

Note of Research Agenda workshop

12 November 2010, CEOP offices

Introduction

The Strategic Oversight Group on Missing Persons¹ (SOG) asked Geoff Newiss (Director of Policy and Research, Missing People) to Chair a 'Research Agenda Sub-Group'. The purpose of the group is to present a UK Research Agenda on missing persons to interested parties, including current and potential researchers in academia, public and voluntary sectors.

The Sub Group has consisted of representatives from the organisations that attend the SOG that have an active research programme: Dr Llian Alys (Policy and Research Officer, UK Missing Persons Bureau, NPIA); Dr Zoe Hilton (Head of Safeguarding, Child Exploitation and Online Protection centre); Lucy Holmes (Research Manager, Missing People) and Geoff Newiss (Chair).

The group sought to bring together the main agencies involved in research about missing and services for missing people and their families, and to produce a national research agenda and action plan for delivering that agenda.

The aims of the Sub Group are:

- To identify gaps in knowledge about missing that can be filled by research and/or evaluation.
- To place a priority order on identified research problems and required solutions and making this available as a UK Research Agenda on Missing.
- To promote the UK Research Agenda on Missing to potential commissioners, funders and researchers.
- To provide a knowledge management hub for the life of the group (on what is known, what projects are planned and what projects are underway), thus preventing duplication.
- To provide a forum for researchers in the field to access advice and support with commissioning and funding applications, and advice about access to data and research participants.
- To disseminate research proposals, plans and findings through networks.

Consultation

To date, there have been no major published reviews of research on missing persons. Whilst members of the Sub Group were aware of some previously published research reports, the consultation provided an opportunity to enquire about other known relevant pieces of work. A list of previous research will be completed and made available in due course. However, there is still an obvious need to conduct a comprehensive literature review, systematic reviews, meta analyses etc.

The Sub Group members compiled a list of known individuals and organisations that might be able to contribute to the Research Agenda consultation. Invitations to participate in the consultation were also distributed on JISCmail list. The exercise asked about past, current and planned projects in relation to missing persons, and invited participants to consider main topics for future work. The results are summarised below.

¹ The Strategic Oversight Group on Missing Persons is chaired by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) and includes representatives from Home Office, Department for Education, Department of Health, National Policing Improvement Agency, Child Exploitation and Online Protection centre (CEOP), Association of Chief Police Officers (Scotland), police forces and a number of NGOs including Missing People, The Children's Society, and Parents and Abducted Children Together (PACT).

Research Agenda workshop

Consultees were invited to attend a roundtable/workshop on 12 November 2010 at the CEOP offices.

The aims of the event were:

- to share findings from the consultation (including ongoing and forthcoming research projects)
- to discuss priorities and opportunities for research on the topic of missing and
- to discuss how best to encourage, support and disseminate research about missing to interested and relevant organisations and individuals

Attendees

The attendees of the Research Agenda workshop were:

Llian Alys	National Policing Improvement Agency
Richard Balyuzi	ECPAT
Francesca Diamond	Missing People
Nick Fyfe	University of Dundee; Director of Scottish Institute for Policing Research
Jo Goodship	University of Portsmouth
Bob Gower	Freelance
Stephanie Gulliford	National working group for sexually exploited children and young people
Carol Hayden	University of Portsmouth
Zoe Hilton	CEOP
Lucy Holmes	Missing People
Chris Maguire	Northumbria University Centre for Forensic Science
Dr Sue Martin	Alzheimer's Safe Return Project
John Mohan	University of Southampton
Geoff Newiss	Missing People
Hester Parr	University of Stirling
Hannah Pearce	ECPAT
Richard Rickford	Missing People
Pete Roberts	Centre for search research
Juliet Singer	STOP UK
Olivia Stevenson	University of Stirling
Jim Wade	University of York
Camille Warrington	University of Bedfordshire
Shaziah Wasiuzzman	CFAB
Robin Williams	Northumbria University Centre for Forensic Science
Penny Woolnough	Grampian Police

Presentations

The workshop started with a number of short presentations, which are briefly summarised below.

