People who go missing abroad: an examination of patterns and investigative challenges

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FOREWARD

This project is a result of a collaboration between the Centre for the Study of Missing Persons (CSMP) and the International Crime Coordination Centre (ICCC). It was funded by the ICCC.

The Centre for the Study of Missing Persons (CSMP) is a specialist research centre within the Institute of Criminal Justice Studies, at the University of Portsmouth. The Centre was founded in April 2012, in partnership with the charity Missing People, to accommodate the growing interest in the field of missing persons. It aims to provide a clear focus for research, knowledge transfer and educational provision to academics, professionals in this community and relatives of missing people. The Centre also aims to function as a one-stop knowledge resource which researchers and other interested parties can access and use to communicate and exchange knowledge about missing persons.

The International Crime Coordination Centre (ICCC) was set up to prepare plans for UK policing to identify alternative international tools in the event of a no deal exit from the EU. The Missing Persons, Vehicles and Documents team (MVD) have written policy, operational guidance and training plans for the ongoing use of INTERPOL functions, locate/trace of missing persons, unidentified bodies and lost/stolen vehicles and documents. The MVD are not a dedicated missing persons unit but is available to answer phone/email enquiries relating to investigations with an international element and have UKICB officers embedded within the team. The ICCC offers assistance and can help forces to formulate their own force level guidance to manage existing live missing person investigations and the transition of adding required cases onto INTERPOL Notices.

FOREWARD

Background and aims

With modern migration patterns, there are large numbers of people going overseas from the UK, some temporarily while others permanently. A person going missing is often seen as a symptom of something that has gone wrong in someone's life. It is, therefore, inevitable that British citizens will also go missing whilst overseas. Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) data shows that 3,059 UK citizens went missing while in a foreign country in the five years between 2009 and 2014, an average of 600 people each year (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2014[2]; Apps, 2016[3]).

Currently, there is no management system in place to identify or oversee international enquiries, and due to current design of data systems, the FCO or Missing Person Unit (National Crime Agency) do not collate statistics on international missing person cases. Due to a lack of data analysis, and a multitude of different police reporting systems it is impossible to state how many people who are reported missing leave the UK, how many international investigations have been conducted or supported by Police or other partner agencies each year, how many international case are ongoing or how many investigations have been successfully closed.

As a result, there has been no research as to the numbers and types of international missing person investigations and this needs to be rectified. UK Policing need to be aware of how many people go missing abroad and what are the patterns of such disappearances. For example, how many of these cases are due to mental health, foul play, parental abduction, etc, and what the trends are in relation to duration and resolution.

It is therefore the aim of this study to explore these gaps, in order to advance our understanding of the patterns of these cases, and the unique challenges faced by investigators tasked at solving these cases. This report explores these issues with a view to making immediate recommendations in the short term and setting the scene for establishing a more thorough understanding of these issues in future.

Method

Data Collection

In order to identify patterns of types of disappearances and demographic background of people who go missing abroad the authors collected police data from nine forces in the UK (see table 1). Following favourable ethical approval from the FHSS ethics committee at the University of Portsmouth, representatives from the Centre for the Study of Missing Persons (CSMP) as well as ICCC contacted forces to request permission to access closed case details. The cases were anonymised and included the following variables: age, gender, date when was last seen, when and where were found, circumstances leading to disappearance, risk level,

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[2] Foreign and Commonwealth Office (2014). *Freedom of Information request answer number*: 0136-14.
[3] Apps, J. (2016) '*Missing Abroad*', in Shalev Greene, K. & Alys. L. (eds). *Missing persons: A handbook of research. Routlege, pp. 181-187.*

whether they came to harm, country where person was found. Overall, the sample consists of 330 closed cases from 1.1.17-31.12.19.

