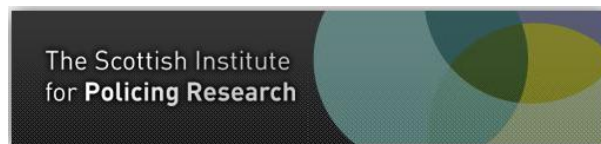


Geographies of Missing People

Processes, Experiences, Responses

Economic and Social Research Council funded research project



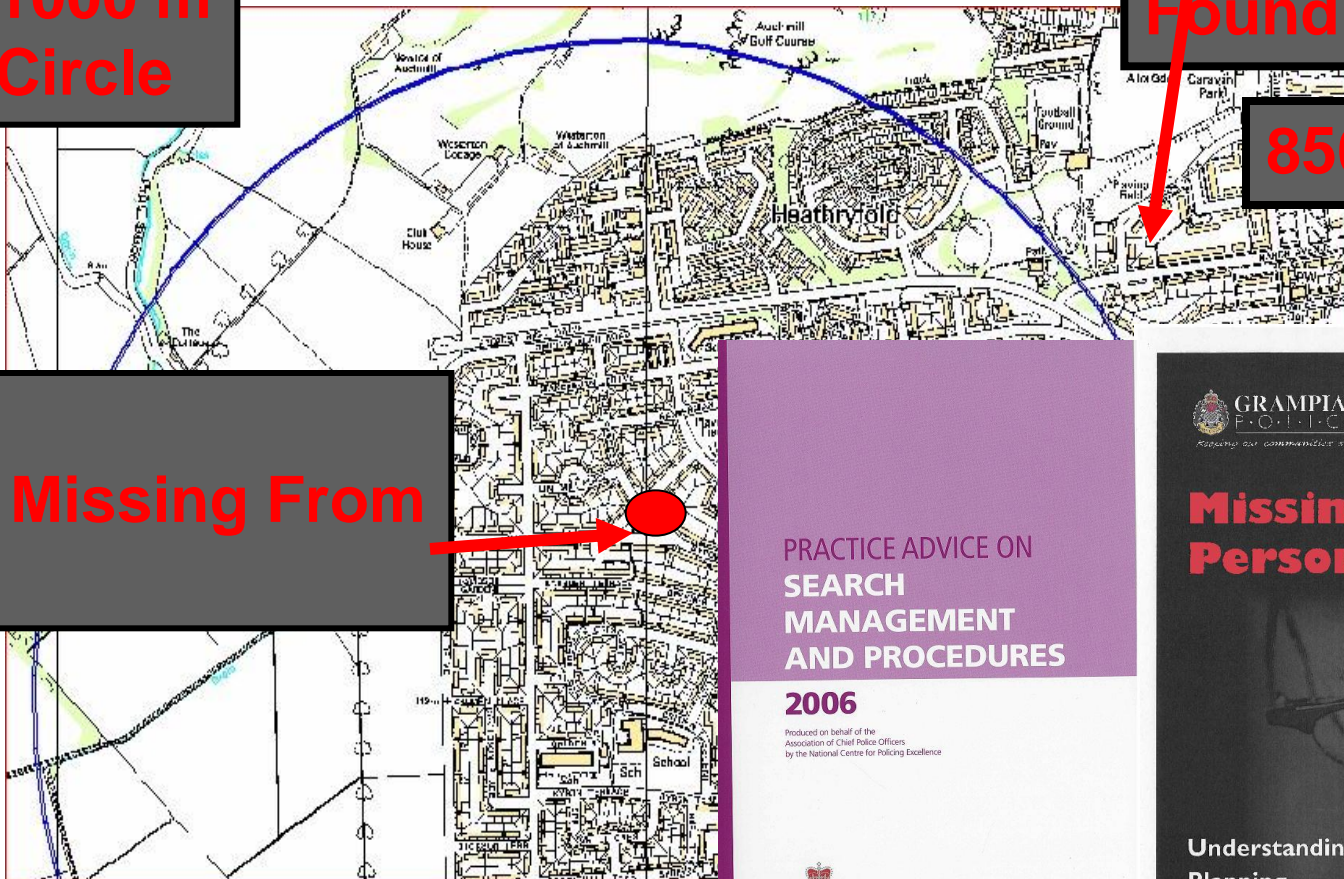
Established geographies of missing....