Introduction and welcome (Geoff Newiss)

Geoff Newiss opened the event and welcomed attendees. Round table introductions only served to demonstrate the range of organisations and issues that have some connection to the missing persons field. Geoff set out the background to the work, including the work of the previous Prime Minister's Taskforce on Missing Persons² and

² Previous Prime Minister Gordon Brown MP commissioned the Missing Persons Taskforce in December 2009. The report of the Taskforce is available at: http://www.npia.police.uk/en/docs/Missing_Persons_Taskforce_Final_.pdf

the appointment of a Minister responsible for missing persons, James Brokenshire MP (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Crime Reduction, Home Office). Establishing knowledge gaps, opportunities for research, and coalescing existing and ongoing research activity would provide a solid basis for future discussions at SOG. The Sub Group also hopes to build a network of individuals and organisations that can develop, promulgate and undertake research in the field of missing persons.

'Geographies of Missing People: processes, experiences, responses'

(Nick Fyfe and Penny Woolnough)

This ESRC funded research project is a collaboration between Grampian Police and Dundee and Glasgow Universities. It starts in February, 2011.

The project has 4 main aims

- To examine the scope, capabilities and capacities of organisations to track missing adult people (aged 18 or over) over space and through time.
- To investigate the experiential geographies of missing people
- To advance conceptual understandings of geographies of 'missingness'
- To advance policy and operational understandings of 'missingness'

The project will examine how different public and third sector agencies involved in searching for missing people mobilize their different knowledge, skills and resources to intervene in missing 'events' and 'processes'. In particular, the project will investigate the spatial/geographical strategies employed by the police, individual officers and families to track missing people at local, national and international levels and how such strategies change and develop over time. The project will also interview 'returned' missing people via relevant agencies in order to understand more about the experiences of going and staying missing and particularly identify intentional/unintentional uses of space and place in short and long term missing processes. This qualitative information on searching and 'experiential geographies' will be used to critique and enhance 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 and processes in ways that potentially enable practical actions via search interventions. Using the results of the project will also enable the academic researchers to update and rethink the conceptual basis of the concept of 'missing'.

In summary, this project involves a partnership between researchers and practitioners which will yield conceptual insights as well as policy and operational impacts. Contact: Hester.parr@glasgow.ac.uk

UK Missing Persons Bureau (Llian Alys)

Llian Alys gave an overview of the work of the UK Missing Persons Bureau. Whilst the Bureau is an operational unit (see: <http://www.npia.police.uk/missingpersons>, and Annex) many staff have research and academic expertise in a number of related disciplines. A Research Assistant maintains an index of relevant literature and undertakes discreet projects. Bureau staff have conducted a preliminary study on elderly people who go missing, using the Bureau's HERMES database of missing people. Further work is under way to review and carry forward the spatial profiling work begun by Grampian Police by Woolnough and Gibb (2007). A project to examine the cost of missing person investigations to the police is under development.

The Bureau actively encourages external research on missing persons, and is currently supporting the Alzheimer's Safe Return Project (represented at this workshop by Dr Sue Martin). The Bureau can, in some cases, provide data from its dedicated missing persons database. Applications for access to data can be made by submitting a proposal to the Crime Analysis Unit/Specialist Operational Support Research Panel though researchers are advised to contact the Bureau for guidance and advice before submitting an application.

Child Exploitation and Online Protection centre (Zoe Hilton)

Zoe Hilton outlined the remit and objectives of CEOP, its key activities both on and offline, and a range of partnerships that have been forged (see <http://www.ceop.police.uk>, and Annex). Zoe explained how the complexity of the missing children issue undermines any simple, universal research strategy for addressing knowledge gaps, and presents a considerable challenge. There is already a significant amount of research which

sheds light upon the scale, trends, factors, causes and consequences of missing children. There is a focus on runaways in terms of why children go missing and the things that can happen to them when they go missing. There are also some useful local studies that look at services for missing children. It is probably fair to say there is no evaluation of the effectiveness of different protocols at a local level and different approaches to this. There are also some gaps that CEOP would like to fill around the effectiveness of different prevention and reintegration activities.