Table 1: Number of cases from forces

Force Area	Frequency	Percent
Devon & Cornwall	11	3.3
Kent	10	3
Warwickshire	29	8.8
Stafford	1	0.3
West Midlands	3	0.9
Suffolk	48	14.5
Humberside	56	17
Merseyside	38	11.5
Metropolitan	132	40
Non-UK Force[4]	2	0.6
Total	330	100

Coding and Analysis

Forces were provided with a template in Excel that could be used to input data, with headings according to requested variables. In practice, however, several forces opted not to utilise the exact template, making it necessary to examine each response. Several fields were ultimately collapsed e.g., to provide simplified categories for ethnicity. Age categories were also created to enable further organisation of the data.

Several of the fields also contained narrative information pertaining to each case. This narrative information was used to determine: the presence of vulnerability markers, and the circumstances in which the person went missing. Narrative information also enabled information missing from some entries to be coded, e.g., some narratives mentioned where the person was found even though the data spreadsheet provided had left this field blank. Examples given below will provide further clarity on how the coding process was undertaken. Cases details and locations have been anonymised.

- *Misunderstanding, Miscommunication or Lost Documents*

This type of case was largely characterised by those travelling internationally not informing others that this travel was to take place, or not being able to inform others that a delay of some sort had taken place. A lack of phone or internet service or simply forgetting were the most common reasons not to communicate, while delays were caused either by issues with documents going missing or due to flights being missed.

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[4] A very small number of cases provided by the participating forces indicated that they had been referred from abroad.

> Examples: A 59-year-old White British man was reported missing by his family. He had told them he was going on holiday to Vietnam, but not how long he would be away. He was quickly traced in Vietnam.
>
> Example: A 35-year-old female was reported missing while on holiday following a break in contact. She had been unable to receive phone signal or wifi and made contact when this was restored.
>
> Example: A 56-year-old male missed his return flight from Spain due to intoxication.

- *Mental Health*

While mental health markers were present more widely within the dataset, some cases seemed to be characterised and caused by a mental health related issue.

> Example: A 23-year-old White British female suffered a mental health breakdown while on holiday abroad. She was missing for 21 days before being located in a Portuguese mental health facility.
>
> Example: An EU national living in the UK returned to their home country after running out of medication for schizophrenia. Their condition caused them to feel at risk of being victimised by criminals.

- *Lost Contact*

These were similar in nature to miscommunication cases but happened over a longer time period. They are reminiscent of the 'drift' typology of missing persons cases reported by Biehal, Mitchell and Wade (2003)[5]. These cases were characterised by long breaks in contact, breaks in contact with family who live abroad longer term, and by people travelling abroad and then staying there. These were often distinguished from miscommunication cases as the person went away for a different purpose than originally planned or stated.

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[5] Biehal, N., Mitchell, F., & Wade, J. (2003). *Lost from view: Missing persons in the UK.* Policy Press.

> Example: A 41-year-old black male had moved to Italy for several months. He was reported missing by his family in the UK after failing to make contact which had previously been regularly maintained. Intelligence indicated he was with a friend in Italy, and further investigation was deemed inappropriate.
>
> Example: A female living in the UK but also an EU national who may have returned home was reported missing by her sister following a month-long break in contact. When police made contact, she indicated that she was well and required not assistance.

A sub-set of these cases involved individuals reporting people missing who they did not know very well but were concerned for their welfare after losing contact with them.

- *Paramour or New Relationship*

A small set of cases saw the primary reason for international travel and a consequent break in contact being due to travelling abroad with or to meet a romantic interest.

> Example: A male reported missing by his family was found to have travelled to South Africa to meet a woman he had been speaking to online for the last several years. He did not inform his family as he knew they would disapprove. He was missing for 19 days before travelling home

- *Removed by or Travelled with Parent*

This case category was used to group children who had been gone missing while in the company of a parent. These cases usually coincided with the parent migrating, with the parent attempting to evade authorities, or due to family breakdown.

> Example: A Canadian male living in the UK returned with his two young children to Canada after coming to believe that his children were to be placed in foster care. They were missing for just over a day before reporting to social services in Canada. No further investigation appeared to take place.

- *Runaway, Absconding, Escaping or Detained*

This set of cases was characterised by the missing person removing themselves from a situation or being removed from that situation as a result of detention. Detention typically meant the missing person would be found in prison or otherwise was detained abroad.

