**Small Grant Award**

Tell us what happened? An analysis of Grampian Police missing person 'closure-interview' forms

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**Introduction :**

It is estimated more than 210,000 people are reported missing to police in the UK every year. Last year, Grampian Police alone received 2159 reported incidences. Because the police have a duty to risk assess and respond to all reported cases, a significant amount of time and resources are devoted to missing person enquiries every day. Indeed, activity analysis highlights missing persons represent one of the top ten incident types to consume police time and account for approximately 3% of officer time overall.

As well as being frequent and resource intensive, missing person cases are often linked to a wider arena of policing related activity: human trafficking is a serious problem; suicides and homicides often begin their investigative 'life' as missing persons; many missing people are vulnerable by their exposure to crime (e.g., drugs and prostitution); and young runaways account for a disproportionate number of cases. Furthermore, there are significant emotional and health related issues for missing people themselves, as well as the impact on their friends and family members while they are missing. Consequently, the challenge of understanding and responding to missing persons relates to many of Grampian Police's current Force Priorities (i.e., Public Protection; Anti-Social Behaviour; Community Focus ). Furthermore, ACPOS Crime Business Area has a sub-group dedicated to missing persons and the UK Government has recently established a Missing Persons Taskforce to address the lack of knowledge and policy response to this extremely important social issue.

Despite such widespread implications, until recently virtually no research effort had been devoted to missing persons. To address this, Grampian Police conducted an analysis of missing person cases to explore whether it is possible to profile the behaviour of missing persons and, thereby, facilitate the expeditious and resource efficient location of them. The results of this innovative research, published as a guide for operational police officers by Grampian Police in 2007 , have widely become 'the' invaluable aid to missing person risk assessment and response by police forces and partner agencies around the UK. Grampian Police has received a number of awards for the work and overwhelming feedback from a wide range of practitioners reinforces that by understanding more about the behaviour of missing people we can better tailor risk assessment and response.

While this work has improved our knowledge and response to missing persons, we desperately need to tap into the views and experiences of missing people themselves if we are to properly understand why people go missing and what they do while they are missing. At an individual case level such information would prove invaluable if a person is reported missing on more than one occasion. In such circumstances, the police could respond in a more intelligence-led manner utilising knowledge of previous case specific behaviour patterns and potentially vital information.

As a step towards such an approach, in 2004 Grampian Police reviewed the Force Missing Person Standard Operating Procedure and introduced a structured cancellation 'interview' form to capture better intelligence and information from missing people when they are located. Introduction of this unique form was subsequently recognised by HMIC as good practice. However, a formal evaluation of this new approach is yet to be undertaken and lessons learned/ best practice identified for all Scottish Forces. Importantly, analysis of the data contained within these forms would allow exploration regarding which aspects of the cancellation form yield the most useful operational information / intelligence, and would compliment the existing research by providing valuable insights into the motivations and experiences of people who go missing. Through such insights, police forces can, in partnership, begin to address the core issues behind missing person behaviour and attempt to reduce the problem.

**Research Aims :** To conduct an analysis of Grampian Police missing person cancellation forms to:

* Explore the motivations / reasons people go missing / are reported missing
* Understand more about whether missing people know they have been reported missing and the impact this may have on their behaviour
* Ascertain the effects health, educational, emotional, relationship, economic, quality of life issues/problems have on the reasons people choose to go missing
* Gain an understanding of whether people who go missing are aware of the impact their disappearance has on others (e.g., family members, Social Services)?
* Explore the nature and incidences of vulnerabilities / dangers missing people are exposed to while missing
* Explore the activities people are involved in while they are missing, including involvement in criminal activity
* Assist in the identification of geographical 'hotspots' in terms of where missing persons go / what they do
* Evaluate the operational value of the component parts of the Cancellation Form.