Missing People (Lucy Holmes)

Lucy Holmes gave a brief overview of the work of the charity Missing People. The Policy and Research team was formed in 2007, and now consists of a team of five people undertaking research, evaluation, policy and campaigning work. The team has benefited from a number of short term student/placement interns and volunteers.

The first major study to be published was *Living in Limbo: The experiences of, and impacts on, the families of missing people* (Holmes, 2008). Forthcoming projects nearing publication are a review of fatal disappearances, an evaluation of the Runaway Helpline and an evaluation of an information sharing protocol between Missing People and agencies in Westminster. Future planned projects include ‘When the waiting is over: Families’ experiences of a missing person being found’ and a study of vulnerable missing adults, exploring the experiences of vulnerable adults who have been reported missing and/or the reactions of professionals working with them.

Research collaborations are planned between Missing People, Grampian Police and Imperial College London on mental health and missing using police data, and with the ECRC funded ‘Geographies of Missing People’ researchers. In future the team hopes to make joint applications for funded collaborate research and to obtain funding to commission external researchers.

Findings from the consultation: topics and priorities

Lucy presented a summary of the responses to the consultation. The exercise highlighted the large number of potential topics available to research and the many different facets of ‘missing’ which are amenable to further research. These were provisionally grouped into four categories: missing adults, missing children and policing and families, and other:

Missing adults:

Numbers, prevalence	Causes
Regional and geographic patterns	Predictive and protective factors
Cost	Mental health
Characteristics	Missing from mental health or support services
Gender and missing	Links to homelessness, learning difficulty/
Durations	disability, other areas of social policy
Experiences whilst away	Links with trafficking
Support structures	Sexual exploitation
Outcomes	Honour based violence
Fatal outcomes	Forced marriage
Typology	Reunion/finding
Links between missing, running away, criminality, victimisation	Services required to aid resolution

Missing children:

Numbers, prevalence	Causes
Regional and geographic patterns	Predictive and protective factors
Cost	Running away, definition, distinction, differentiation
Characteristics	Abduction
Gender and missing	Child sexual exploitation
Durations	Trafficking
Experiences whilst away	Honour based violence
Support structures	Forced marriage
Services for young runaways	Reunion/finding
Outcomes	Services required to aid resolution
Fatal outcomes	Missing from education/nursery/other support services
Typology	Unaccompanied minors missing from care
Links between missing, running away, criminality, victimisation	

Policing and families:

Policing	Families of missing people/young runaways
Costs	Trauma
Risk assessment	Coping
Links between missing, running away, criminality, victimisation	Psychological impacts
Evaluation	Impacts on children
Theory	Counselling
Search methods	Impacts
Officer understanding	Siblings
Attitudes to missing persons work	Parents
International comparisons	Reunion/finding
Service user expectations	Services
Public/victim satisfaction	Outcomes
Missing vs wanted	

Other:

Legislation	Other
Presumption of death	Armed conflict
Section 46 burials	Organised crime
Declared missing	Political/terrorism
Historical patterns of legislation	Natural disaster
International variance	Geography
	Prevention
International	UK residents missing abroad
International contexts	Foreign nationals missing in UK
Numerical comparisons	
Policy/response comparisons	
Country profiles	
Migration (internal/international)	
Comparative policing	
Approaches/discourses	

Following the presentations, roundtable open discussions focused on a) how the topics could be organised and presented in a fashion to create an intelligible Research Agenda, and b) how the findings could be communicated to excite the interest and involvement of the wider research community. A thematic summary of the discussion is presented below.

Scope of the Research Agenda

The event highlighted the complexity of the many inter-linking issues that constitute the missing persons phenomena. Attempts to produce and agree a single, universal research strategy and agenda are likely to be doomed to failure. However, this work has highlighted key knowledge gaps and research needs from across the various 'missing' related sectors and disciplines. A challenge, and indeed the 'litmus test' for the output of this work, is to communicate these gaps and needs, in an intelligible way, to a wider, non-missing-specialist audience.