> Example: Overstaying VISA and being detained by authorities.

Absconding indicated the person was evading a service, e.g., the police or social services.

> Example: Parents of the children removed to evade social services would fall into this category.

Escape generally meant the person was removing themselves from a stressful situation.

> Example: A man reported he was going on a short break for work but was actually having personal difficulty and needed a break. His family gave him space for several days before reporting him missing.

Runaway cases were typical of the definition seen in missing persons cases more generally where an individual, usually a young person, leaves their normal living situation.

> Example: A 16-year-old girl was reported missing having taken money from her parents. She was found to have travelled to Norway, and was located in the care of social services.

- *Asylum Seeker, Refugee or Migrant, Including Visiting Family and Travelling*

This broad set of headings was intended to cover people who had been reported missing as they were either moving permanently abroad or returning to a country with familial or personal contacts to visit. These movements appeared to be voluntary in all cases, however, were construed by relatives or contacts as constituting a missing incident.

> Example: A 34-year-old male was reported missing by their grandmother after leaving their home to travel to Germany. He was found to have voluntarily and intentionally moved to Germany, and the case was transferred to German authorities.
>
> Example: A 38-year-old male was reported missing while travelling from Angola to Belgium via Heathrow. He was found to have been travelling to visit family, and the case was transferred to Belgian authorities.

- *Concern for Welfare/Health Check*

These cases involved a person being reported missing following a check by an official authority or due to a personally known informant believing there was a genuine concern for welfare.

- *Domestic Abuse Related*

A small number of cases were found to be a direct result of an individual fleeing an abusive domestic situation.

Following this process, data could be coded with numeric values taking the place of written information. This enabled data to be entered into IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 26) for analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to ascertain the frequency and distribution of factors and case types, with crosstabs being used to examine co-occurrence. Where possible, Pearson's Chi-Square tests were used to ascertain the association between variables.

Limitations

It should be kept in mind that the study only represents findings from 9 of the 43 police forces in England and Wales. It is therefore not fully representative of the full picture of missing abroad in England and Wales, nor in the UK more broadly as the dataset also does not reflect Police Scotland or PSNI.

Police forces returned data in slightly different ways, meaning that there may have been variance in what each field meant to each force, e.g., there is a possibility that the term 'police' was used to refer to any police force worldwide by some forces and to domestic UK police by others. While the use narrative fields meant that it was possible to mitigate some of this ambiguity, having to use these narrative fields to fill in missing data codes meant that there was a possibility of researcher misinterpretation of police meaning.

It should be noted that when broken down by variable, some of the case numbers being dealt with were very small, even when a statistically significant association was found. As such, small variance in case numbers could have changed the profile of cases and outcomes substantially. As such, conclusions drawn should be made with caution. This further reinforces the need to keep gathering data about missing abroad cases, and to do so in a systematic way, so that in time a large, robust dataset will be available for analysis.

Results

The results presented below summarise the analysis of three demographic background variables of individuals in this sample (i.e. age, gender and ethnicity) as well as a range of additional variables with information about the missing incidents (i.e missing in the UK or abroad at time of report, venue where missing from, number of days missing, circumstances of going missing, risk classification, who they were found by, at which venue was person found at).

Demographic Background

Table 2: Age Category of Missing Persons

Age Category	Frequency	Precent
0-12 years old	39	11.9
13-17 years old	13	4
18-30 years old	97	29.7
31-50 years old	122	37.3
51-70 years old	51	15.6
71+	5	1.5
Total	327	100

The majority (59.1%, N=195) of people who were reported missing abroad were male, while 40.3% were female (N=133). There were also 2 cases of people identifying as transgender. In terms of age, the average and median age was 33, ranging between 0 and 89 years old. The majority of people reported missing abroad were aged 31-50 (37.3% N=122) and 18-30 (29.7% N=97)(see table 2).

