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CASE MANAGEMENT FOR MISSING CHILDREN HOMICIDE INVESTIGATION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Most children who are not where parents expect them to be, are “missing” for a very short period of time and reappear on their own, with no evidence of foul play. However, some children are missing against their will. The great majority of those children, even though they have undergone a traumatic experience, are not harmed seriously and are returned home alive. Many of them are taken by estranged parents or other family members. A small group is victimized by more predatory abductors, who want to make money by ransoming the child, to sexually molest the victim, and/or to kill the child. The list of children who are abducted and killed each year by someone who is not a family member is relatively small, compared to the number of missing children or to other types of child murder.

Because of their rarity among criminal homicides their complexity, emotion and high profile nature, they are extremely difficult to investigate. *This research was undertaken in an effort to better understand these types of murders, and to identify investigative techniques and strategies that will improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the criminal investigations and the apprehension rate of the murderers who abduct children.* The focus is on cases of child murder in which the victims were abducted or, at the time of the initial report to the police, were suspected to have been abducted.

The murder of a child who is abducted by a stranger is a rare event. There are estimated to be about 100 such incidents in the United States each year, less than one-half of one percent of the murders committed. There is approximately one child abduction murder for every 10,000 reports of a missing child.

The victims of these cases are “average” children, leading normal lives, and living with normal families, typical low-risk victims. The vast majority of them are girls (76%), with the average age being slightly over 11 years of age. In 80% of cases, the initial contact between the victim and killer is within 1/4 mile of the victim’s residence.

These cases are generally reported to a law enforcement agency as a “missing child” (58%). Often there is no initial indication of foul play, just a report that the child is missing or runaway. This is a difficult time for the investigator; not knowing whether the “missing child” is late or has been abducted. The investigator is in a position of having to decide on a course of action when time could be a very critical factor.

Any report of a missing child should be taken seriously. As many facts as possible surrounding the disappearance should be obtained as fast as possible, and an assessment of the nature of the case made expeditiously. Factors to consider in assessing the case should include the age of the child, the circumstances surrounding the child’s missing status, and the history of the child.

Fast action is necessary since, 1) there is typically over a two hour delay in making the initial missing child report (60%), and 2) the vast majority (74%) of the abducted children *who are murdered* are dead within three hours of the abduction. Because of these critical time features, it is important to respond quickly with a neighborhood canvass and search of the area.

Over half (53%) of these child abduction murders are committed by a killer who is a stranger to the victim. Family involvement in this type of case is infrequent (9%). However, the relationship between the victim and the killer varies with the gender and age of the victim. The youngest females, 1-5 years old, tend to be killed by friends or acquaintances (64%), while the oldest females, 16-17 years old, tend to be killed by strangers (also 64%). The relationship between the killer and victim is different for the male victims. The youngest male victims (1-5 years old) are most likely to be killed by strangers (also 64%), as are the teenage males (13-15 years old, 60% and 16-17 years old, 58%).

The average age of killers of abducted children is around 27 years old. They are predominantly unmarried (85%) and half of them (51%) either live alone (17%) or with their parents (34%). Half of them are unemployed, and those that are employed work in unskilled or semi-skilled labor occupations. Therefore, the killers can generally be characterized as “social marginals.”

Almost two-thirds of the killers (61%) had prior arrests for violent crimes, with slightly more than half of the killers’ prior crimes (53%) committed against children. The most frequent prior crimes against children were rape (31% of killers) and other sexual assault (45% of killers). Sixty-seven percent of the child abduction murderers’ prior crimes were similar in M.O. to the murder that was committed by the same killer.

Commonly, the killers are at the initial victim-killer contact site for a legitimate reason (66%). They either lived in the area (29%) or were engaging in some normal activity.

Most of the victims of child abduction murder are victims of opportunity (57%). Only in 14 percent of cases did the killer choose his victim because of some physical characteristic of the victim. The primary motivation for the child abduction murder is sexual assault.