The consultation has shown that there is the potential to include different types of research activity within a UK Research Agenda. Including evaluations, policy research, social research, strategic analyses, cost benefit analyses, and process reviews would illustrate the breadth of opportunity in the field and would bring together known existing knowledge gaps.

Structure of Research Agenda

The presentation of a Research Agenda would benefit from following a structure familiar to academic and policy audiences. For example, potential projects could be grouped according to more clearly established subject areas, e.g. mental health, family policy, exploitation, gender, ethnicity. Areas of research might also be presented according to the academic disciplines to which they might appeal, for example, sociology, psychology, geography, policing, statistical modelling etc. A system of 'tagging' potential projects with key words (disciplines, subjects etc.) might be feasible, and may aid the identification of intra-disciplinary projects.

A flexible approach to structuring a Research Agenda might be most appropriate.

Prioritising a Research Agenda

The variety of potential research topics, and the different audiences and impacts they would serve, make developing a single prioritised list of topics unfeasible. The Research Agenda might be better served as a point of reference for identified knowledge gaps and potential projects for various commissioning bodies and the wider research community.

The discussion did highlight the timeliness of some potential areas of work. For example, the context of constrained government spending would indicate that evaluations and cost-benefit-analyses of local interventions would be timely for Local Authority spending decisions. The same context has produced growing interest in producing estimates of the overall cost of missing, and the potential to deliver cost savings.

Policy engagement

A Research Agenda should both inform and be responsive to current Government policy agendas. Whilst there is a broad spectrum of research that could be undertaken, projects that develop policy and enable the implementation of policy will be attractive to some commissioners. There has been considerable policy and research interest in young runaways and interventions to support them over the last decade. Momentum currently looks to be building on developing a policy programme on missing persons more widely. This will bring new research opportunities. A Research Agenda will have to be maintained to keep its relevance.

Availability of data and research participants

The presentations and discussion highlighted a number of potential sources of data and participants for further research. Missing People has agreed, in principle, to provide access to participants for the ECRC funded 'Geographies of Missing People' study, and previously allowed researchers from the University of York access to participants and case data for the Lost from View study (Biehal, Mitchell and Wade, 2003).

The UK Missing Persons Bureau invites applications for access to data from researchers interested in missing persons. The Bureau hosts a central database of missing people, unidentified people, bodies and remains (HERMES). Please note that the data is collected for operational rather than research purposes (to allow missing person cases to be matched to unidentified people, body and remains) and therefore it is not a complete and comprehensive dataset.

Other secondary sources of data are potentially available to researchers and the output of this UK Research Agenda should highlight opportunities to analyse data. For example, a number of self report surveys have taken place, across the UK and beyond, which have asked young people about running away behaviour. Examples include: Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime (various years); Offending, Crime and Justice Survey (various years); Youth Lifestyles; Families and Children Study.

Service user involvement

So far, efforts to produce a UK Research Agenda have focused on consulting with researchers and professionals. Consultation should be extended to those with direct experience of going missing and with their families who have, or who continue to, experience the impacts of having someone go missing. Missing People has a developing programme of service user engagement which would provide a direct means of canvassing views on research topics from beneficiary representatives.

In addition further consultation might usefully be undertaken with practitioners dealing with missing persons day-to-day, e.g. police officers, social workers, care staff, nurses etc. etc.

Research funding

There was a discussion about the potential for consulting with known research funders to establish how a UK Research Agenda on missing persons could be made attractive to funders. A system of 'tagging' research projects according to the policy themes or programmes typically of interest to funders would certainly help to communicate the research opportunities to this audience. In addition, it was suggested that major funders might be approached for advice on whether discrete programme funding could be developed in the area of missing persons. It was felt that the proposition would be made more attractive by the fact that such a programme would most likely involve the formation of multi-disciplinary partnerships. Initial advice might be sought on how funding programmes and priorities are decided, and how these processes can be influenced.