Table 3: Missing Person's Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Frequency	Percent
White British	53	19.2
White Other	133	48.2
Black/African	38	13.8
Asian	30	10.9
Other	22	8
Total	276	100

As shown in in Table 3, out of the 276 cases where data was available, the vast majority of people were identified as white (67.4% N=186), either as White Other (48.2%, N=133) or White British (19.2%, N=53), followed by Black/Africans (13.8%, N=38) and Asians (10.9% N=30).

Information about missing incidents

The material below will examine variables that were examined in terms of their occurrences as well as in terms of their co-occurrences against the demographic background. The results will only highlight findings that are statistically significant (likely to occur more than by chance) and that the authors consider important to be consider in the overall context of missing abroad cases.

Table 4: Venue where the missing person was last seen

Venue	Frequency	Percent
Street or Public Venue	28	11.6
Home/Neighbourhood	161	66.8
Hospital	15	6.2
Friend/Family Address	5	2.1
Other[6]	20	8.3
School or University	3	1.2
Residential setting including care home, youth housing	9	3.7
Total	241	100

91.2% of people who were reported missing abroad were believed to have left the country (n=239), while 8.8% (n=23) were either left the UK or had returned by the time the case was resolved. Most people (66.8% n=161) were last seen at their home or neighbourhood. This was followed by being last seen in a street or public venue (11.6% n=28) (see table 4). This was the case for all gender, ethnic and age groups. It is worth noting that those who were last seen at a hospital were all 31 years old or above (X^2 (30, N = 238) = 54.157, p = .004).

Table 5: Number of days person was missing for

Days Missing	Frequency	Percent
0 to 2 days	65	19.9
3 to 7 days	70	21.4
8 to 31 days	93	28.4
32 to 90 days	43	13.1
91 to 365 days	31	9.5
Over a year	25	7.6
Total	327	100

Contradictory to missing persons cases within the UK that are typically resolved within the first 48 hours[7], people who go missing abroad tend to be missing for longer time periods, with

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[6] 'Other' venues include: pub; hotel; campsite; refuge; workplace.
[7] National Crime Agency (2020). Missing Persons Data Report 2018/2019. UK Missing Persons Unit. Retrieved from: https://www.missingpersons.police.uk/en-gb/resources/downloads/missing-persons-statistical-bulletins

an average of 134 days[8] and a median of 13 days. The analysis shows that only 17.4% of people were found within the first 48 hours (see table 5). Furthermore, nearly a third of the sample remained missing for over a month.

Table 6: The circumstances of the disappearance

Circumstance	Frequency	Percent
Misunderstanding, Miscommunication or Lost Documents	56	20
Domestic Abuse Related	5	1.8
Runaway, Absconding, Escaping or Detained	33	11.8
Lost Contact	45	16.1
Mental Health	36	12.9
Paramour or New Relationship	8	2.9
Other	10	3.6
Asylum Seeker, Refugee or Migrant, Including Visiting Family and Travelling	37	13.2
Concern for Welfare, Health Check	15	5.4
Removed by or Travelling with Parent	35	12.5
Total	280	100

Surprisingly, the circumstances leading to a disappearance are different to what previously considered to be stereotypical cases, such as cases of getting lost, abduction or homicide (Apps, 2016). The results in Table 6 (above) suggest that the majority of people are reported missing due to misunderstanding, miscommunication or lost documents (20% n=56) followed by lost contact (16.1% n=45) and asylum seeker, refugee or migrant, including visiting family and travelling (13.2% n=37). The latter especially may have more in common with cases where the missing person would be considered absent or at no risk. However, the international dimension means that they are treated as missing with some level of risk associated.

It is worth noting that when mental health and concern for welfare, health check are combined they represent nearly one fifth of the sample (18.3% n=51). Furthermore, those who were coded as 'runaway, absconding, escaping or detained', were likely to be aged 31-50 (n=12) or 18-30 (n=10) and those who were coded as 'asylum seeker, refugee or migrant including visiting family and travelling' were also more likely to be ages 31-50 (n=20) and 18-30 (n=9).