After the victim has been killed, 52 percent of the bodies are concealed to prevent discovery. In only 9% of cases is the body openly placed to insure its discovery. When searching for the victim, searchers must be aware of this fact and look under branches, rugs, or debris. The fact that so many of the bodies are concealed also requires that searchers be placed at intervals approximately equal to the height of the victim.

A unique pattern of distance relationships exists in child abduction murders. The initial contact site is within 1/4 mile of the victim’s last known location in 80% of cases. Conversely, the distance between the initial contact site and

the murder site increases to distances greater than 1/4 mile (54%). The distance from the murder site to the body recovery site again decreases, to less than 200 feet in 72 percent of cases.

There are investigative implications of these spatial relationships. If the initial contact site is not identified by the police, the clearance rate drops drastically, and vice versa. The close proximity between the initial contact site and the victim's last known location suggests that a thorough neighborhood canvass and area search be completed to locate the initial contact site.

Similarly, knowledge of the location of the murder is important to the investigation. The murder site is second only to the body of the victim as a source of physical evidence that can be connected with the killer. Its close proximity to the body recovery site suggests that a thorough search be conducted to locate it.

It was discovered that once the murder investigation has begun, *the name of the killer* is known to the police *within the first week* in 74% of cases. This provides an opportunity for investigators who are stalled regroup after a week or two, and evaluate everyone connected with the investigation. Likewise, it is not uncommon for the police to have actual contact with the killer before he becomes a primary suspect, for example, during the initial neighborhood canvass.

While at times the media seems to "get in the way," in the end they are much more likely to have a positive effect on the investigation (31% of cases) than a negative one (6% of cases). In short, the media are more likely to bring witnesses forward than to aid the killer in his escape. The media had no effect at all in 63% of the investigations.

One question answered by this research is: What can we tell parents to help them protect their child? Even though child abduction murders are rare events, the thing for parents to do is to eliminate, or minimize, the opportunity for their children to become victims. The first step is to be aware that children are not immune from abduction because they are close to home. In fact, well over half of these abductions that led to murder took place within three city blocks of the victim's home and approximately one-third of them within one-half block. (It is probably not a good idea to send an unescorted ten year old girl to the grocery store to buy a quart of milk.) The greatest single thing we can do as parents is to be certain that our children are supervised, even if they are in their own front yard.

There has been much publicity about, "not speaking to strangers" and "not getting into cars with strangers." We should carry that precaution one step further. We should also educate our children *not to even approach* a car, *whether the occupant of the car is a stranger or not*. We should tell our children, "if someone offers a ride, asks for directions, or offers treats, *turn around and run* to a safe place, and tell (their guardian)."

Citizens need to be aware of strangers and *unusual* behavior in their neighborhoods. They need to have the presence of mind to observe and to write down descriptions of people, vehicles, and license numbers. Many child abductions are witnessed by people who do not realize that a crime is being committed. For example, when a citizen observes an adult pulling a struggling child in a public place, it is easy to interpret the event as a guardian taking control of an unruly child. In fact, in most instances, that is exactly what it is. However, nothing prevents a citizen from evaluating the circumstances closer, perhaps intervening, and certainly, noting descriptions and license numbers.

Last, we need to tell parents that if their child is unaccounted for, *call the police immediately*. Do not delay.

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HOMICIDE INVESTIGATION

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INTRODUCTION

Every parent has felt their heart pound, their pulse quicken, their mind race, and their instinctual fear of losing a child, all strike them at the very instant it is recognized that their child is missing. Whether it is when he is late coming home from school, she disappears from sight in a department store, or he does not return home on time from a weekend party, that parental fear is quick to surface. Fortunately, parents' greatest fear is not realized very often.

Most children who are not where parents expect them to be are "missing" for a very short period of time and reappear on their own, with no evidence of foul play. However, some children are missing against their will. It is not simply that they have loitered on their way home from school, but rather, they may have been taken or abducted. The great majority of these children, even though they have undergone a traumatic experience, are not harmed seriously and are returned home alive. Many of them are taken by estranged parents or other family members. A small group is victimized by more predatory abductors, who want to make money by ransoming the child, to sexually molest the victim, and/or to kill the child.