**1000 m
Circle**

**Place
Found**

850 m

Place Missing From



**PRACTICE ADVICE ON
SEARCH
MANAGEMENT
AND PROCEDURES**

2006

Produced on behalf of the
Association of Chief Police Officers
by the National Centre for Policing Excellence

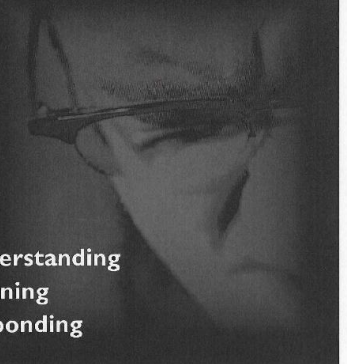


CENTREX
HELPING TO DEVELOP POLICING

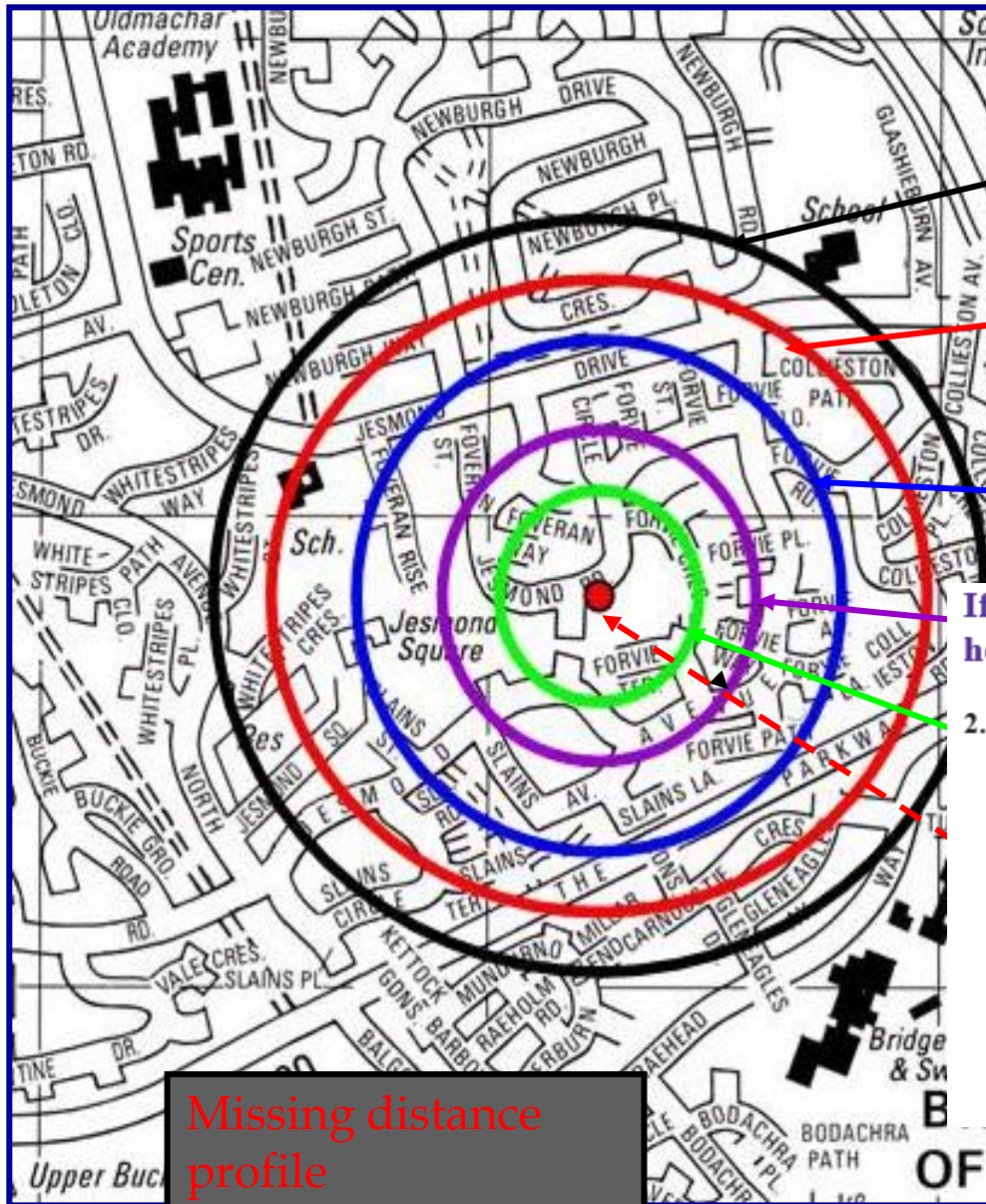
**GRAMPIAN
POLICE**
Respecting our communities