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[8] The mean was skewed as a result of the dataset including 7 cases with a duration of over 2000 days, with 2 of these lasting over 5000 days. The authors recommend the median as the more indicative measure.

Table 7: What level of risk was assigned to the case?

Risk Classification	Frequency	Percent
No Apparent Risk	9	3
Low	120	40.4
Medium	137	46.1
High	31	10.4
Total	297	100

Unlike missing person cases within the UK that are typically assigned a medium risk (80%) with low and high risk at 10% (NCA, 2020), in missing abroad types of cases the majority of cases are assigned medium risk (46% n=137) and low risk (40% n=120)(see table 7 above). However, it important to note that 10% of cases (n=31) are still classified as high risk.

Table 8: Cross tabulation of circumstances of disappearance and risk classification

	No Apparent Risk	Low Risk	Medium Risk	High Risk	Total
Misunderstanding, Miscommunication or Lost Documents	2	29	23	2	56
Domestic Abuse Related	0	1	3	1	5
Runaway, Absconding, Escaping or Detained	0	11	16	2	29
Lost Contact	1	26	13	3	43
Mental Health	0	4	20	9	33
Paramour or New Relationship	0	2	5	0	7
Other	1	2	6	1	10
Asylum Seeker, Refugee or Migrant, Including Visiting Family and Travelling	3	18	14	1	36
Concern for Welfare, Health Check	1	5	8	1	15
Removed by or Travelling with Parent	0	10	18	7	35
Total	8	108	126	27	269

$P < 0.05$

This difference in classification may be due to the circumstance of going missing (see table 8 above). It is worth noting that 43.3% (n=143) of people in this sample had a vulnerability marker assigned to them, and 26.5% (n=87) of those cases were related to mental health. To explore this issue in more depth requires examination of case details, which is outside the scope of this study.

Table 8: Who found the missing person

Found by	Frequency	Percent
Returned of Own Accord	33	11.6
Police	119	41.8
Family	34	11.9
Non-UK Police or Authorities	57	20
Airline	2	0.7
Other[9]	15	5.3
Case Being Handled by Other Authorities	5	1.8
Investigation No Longer Appropriate[10]	20	7
Total	285	100

People who were reported missing abroad were more likely to be found by the UK police (41.8% n=119) or non-UK police or authorities (20% n=57). Otherwise, they were likely to be found by their family (11.9% n=34) or return on their own accord (11.6% n=33). It is worth noting that people who were classified as high risk were most likely to be found by UK or non-UK police (24 out of 29 cases).

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[9] 'Others' finding the missing person included: hospital staff; unidentified informant; hotel staff; Missing People charity.

[10] Typically this meant that the person was deemed not missing and the case closed.

Table 9: Location where person was found

Location Found	Frequency	Percentage
Airport	28	12.4
Address of Friend, Family or Acquaintance	41	18.1
Determined Not Missing	16	7.1
Public Location	15	6.6
Prison or Custody	23	10.2
Hospital	12	5.3
Home Address	31	13.7
Hotel or Hostel	11	4.9
Other	15	6.6
Presented Self to Authorities	5	2.2
Traced Via Inquiry or By Third Party	8	3.5
Border	3	1.3
Deceased	6	2.7
Embassy or Consulate	2	0.9
Contact made remotely	10	4.4
Total	226	100

In terms of locations, people who were missing abroad were likely to be found at a known address of friends, family or acquaintance (18.1% n=41), their home address (13.7% n=31) or airport (12.4% n=28). It is important to consider though that there were over 100 cases where data was not available for analysis.

