviews will be conducted with sensitivity and care. The interviews will be conducted in light of ethical guidelines issued by the ESRC and writing on trauma and loss (Fravel *et al*, 1992; Boss, 1999; 2002; DePrince *et al*, 2006). The topics of the interviews will be partly-based on original thinking, previous police-based research (1600 'cancellation form' case closure interviews: via Dr Penny Woolnough), and also reflections from a steering committee of national experts in the field of missing persons. Ethical clearance for planned interview schedules *has already been attained* by a Glasgow University LBSS Ethics Committee. Interviews will be transcribed by the contracted researcher or a secure transcription service with confidentiality agreements. The interview data will be anonymised and loaded onto a single password protected computer hard drive to which only the researchers will have access. Results will be written up for police and 'user' audiences, ensuring respondents feel they have made an important contribution to knowledge about missing persons, albeit in anonymised form.

**Aim 3 and 4:** a robust writing programme will address aim 3 and is detailed in the main application form. Meetings with the expert steering group at 6 points over the project will allow for analytical findings to be channelled into appropriate formats for policy and operational guidance. The impact assessment details how police liaison and training will ensure user-value.

#### **Framework for Analysis**

Using the NVIVO software package to aid a coding and analysis of qualitative data, we would build 'emit' and 'etic' categories through which data-led theory would emerge. A context sensitive analysis would identify information for policy/practice relevant research findings and conceptual categorization for theoretical writing. Theoretically, the materials will be used to help build new conceptual understandings of vulnerable human mobility and 'crisis geographies', and this could act as a framework for regarding the issue of going missing as more than a collection of 'causes', 'events', and 'typologies'. This project will not produce a representational typology of missing adults but rather will construct systematic insights into particular kinds of missing journeys and searching strategies as these are revealed by qualitative methods. Research questions related to the aims above will be used as a structuring device for analysis, to ensure relevant delivery.

**Expected outputs:** at least 5 journal publications in academic and police practitioner journals; practitioner, policy and academic seminars; practitioner and policy focussed reports; a user friendly website; co-organisation/hosting of dissemination events including 2 national day seminars, an EU and US day seminar; UK and International academic conferences; a book proposal (Ashgate) with manuscript delivery in 2014. Film-makers will be approached to translate the findings of the research into a documentary. **Impacts:** to enhance police officer training/knowledge at strategic and operational level; to enhance the role played by other organisations and searchers in tracing missing persons; to highlight family needs and interventions; and to help develop a strategic research agenda around missing people that would attract national and international support.

#### **Impact**

The impacts of this project are ambitious and the Research Fellow would have a key role in delivering these:

The National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA), Metropolitan Police Service, Grampian police and the Missing People Charity have all provided letters of permission and support. Their support reflects the added value that this proposed research can offer them in terms of broadening and deepening their understanding of the issues surrounding missing persons In

order that the research team identify and manage deliverable outcomes which are of use for the police, families and the charity, we are engaging a UK-based but internationally recognised steering group made up of experts in the field (including Professor Sue Black OBE, Dundee University (a forensic anthropologist who works closely with police forces around the world on human identification issues), Professor David Alexander (Trauma studies and specialist, Robert Gordon University), Geoff Newis, Director of Policy and Research at Missing People, Assistant Chief Constable Colin Menzies (ACPOS lead for Missing Persons), an NPIA representative from the Missing Persons Bureau, and Mark Harrison (The Police National Search Advisor for the UK)). This team will meet at 6 times over the project and have a key role in advisory how to increase the user-value of the research data gathered into user-relevant impacts.