**Missing
Persons**

**Understanding
Planning
Responding**



Established geographies of missing....



Missing distance profile

Females who are suicidal

How far do suicidal females travel on foot ?


1. Distance between place missing & found

Cumulative percentage of cases	Distance between location missing and location found
40%	1.10 kilometres
50%	1.50 kilometres
60%	2.00 kilometres
70%	3.20 kilometres
80%	4.90 kilometres
90%	6.90 kilometres
95%	8.00 kilometres
99%	10.00 kilometres

If suicidal females use a motor vehicle – how far are they likely to travel?

2. Distance between place missing & found

Cumulative percentage of cases	Distance between location missing and location found
40%	11.00 kilometres
50%	11.50 kilometres
60%	20.00 kilometres
80%	25.00 kilometres
90%	44.00 kilometres



But there are alternative,
complementary geographies of
missing people....

- Use qualitative data rather than quantitative data;
- Focus on a small number of detailed case studies rather than large scale data sets;
- Employ one-to-one interviews and focus groups rather than survey methods

Narratives about search: the POLSA's story...

- What immediately I was told ... was that there was a pathway alongside this river on this side of the river and there was a tree that obscured the pathway, a newly fallen down tree and there was slip marks into the riverbank, a sign of somebody slipping down there. So the obvious thing to assume was that he had been walking home and he'd come along here and he'd slipped and fallen in the river. So all I did ... the first day, was deploy divers, taking them back to here, because they always go back to the river from the last place just in case he's flushed back a little bit.

Narratives about search: the POLSA's story....

- So your scenario is that he's fallen in but his body doesn't appear. Now it wouldn't because it's so fast flowing but the pressure really starts to build on day two because the family are walking these banks. By now we've got the coastguard out walking these banks, had a company called Skywatch who are a charitable organisation of retired RAF pilots who'll go up in micro light. So they started to fly the river as well and the divers carry on. So in the meantime we're going to have to think about another scenario and it then comes back with what can you live with. Well you couldn't live with him being found in somebody's back garden so we take the policy decision to basically search all the front and back gardens of this whole area here which is quite a massive weekend job.

Narratives about missing: the misper's story...

- I didn't think I was going to be a missing person, but I know I didn't want to be found. I wanted to be missing for long enough for the tablets to do their job, after that it didn't matter. I wanted to be dead so I needed a certain amount of time for the poison to take effect basically, so I knew that I had to be well hidden.
- I used to run by the building, that's how I knew it. I don't know what it used to be, it's beside an old mill, like what's left of an old mill on the river. It's kind of in the bank, and there's a path that goes alongside it and then steps upwards. A lot of it is derelict now, it's full of leaves when it gets windy, it's very well hidden and you can't see it from the road or anything.

Narratives about missing: The misper's story...