The list of children who are abducted and killed each year by someone who is not a family member is relatively small, compared to the number of missing children or to other types of child murder. However, the names of many of these victims, due primarily to national media coverage, are well-known. Adam Walsh. Polly Klaas. Jimmy Ryce. And there are many other local cases which do not become the focus of national media attention.

Because of their rarity, even among criminal homicides, and their complex, emotion-laden, high profiles, these cases are extremely difficult to investigate. *This research was undertaken in an effort to better understand these types of murders, and to identify investigative techniques and strategies that will improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the criminal investigations of the murders of abducted children.* The focus is on cases of child murder in which the victims were abducted or, at the time of the initial report to the police, were suspected to have been abducted, typically by a stranger or nonfamily member.

The investigation of a murder of an abducted child is not a common occurrence for a homicide detective or, even, a police agency. These types of cases represent less than 1/2 of one percent of the murders committed in this country. Their infrequency causes special challenges for homicide investigation. It prevents the typical investigator and detective supervisor from developing the expertise needed in the field of such investigations. Coupled with the age and lifestyle of the victim, it also makes these cases more "newsworthy." Anyone who watches the *6 O'clock News* has seen evidence of the media "feeding frenzy" surrounding such cases. The rarity of these cases has allowed a body of "commonly held beliefs" to develop that has no basis in fact. Hence, detectives, case managers, police executives, and the media sometimes operate from a position of false assumptions.

Homicide investigators, through no fault of their own, sometimes fail to realize that the investigations of the murders of abducted children are different from the other murders they usually investigate. Consequently, they sometimes make decisions about the direction of the investigation that are not "high percentage" choices. For example, some detectives believe that in any murder of a child the logical suspect is a parent and, therefore, devote a considerable amount of resources to proving that the killer was the father. But this research shows that the parents are the least likely suspects in an abduction murder of a child. This kind of false assumption is made, in part, from lack of experience with these types of cases and because there is no body of empirical research on these types of child murders and their investigations from which detectives can draw guidance. This research will help investigators make the decisions, identify the strategies, and implement the tactics that will lead to the more certain and timely capture of the killers of abducted children.

This report discusses the findings of a three year research project that examined the investigations of murders of more than 600 abducted children. The research was conducted by criminal justice professionals with extensive murder investigation and research backgrounds. The report is written for the homicide detective who is confronted with an unsolved case and for the uniformed patrol officer who responds to the initial call of a missing or abducted child.

Throughout the report data are presented as simple percentages. Often comparisons are made with "all murder cases" and, at times, with "all child murders," which include domestic child abuse murders and mutual combat murders. Percentages are used to provide a sense of how often or how rarely a characteristic or circumstance can be expected in these types of cases. The logic is that knowing the "spread" will help the detective make better decisions and prioritize courses of action.

There are eight chapters in the report. They include: this *Introduction*; the *Methodology* of the research project; a description of *The Victim*; a discussion of the characteristics, motives, and actions of *The Killer*; select aspects of *The Investigation*; an elaboration of the *Murder Incident Sites*; a comparison of single-victim and *Series Cases*; and, last, the

METHODOLOGY

Identifying Potential Cases

The first task was to identify cases to be used in the research. Every municipal police department and county sheriff's office in the United States that had a service population of 100,000 or more, or that had fifteen or more murders reported to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) Uniform Crime Report (UCR) in 1987, was identified (combined total of 227 agencies). Depending on the size of the agency, either the Office of the Department Head, the Detective Division Commander, the Homicide Squad Supervisor, or a detective was contacted by telephone and the research project was explained in brief. The purpose of this call was to identify someone within that agency to whom correspondence could be directed regarding a formal request for preliminary case information. In most cases, the person contacted on the telephone was the person to whom a formal letter of request was sent.