Table 10: Crosstabulation between Days Missing and Location Found

			At Which Venue Was the Person Found													
		Airport	Address of Friend, Family or Acquaintance	Determined Not Missing	Public Location	Prison or Custody	Hospital	Home Address	Hotel or Hostel	Other	Presented Self To Authorities	Third Party Inquiry	Border	Deceased	Embassy or Consulate	Contact made remotely
	0-2 days	2	9	3	6	4	2	8	5	7	0	0	1	0	0	0
	3-7 days	6	7	4	3	5	4	5	4	1	1	4	0	0	2	0
Categories of Missing in Days	8-31 days	5	15	7	1	6	4	8	1	3	1	2	2	2	0	6
	32-90 days	6	8	1	3	4	0	7	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	3
	91-365 days	8	1	0	0	4	0	2	0	0	2	1	0	1	0	1
	Over a year	1	1	1	2	0	2	1	1	4	1	0	0	1	0	0
Total		28	41	16	15	23	12	31	11	15	5	8	3	6	2	10

P=0.001

A significant association was found between the duration in days for the person had been missing and the location they were found. The data appears to indicate that the longer a person is missing, the more likely it is they will settle at a home address or the address of someone known to them, reinforcing the migration themes found in the missing circumstances. The findings indicate that being found at the airport and being found in custody remain relevant throughout all but the longest-term investigations, whereas longer term cases become less likely to be found crossing a border or at a hospital.

Table 11: Crosstabulation between Days Missing and Who the Missing Person Was Found By

					Who Found the Missing Person?				
		Returned of Own Accord	Police	Family	Non UK Police or Authorities	Airline	Other	Handled by Other Authorities	Investigation no longer appropriate
	0-2 days	13	24	8	7	2	3	0	2
	3-7 days	8	28	9	9	0	4	4	1
	8-31 days	7	38	8	18	0	3	0	4
Categories of Missing in Days	32-90 days	2	12	2	16	0	2	0	0
	91-365 days	3	11	2	5	0	1	1	4
	Over a year	0	6	5	2	0	2	0	9
Total		33	119	34	57	2	15	5	20

P<0.001

Another significant association was found d between the duration in days for the person had been missing and who they were found by. The efforts of police and of family remained relevant throughout all stages of investigation, with longer term missing people becoming less likely to return on their own. Cases were most likely to be determined as inappropriate for investigation in earlier and later stages.

Table 12: Crosstabulation between Who the Missing Person was Found by and at Which Venue the Person Was Found

		At Which Venue Was the Person														
		Airport	Address of Friend, Family or Acquaintance	Determined Not Missing	Public Location	Prison or Custody	Hospital	Home Address	Hotel or Hostel	Other	Presented Self To Authorities	Third Party Inquiry	Border	Deceased	Embassy or Consulate	Contact made remotely
Who Found the Missing Person?	Returned of Own Accord	1	4	0	2	2	0	10	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
	Police	20	24	0	5	4	4	8	6	6	3	2	1	1	0	7
	Family	1	4	1	1	1	5	4	0	3	0	2	0	2	0	1
	Non UK Police or Authorities	6	9	2	6	13	1	4	0	4	1	1	2	1	2	1
	Airline	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Other	0	0	2	1	0	0	1	2	2	0	3	0	0	0	1
	Investigation Not Appropriate	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Total	28	41	10	15	20	11	27	8	15	5	8	3	4	2	10

P<0.001

A further significant association was found between the location the person was found and the agency or actor that found them. Of particular note, although they made finds at a range of locations, a large number of police inquiries resulted in finds at the airport and at addresses of those known to the missing person. By contrast, while authorities abroad also traced people at airports and at addresses abroad, other agencies were particularly able to find those who had entered the criminal justice system in another jurisdiction.

Discussion

The findings from the study of people going missing abroad have a range of implications that can be taken forward to inform training, response and future research. The novelty of this study, being among the first to break down missing abroad cases in this manner, enables a range of trends, patterns and practices to be discerned.

Case Profiles and Characteristics

This study indicated that the circumstances in which a person goes missing can be used as an organising factor to help examine this sort of case. The circumstances in which those represented in this dataset indicate that missing abroad cases were distinct from 'typical' missing persons cases. Those going missing abroad were older overall, with the largest category of missing people aged 31-50. This contrasts with domestic missing persons cases, 62% of which involve children (NCA, 2020). Furthermore, children who went missing abroad typically were under the direction of a parent, with only a small number of child cases leaving a care or residential setting to go abroad.

