

## **Technical appendix - *Missing People, Missing Voices: Stories of Missing Experience***

[\*Missing People, Missing Voices: Stories of Missing Experience\*](#) are developed from in-depth narrative interviews with forty-five adults who have been reported missing during 2009 to 2011 and who have returned or been located and reconnected. The interviews focussed on the missing journey itself and not life histories. This technical appendix outlines important issues of ethics, access and data collection through to the development of the stories of missing experience.

### **Ethics**

The research was carried out in line with the Data Protection Act 1998 and full original ethical approval was granted by the Faculty of Law, Business and Social Sciences Ethics Committee of the University of Glasgow. During the project the participants have been afforded confidentiality, all gave informed consent to take part, and were free to withdraw from the process at any time without having to give a reason.

### **Access and sampling frame**

The project is qualitative, based on in-depth semi-structured interviews and a mapping exercise with returned missing adults. Accessing the sample of returned missing adults was achieved via the generation of a sample from two police force databases. Access was negotiated with each force and in compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998. Although police partnerships were developed to facilitate access to this hard to reach group, the research team are not police officers and simply worked *through* the police service rather than *for* them.

The project is qualitative and therefore cannot seek to be representative of all missing adults' experiences. Further, the method of postal recruitment via letters meant that those who responded determined the final sample, although procedures were put in place to invite a range of adults to participate, including on-line and social media recruitment via [www.geographiesofmissingpeople.org.uk](http://www.geographiesofmissingpeople.org.uk).

The sample frame was developed in consultation with the two forces and excluded cases for under 18 year olds, those with dementia, forced missing people, incomplete addresses or no fixed abode and where a hospital address was given but no home address. The sample included proactively sampling for 100% of post-fourteen day cases to ensure that the project had the opportunity to potentially interview longer-term missing persons.

### **Interviewees**

All interviews were conducted face-to-face in a location chosen by the interviewee. Fourteen females and fifteen males were interviewed in one force area and seven females and eight males in the other. The age profile of the adults reported as missing who participated in the research is one 18–21 year old, eighteen 22–39 year olds, twenty-four 40–59 year olds, one 60–79 year olds, and one for whom age was unknown. Within the sample (n=45) thirty had been reported missing once, and fifteen on more than one occasion. Twenty-four of the adults had returned within forty-eight hours from the time they were reported as missing, and nine were missing for more than seven days. All interviewees resumed contact.

## **Interviews**

In total forty-five narrative interviews with returned missing adults were conducted during 2011 and 2012. Each interview lasted between one and a half to two and a half hours. Interviews were conducted in a way that suited the interviewee but followed a semi-structured interview schedule that focussed on the missing journey. All interviews were conducted face-to-face and recorded on a digital recorder, with the permission of the respondent, and later transcribed verbatim. All interview data have been anonymised and treated confidentially as standard. All names and places are pseudonyms.

## **Qualitative analysis**

Interviews were coded and explored using QSR NVivo8. Initial interview coding involved breaking the data into units of analysis based on *a priori* codes, which were developed on the basis of discussions within the research team, discussion with the advisory group, analysis of geographical and missing literatures and driven by the content of a subset of the interviews. These initial codes were then reformulated through a process of analytical induction, whereby provisional themes were refined as more interviews were analysed. After a lengthy coding process, data from the interviews were analysed thematically to qualitatively explore the associations between different journeys and duration, gender, mental health, police experience, intentionality and number of missing episodes. A thematic analysis led to the development of key socio-spatial components of missing journeys (including 'core elements' relating to departure, decision-making, mobility, sheltering, communication, police interaction and return) which are reflected in the stories of missing experience.

## **Creation of missing stories**

Working with the run query function of QSR NVivo8, interview transcripts were grouped by unit of analysis for a particular story type. For example, all adults who had reported absconding from mental health wards were grouped together and only their narratives were used to create 'Johnny's story'. The purpose of this was so that the stories written from verbatim words could be creatively reassembled across the dataset from more than one narrative, so as to be representative of the experience of forty-five adults who participated in the research study but reduce risk of identification.

Once transcripts were grouped by the chosen unit of analysis, the researchers worked to create the narratives of experience. To do this they read through the data generated by the NVIVO query and pulled out the salient material. This was material that reflected the majority experience and co-ordinated within and between diverse verbatim quotation to produce a readable, informative and representative narrative. Initial stories were created to be between five to ten minutes in length if spoken aloud. These rough drafts were discussed and shared amongst two members of the research team and then edited for 'readability'; this creative writing enabled a 'smoothing' effect on some disjointed narrative. The stories are designed to exist as both aural and written materials and to be used as educational and awareness raising resources.

As some adults had been reported missing more than once and their journeys encompassed a range of stories, there was a strong likelihood that they would feature in more than one (subset) data set. To reduce this, and any possibility of over quoting, the research team excluded material manually that already featured.

Once the initial five narratives had been produced the advisory group was invited to comment and provide feedback and the research team piloted the stories in a range of operational, policy and academic forums for the same reason. The overwhelming message from these pilots was that the narratives were a powerful learning resource, but should be no longer than ten minutes (spoken) in length. The stories were then audio recorded at the University of Glasgow by actors and can be listened to/ downloaded at [www.geographiesofmissingpeople.org.uk/missingvoices](http://www.geographiesofmissingpeople.org.uk/missingvoices) and the websites of the Missing People Charity ([www.missingpeople.org.uk](http://www.missingpeople.org.uk)) and the UK Missing Persons Bureau ([www.missingpersons.police.uk](http://www.missingpersons.police.uk)).

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