- *I could only get there by foot. I remember it was pretty quiet, I walked alongside the parked cars, so if I did stumble I wasn't very obvious. I was aware that if a police car was going past or even a taxi driver, somebody might have spotted me and just sort of 'there's something really not right with that girl', and that would have spoiled my plan as well ...*
- *I wasn't alert when she shouted my name, it was like "oh Sophie thank god just stay there, just stay there I'm coming down, I'm coming down" and she had like my stepdad with her . She did the jump, like the six foot jump, because she was so worried that I would run away or something. My friend had mentioned my running route and they'd worked it out and just gone looking.*

Why these narratives matter...

- The **misper's** story provides insights into why she went missing, how she attempted to navigate her way , and why she sought out a particular place to hide...
- The **POLSA's** story provides insights into the challenges of search, scenario building and the deployment of limited resources in a complex geographical environment...
- Hence *Geographies of Missing: processes, experiences, responses...*



What we are focusing on....

1. The challenges for the police, families and individuals in searching for missing adult people over space and through time;
2. The 'experiential geographies' of missing people and their families (what it means to be missing or missed and the journeys people make while missing);
3. Advancing evidence-based policy, operational and conceptual understandings of being missing and of searching to help improve future policy and practice.



Who we are: the research team

- **Dr Hester Parr** (University of Glasgow): social geographies of mental health and qualitative methodologies;
- **Professor Nick Fyfe** (University of Dundee & Scottish Institute for Policing Research): police decision-making and witness protection;
- **Dr Penny Woolnough** (Grampian Police & Scottish Institute for Policing Research): use of profiling in missing persons inquiries
- **Dr Olivia Stevenson** (University of Glasgow): research fellow for project



How we developed the research project

Consultation with:


- NPIA and Missing Persons Bureau;
- Missing People Charity;
- Grampian Police and Metropolitan Police Service;
- Continuing involvement throughout the project via the **Steering Group**

How we are doing the research I

- **Case study approach** working with two police forces: Metropolitan Police Service and Grampian Police;
- **Interviewing a sample of returned people reported missing** in each police area, focusing on their 'missing journey';
- **Interviewing local police officers and carrying out case reconstructions** will be used to examine police organisational responses to specific missing person cases in the two case study areas;

How we are doing the research II

- **National level interviews** with those playing key roles in organisational responses to missing person cases including those from the Missing Persons Bureau, the Missing People Charity, the Police National Search Centre NPIA National Search Advisor, NPIA Crime Investigation Support Officers, and Police Search Advisers (PolSAs).
- **Interviews with a sample of families of people reported missing** in order to understand how families mobilize and deploy their own resources to search for missing relatives and loved ones;



What we have done so far I: interviews with reported missing (Grampian)

- 30 adults interviewed (14 females and 16 males aged between 22-78) focusing on:
- Going missing
- Journey narratives
- Possessions/Objects/Encounters
- Transport and tracking
- Police interactions
- Thoughts of return
- Being found/returning
- Interventions/helplines



What we have done so far: case reconstructions I

- Grampian Police and Metropolitan Police Service, identified cases from 2010;
- Cases include examples of cross-force collaborations, changing risk status, and longer term missing cases;
- Each case file analysed and key officers identified for interview.

Broader Analytical and Policy Questions: Supporting Strategy Delivery

Qualitative data will provide opportunities to address a range of relevant questions including:

- How do individuals and agencies involved in searching mobilize and co-ordinate their different knowledge's, skills and resources? (Protect)
- How do search agents interpret and reflect on *spatial* information about missingness? (Protect)
- How do people experience the processes of going and staying missing? (Prevention; Protection)
- What are the key social impacts on families of missing people? (Provision)
- How can insights from the qualitative research be harnessed to inform and enhance policy and practice? (Prevention; Protection; Provision)



Outputs & Knowledge Exchange Strategy

- Practitioner and policy focused materials to inform the work of police and other organisations in tracing missing persons and supporting families;
- UK and international dissemination events to help inform policy and develop a strategic research agenda around missing people;
- Academic outputs;
- Enhanced public awareness via use of the media



Opportunities to contribute

- Welcome feedback/comment on the project;
- Welcome advice on how to make the findings from the project of value to practitioners
- Please contact member of the project team.

How to contact us

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- www.geographiesofmissing.org.uk