However, considering these categories of case further, a range of overlaps with 'typical' missing cases can be also be observed. However, these are transformed due to the international element of the case. For instance, people going missing abroad due to a miscommunication is conceptually very similar to missing persons cases whereby an individual is 'not where they are expected to be', or in other words, is similar to the 'no risk to welfare' or 'absent' risk category. Often, these cases would be resolved quickly. However, the person being missing abroad meant that contact often could not be re-established quickly, and as a result the case and the investigation lasted much longer than a similar, domestic missing persons incident. In addition, missing people who lost contact with their families or who made a decision to leave without fully informing others (also a type of case observed domestically) took more investigative effort to trace and to determine were safe.

Mental health played a primary role in 12.9% of missing abroad cases, which is congruent with the 13% proportion of adult cases the NCA found to have a mental health marker. However, within the dataset, a higher proportion (26.4%, n=87) included the presence of a mental health issue of some kind among a potential range of other factors. As such, these figures provide a tentative suggestion that mental health issues may play even more of a role in missing abroad cases, even if their role is not always the leading cause of being missing. It is unclear, however, if the use of narrative coding fields allowed a higher rate of mental health issues to be identified than would otherwise have been possible.

The ethnic profile of people missing abroad was predominantly white. Yet, only 18% of the sample was White British. This indicates a high proportion of 'other white' individuals. Police forces coded ethnicity differently in the date provided. However, it can be said that this typically reflected the UK's relationship with European countries for the most part, with 'White Other' mostly including those from within or just outside of the EU's geographic area in terms of nationality. Black people were over-represented in terms of their presence in the UK's population. However, they are only a fraction of a percent more represented than Black people among the UK's overall missing population (13.6% against 13%). Asian individuals were more than twice as represented in this dataset, at a rate or 10% against the domestic rate of 5% in the missing population.

The increased relevance of 'white others' in the dataset is indicative of the importance of migration and free movement as a factor in people going missing or going out of touch with loved ones. White British individuals were more likely to be missing as a result of a holiday related temporary stay abroad, whereas White Others had a more diverse range of movements that adds to the complexity of profiling how and why they might go missing abroad, from a temporary visit to permanently re-setting away from or within the UK.

Missing children in the dataset seemed to be predominantly linked to being moved by or with parents. The way in which this occurred varied, however. In some cases, the movement was a fairly innocuous migration, whereas in others, parents were actively attempting to evade social services or a court judgement by going abroad, creating an overlap with parental abduction cases. This strategy appeared to disrupt the ability of services to respond given the delays that an international movement created in coordination and action.

Duration

Missing abroad cases were found to last far longer than the average missing persons case. Even when accounting for very long-term cases skewing the results, the median duration was at 13 days. While any missing persons inquiry *can* last for a long time, 85% of adults and 90% of children in domestic cases are found within 48 hours (Missing People, 2020[11]), whereas for missing abroad cases, only 19.9% were resolved within this relatively short timeframe. This has a range of potential implications.

Firstly, it indicates that missing abroad cases are likely to cost significantly more to investigate than equivalent domestic cases due to the additional time required to engage with them. It is not clear from this dataset, however, the extent to which these cases generate additional action that draws upon investigative time. It is possible, for instance, that the additional time is spent waiting on responses from non-police agencies or from foreign authorities which does not, in fact, tie up UK policing resources substantially.

Secondly, the increased investigative duration means that family members can expect to wait longer for cases to be resolved. This highlights the importance of considering the needs for family support and making sure that expectations about case duration and how time consuming the actions required to resolve these cases can be are communicated clearly.

[11] https://www.missingpeople.org.uk/for-professionals/information-and-policy/information-and-research/key-information

Cases became less likely to resolve themselves, e.g. via the person returning, as their duration increased.

Tracing Missing People: Collaboration with Authorities and Families

Cases in this sample were resolved by the efforts of the UK police 41.8% of the time. While this underlines the importance and effectiveness of UK police effort to make inquiries into these sorts of case, the findings also highlight the role of other agencies in responding to these cases. In at least a fifth of cases, authorities abroad or which operate at the border resolved the incident. Non-UK authorities appeared particularly able to trace individuals who had entered the CJS in other jurisdictions.