- The project intends to maximise impact by holding both academic and practitioner focused events. Academic conference presentations will be made to Geography and Social Science audiences in UK and international events. We also plan a series of practitioner and policy focused seminars, organised through SIPR and that engage police policy community audiences. These will include three major dissemination events in London, Brussels and New York. The London event will involve the participation of a range of organisations linked to missing persons enquiries and be inclusive of families and missing persons themselves. SIPR will utilise its existing networks to hold an international seminar in Brussels (using in-kind conference facilities provided by Scotland Europa), aimed at disseminating the findings of the research to representatives of police organisations from across Europe, including Interpol which has international remit in relation to missing persons inquiries. A third event will be held in New York in order to reach the North American communities of practitioners and researchers. Drawing on the network of contacts of Woolnough, assembled while she was a Fulbright Scholar attached to the New York City Police Department and working on missing person issues, this event would involve participation from the FBI, the US National Institute of Justice and the National Centre for Missing Adults, Phoenix.
- At key stages over the course of the project, the team will produce briefing papers on the research for practitioner and policy audiences. The research team will also aim to contribute to the national missing persons police training courses delivered by the Crime Faculty, Force Learning and Development Centre within Surrey Police Force and the NPIA annual Missing Persons Conference (Ryton, nr Coventry) and to relevant PolSA training at the UK's Police National Search Centre.
- Academic publications will be aimed at a mixture of geographical, social science and practitioner based journals such as Environment and Planning D; Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers; Social and Cultural Geography; Progress in Human Geography; Policing and Society; Policing: a Journal of Policy, Practice and Research; International Journal of Police Science and Management.
- A website with research progress, papers, publications and events will be maintained throughout the project and hosted by SIPR at Dundee University.
- The research team will produce specialise reports on each of the main respondents targeted for the project (police/search agents, families and missing persons themselves). These reports will match the standards of research report documentation produced by individual research units in the support partnerships that have been built (the NPIA and Missing People in particular).
- The research team will actively seek media interest and use experience with media dissemination in past ESRC funded research. Preliminary engagement with independent filmmakers in Glasgow indicates a high level of interest in developing sensitive documentary output. Media Press Officers will be utilised through both universities, the police partners and ESRC to co-ordinate effective media coverage.

## **Locations of research work**

The project will involve working for periods of time (for a maximum of 5 weeks at a time) in London, Aberdeen and SIPR in Dundee. Your main location for the duration of the project will be Glasgow University and the department of Geographical and Earth Sciences.

Note that you will be asked to represent the project at various seminars and conferences in a variety of locations in UK, Europe and USA.

The latter six months of the project will be partly based at SIPR in Dundee (involving daily/weekly travel rather than relocation) in order to maximise the impact via police research networks.

Project team: please see [http://www.sipr.ac.uk/networks/missing\\_persons.php](http://www.sipr.ac.uk/networks/missing_persons.php)

Dr Hester Parr is the PI and directly responsible for your 'line management'. She is a social and cultural geographer who has worked on mental health issues.

Prof Nick Fyfe is Director of SIPR and Professor of Human Geography at the University of Dundee and has worked on crime and policing issues.

Dr Penny Woolnough is co-applicant and employed by Grampian Police as a Senior Research Officer. She is also an Honorary Research Fellow in the School of Social Sciences at the University of Dundee and a Visiting Lecturer at Glasgow Caledonian University.

Scottish Institute of Police Research (SIPR) Established in 2007 and supported by investment from the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland and the Scottish Funding Council, the Scottish Institute for Policing Research (SIPR) is a consortium of thirteen universities. Its key aims are:

- To undertake high quality, independent research of relevance to policing in Scotland;
- To engage in a range of knowledge exchange activities in order to strengthen the evidence base on which policing policy and practice are developed;
- To provide a single focus for policing research in Scotland in order to foster the development of national and international links with other researchers, policy makers and practitioners;
- To enhance policing research capacity in Scotland by developing the research infrastructure and enhancing research skills.

SIPR's activities are organised around three inter-disciplinary Research Networks which bring together researchers from over 15 different academic disciplines. The Police-Community Relations Network focuses on the relationships between the police and different socio-economic and geographical communities and brings together researchers with backgrounds in sociology, criminology and political science. The Evidence & Investigation Network focuses on the role of the police in the recovery,

interpretation and effective use of intelligence and evidence in the investigation of crime and draws on the expertise of researchers with backgrounds in areas like forensic science, computing and psychology. The Police Organisation Network focuses on issues of management, structure and leadership within the police and includes researchers with a management science and public administration background. The activities of the three networks are coordinated from an administrative hub based at the University of Dundee. Further details of SIPR's activities can be found at [www.sipr.ac.uk](http://www.sipr.ac.uk)

### **Working Culture**

We are a friendly research team and have been involved in working on this proposal for some years. We are looking forward to seeing the plans put into action. We welcome informal enquiries – which will be taken by Hester or Nick. We encourage you to ask any questions before or after application/interview – however small these are. We are looking for someone who can work effectively, and independently, but also enjoys friendly working relationships.

### **Working Context**

The Human Geographers in GES at Glasgow operate as a team holding regular informal sessions, including research fellows and postgraduates, at which members give presentations on their current research activities or related research issues.