Disseminating a Research Agenda

There was wide support for the idea of creating a network of individuals and organisations within the wider research community with an interest in undertaking work on missing persons. At its most basic, a designated webpage (or separate website) could be created to host the Research Agenda and invite discussion and the exchange of information relevant to research activity on missing persons. Missing People plans to develop such a page in the near future. A JISCMail mailing list has been created to which interested colleagues may sign up to receive and send messages around the group. This may be found at <http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/>, group name MISSINGPERSONS.

Opportunities to extend awareness of the Research Agenda will also arise by connecting with other established networks. One example is Making Research Count – a national collaborative dissemination initiative established

by a consortium of universities, which aims to promote knowledge-based and research informed practice in the field of social work and social care.

Valuable opportunities might be available to connect a UK network to an international research audience on missing persons. A number of international studies – past and ongoing – were discussed which could usefully contribute to existing knowledge and methodological development in the field.

Keeping a Research Agenda up to date

There was repeated acknowledgement that a Research Agenda on missing persons would need to be kept up-to-date. Whilst a 'snapshot' would be a useful starting point to galvanise interest from the wider research community, the real benefit on this work may lie in the creation of a network that can respond to changes in the policy, practice and research environment and keep the Research Agenda relevant.

Next steps

The Research Agenda Sub Group set out to be a time limited working group to create a Research Agenda and to plan for its dissemination and communication to the wider research community. The initial consultation and the 12 November event have helped the Sub Group produce a list of research projects and topics which can now be shaped into a Research Agenda.

Establishing a network of interested researchers will be key to disseminating the Research Agenda and to keeping it 'alive'. Missing People will share this paper and invite ongoing dialogue on: a) what topics should be on the agenda, and b) how research can be encouraged in this area. A dedicated web page will be developed to host the Research Agenda with appropriate mechanisms for fostering an online community.

End note

Thank you to all those individuals and organisations that have freely given their time to assist the Sub Group with this work.

Annex

Missing People

Missing People is a national charity that offers a lifeline for the 250,000 people who run away and go missing each year. For those left behind, we search and provide specialised support to end the heartache and confusion.

We provide 3 24hr helplines: the Runaway Helpline for young people, Message Home for adults and a helpline for families searching for someone. We also provide search support through poster distribution, media publicity and web appeals, and by taking sightings to pass to police, as well as providing advice and support to families left behind.

The charity is also developing a number of new projects, including a text service, TextSafe, whereby police can request that the charity sends a text message to a missing person with details of our confidential service, Turn2, an online repository of contact details for services for young runaways, 116000 a hotline for missing children, which will become our one point of contact, and the Reconnect Network, an information sharing protocol with NHS, local authority and NGO partners in Westminster.

UK Missing Persons Bureau

The UK Missing Persons Bureau is the national and international point of contact for the UK for all missing and unidentified person, unidentified body and remains cases and is the centre for information exchange, knowledge and expertise on missing. The Bureau currently holds the policy lead for 'missing' for the Government and will retain the policy lead for missing adults when CEOP assumes the policy lead for missing children as directed by the Government.

The Bureau provides integrated operational services for all missing people in support of law enforcement and other agencies; including:

- Tactical advice and support through field officers and analysts, particularly in suspicious cases such as suspected homicide and murders where there is no body found;
- Specialist advice from the National Suspicious Missing Person Adviser, the Serious Crime Analysis Section (SCAS), Behavioural Investigative Advisers, Geographical Profilers, Search and other experts;
- National and international cross-matching of outstanding missing people with people who are alive but unidentified, bodies and remains;
- Management of the UK's Child Rescue Alert service and interoperable EU schemes;
- Specialist overseas services through Interpol, the North Sea Group contacts (a network of maritime police forces) and the Bureau's European and wider world network;
- Specialist access to critical national services such as the National DNA Database, National Missing Persons DNA Database, National Fingerprint Database, Police National Computer and Automatic Number Plate Recognition
- Collation and analysis of high level data on the number of missing people reported to UK police forces to provide the UK national picture of missing.

Child Exploitation and Online Protection centre

January 11, 2010 – The Government announced its intention to move the national lead on missing children to CEOP

'to enable CEOP to build on their extensive experience of responding to incidents where children and young people have been or are vulnerable to abuse'