As cases went on, the efforts of UK police remained relevant in tracing missing people, with the role of other agencies increasing in presence when the person had been missing for over a week up until 3 months. This indicates that collaboration and liaison with other authorities is especially relevant in the period during which it first becomes clear that the person has gone abroad, with other authorities making important inquiries as the case shifts into its later stages. However, for the longest-term cases, the onus of responsibility and/or activity appeared to shift back to UK police and to families. The reason for this pattern remains unclear, e.g., it may be that it simply takes time for communications across borders to translate into action.

Families were also able to make contact with the missing person in 11.9% of cases, indicating that the family should, where appropriate, be encouraged to continue making efforts to reach out to missing loved ones. Family members were found to trace missing people in cases of any duration, with little drop off in their relevance. This indicates, firstly, that families should be kept involved in investigations throughout, and potentially points towards a need to assist families in making ongoing inquiries without shifting responsibility to them. It also indicates that families are often staying involved for extended durations, further highlighting the need to support families over a potentially lengthy and distressing period.

It should be kept in mind, however, that the role of families is potentially complex, and in some cases the person has gone missing in order to escape a problematic family situation, or simply no longer wishes to be in contact.

Locations and Actions to Prioritise

The dataset indicated that the most common locations that a person missing abroad would be found were either at the airport or staying at the home of or otherwise with the home of someone known to them. However, those missing abroad could be found in a range of locations, with the dataset indicating that routine inquiries, such as searching custody suits, are as important to conduct abroad as they are domestically, with a significant proportion of missing people being traced as having entered either the CJS or the health care system.

When examining which locations were most associated with tracing a missing person as the case went on, the data did not indicate any patters that would highlight 'quick wins' in terms of a specific set of locations to prioritise to search early on. Rather, the data indicates that similar locations remain relevant throughout an investigation, highlighting a need to continue making repeated enquiries as the case progresses.

Recommendations

A number of recommendations can be made based on the findings of this study:

- ➢ Future training for police would benefit from indicating the profile of missing abroad cases as identified in this study. Missing abroad cases seem to be largely distinct in profile to missing cases more generally and would benefit from being treated with some separation.
- ➢ Training should acknowledge the larger scale and duration of missing abroad cases. Officers undertaking these cases are likely to have to deal with them for an extended amount of time compared to 'domestic' cases. The implications on this for the welfare of missing person's families should be recognised as well.
- ➢ Police and policing authorities should be aware of the length of time the UK spend on missing abroad cases:
  - o UK police seemed to be associated with the return of a large proportion of missing abroad cases, indicating a high level of effectiveness and ongoing dedication to investigating them that should be recognised;
  - o However, the increased cost and burden on UK policing should be acknowledged.
- ➢ The research indicated that the UK police taking charge and being involved early in investigations helped to resolve cases more quickly.
- ➢ There is a need to understand the challenges of dealing with other authorities, particularly authorities abroad. Some matters seem to be out of the hands of UK police, and there needs to be acknowledgement of this to help domestic police direct their resources while other authorities investigate.
  - o Non-UK police seemed especially relevant when finding missing people in their countries who had entered their CJS or healthcare systems, e.g., they were able to perform routine custody checks on behalf of UK police.
- ➢ Future research should investigate the cost and resource requirement of missing abroad cases to further explore the impact of these cases.
- ➢ A central database that gathers and collates information on missing abroad cases (or which collates these alongside missing cases generally and clearly demarcates missing abroad cases) is recommended to promote understanding of these cases and to reduce ambiguity between forces.
- ➢ The research indicated slight differences in terminology and approach between forces, e.g., when categorising information relating to these cases. It would be worthwhile to align approaches so learning can be more accurately shared between forces and when contributing to research projects such as this.

These recommendations should be read considering the limitations of the study and bearing in mind that the findings are reflective of only 9 force areas.