### **Current Departmental Research in Human Geography in GES**

To give us a sharper focus and to promote collaboration, we have developed four research themes within Human Geography, all set under the rubric of *Space, Polity and Power*, which cut across some of the more traditional divides in the discipline. These four themes are:

#### **(1) Spaces of knowledge**

Various staff are examining ways in which geographical and environmental knowledges are 'made', contested and put into practice. There is a substantial DFID-funded programme of ongoing research on the local environmental knowledges possessed by Bedouin in Egypt, asking how these might be more usefully compared to and integrated with other knowledges. Related work is being conducted on the knowledges informing resistant networks and activities challenging modernist projects in South West Asia, South America and elsewhere. We are involved in work on popular geopolitical knowledges, with a focus on their consequences for how national groups imagine 'evil others'. A current ESRC-funded project is examining the place of coffee-houses in developing new forms of sociability, interaction and knowledge-production, linked to claims about the changing 'public sphere'. We are also developing understandings of geospatial knowledges together with GIS colleagues in the Department.

#### **(2) 'Other' geographies**

This theme focuses on 'other' human groupings who stand outside of the 'mainstream'. A current ESRC-funded project is investigating the experiences of people with mental health problems living in remote rural

areas in the Scottish Highlands. We are also working on other aspects of these issues, including specific work on the geographies of children, young people, sexual dissidents, asylum-seekers and women with disabilities. Also, within the UK, we are looking at women and their relationships to national identity, as well as factors influencing political participation within disadvantaged urban communities. Outside the UK, we have work in train on Bedouin communities in Egypt, in which issues such as access to technology and markets by such marginalised communities are being investigated.

(3) **Globalisation and local transformation beyond the West**

This theme aims to explore the effects of recent political-economic globalisation processes at the local level, investigating different forms of local transformation experienced by differing peripheral regions both in and beyond the West. Building on long-standing interests in less developed countries, the work focuses on three main areas: how globalisation, and particularly Structural Adjustment Policies, impact upon urban and peri-urban areas, both in Africa and Latin America; global shifts within industry, especially the oil and footwear industries; and the role of social movements and other forms of resistance in contesting modernist development.

(4) **Restructuring of Scotland's economic, political and cultural landscapes**

We are interested in exploring the diverse aspects of how the spaces of contemporary Scotland are being restructured. Particular concerns include the changing nature, and profound shifts in, urban relations, governance, competitiveness and place-marketing strategies in Central Scotland; subnational political restructuring and decentralisation; the ways in which global-economic changes rebound upon the industrial sectors of Scotland, and in particular the oil industry; and the cultural re-visioning of Glasgow as an allegedly post-industrial city, particularly in terms of the connections between public and visual arts projects, local regeneration and issues of democratic citizenship.

Current Human Geography staff in the Department, and their primary research interests include:

John Briggs, *Development and environment in LDCs, indigenous knowledges and agriculture.*

Andrew Cumbers, *Regional development in advanced industrial societies, work and employment restructuring, globalisation.*

Stella Lowder, *Urban development issues in developing economies, especially Latin America.*

Ronan Paddison, *Urban governance in advanced economies, community participation, urban marketing.*

Chris Philo, *Cultural / social / historical geography, geographies of mental health, animal geographies, histories of geographical thought.*

Paul Routledge, *Cultural / political geographies of resistance, local protest / social movements.*

Joanne Sharp, *Cultural / political geography, art and public space in urban communities, feminist geography.*

David Featherstone *Geographies of resistance, Spatiality and political identities, Subaltern political ecologies, Geographies of solidarity and internationalism*

Hester Parr, *Geographies of mental health, creative methodologies, public and participatory geographies*

Hayden Lorimer, *cultural geography / historical geography / cultures of landscape*

Deborah Bryson *urban growth, creolization, mining, deagrarianization, East Africa*

Danny Mackinnon *Economic adaptation and evolution in old industrial regions, Innovation and knowledge networks • State restructuring and governmentality • Neoliberalism and urban entrepreneurialism • Labour control and labour agency in cities*

There are also at present circa 20 postgraduate students in human geography supervised by academic staff within the Department, at various stages of progress in their PhD theses and MRes course. There are also new post-docs and research fellows. The overall Human Geography Research Group membership is hence currently 32+ active researchers.