The letter explained the research project and the criteria used to select cases. Each agency was requested to provide some basic information about their child murder cases. The rate of response to the request letters was a surprisingly high 75%.

In addition, a teletype variation of the above mentioned letter was sent to all police agencies in the United States. To increase the chances of response, this teletype was sent out three times, on different days of the week, at different times of the day. It asked the agencies with child murder cases meeting our stated criteria to contact the Project Coordinator, who then recorded basic information about the cases.

Other avenues were also pursued to identify cases. State and federal agencies that collect murder information were contacted and requests for case information were made. Also, homicide detectives across the country who were known to project team members were contacted for information.

In all, information was received on 1,025 "nominated" cases. These responses came from large police agencies like the New York City Police Department and from agencies as small as three-officer departments. The responding agencies were from all regions of the country, representing 44 states. After careful review of each of the cases, 621 were found to meet the criteria established for inclusion in the project. (See Appendix A for map of cases.)

Case Criteria

Cases of murder victims that were chosen for study were selected based on the following criteria:

- 1) The victim was *younger than* 18 years of age (except as described in #3 below), whose body had been recovered, or if the body had not been recovered, the killer was identified, tried, and convicted; and
- 2) The police agency receiving the initial contact about the case, whether as a missing, abducted, runaway, or dead body case, acted on the premise that an abduction was a possibility; or
- 3) The case was part of a series in which at least one victim in the series met the above stated criteria.

The word "abduction" means different things to different people. For purposes of this research, it means

- 1) The victim was kidnapped.
- 2) The victim was detained and his/her freedom of movement was restricted.
- 3) A victim of domestic violence was reported by the family (or someone else) as a missing child.

4) The police were initially of the opinion that the victim was taken or held against her will, whether or not that turned out to be the case in the end.

The *major criterion* for case selection was the information with which the initial investigating police agency was working. For example, if the agency believed that abduction was a possibility and began investigating it as such, it was included in this research. A secondary factor for keeping a nominated case was whether the detective who worked the case was available for interview.

Design of the Data Collection Instrument

The data collection instrument was designed by two homicide investigators (the project director and project coordinator) and a criminologist (the research director). The form was used to record comprehensive, detailed information on 412 items that tap the essential characteristics of a child abduction murder and its investigation. It was designed to evaluate the criminal investigative process, to include: initial response of the police agency, basic investigation, extended investigation, physical evidence, geographical considerations, victim information, and offender information.

The Criminal Division of the Washington Attorney General's Office had previously conducted solvability research on all murders committed in Washington state committed since 1981. Many questions from that data collection instrument were duplicated for this research project so that direct statistical comparisons could be made between the two

data bases. Throughout this report, the reader will see comparisons between “all murders” and “child abduction murders.”

The Homicide Investigation and Tracking System (HITS) is a program within the Washington Attorney General’s Office Criminal Justice Division that tracks murder and rape in the state of Washington. Some questions from the HITS data collection instrument were also duplicated for this research project, again so that direct statistical comparisons could be made between the data bases.

After designing the data collection instrument, it was field tested on ten child murder cases. Problems with design, such as wording or placement, were identified and corrected.

Detective Interviews

The data collected during this project came directly from two sources: interviews with the detectives who investigated the cases being reviewed, and investigative case files. To make the interview process consistent, training was given to the Washington Attorney General Office HITS investigators who conducted most of the interviews. In the beginning, these HITS investigators each conducted detective interviews in Washington state law enforcement offices to familiarize themselves with the instrument and the interview process.

Selected volunteers from law enforcement agencies in different parts of the U.S. also agreed to assist in the data collection process. These volunteers were teamed up with HITS investigators for on-site training, and detective interviews were conducted at various locations.

Detective interviews across the nation were then scheduled over a two year period and assigned to interviewers. These interviews were conducted at the primary investigating police agency, during which the data collection instrument was completed.

Data Integrity

After the data collection instrument was completed, it was reviewed by the project coordinator for validity and internal consistency. The data were then entered into a computer data base designed specifically for the project.

To guarantee computer data integrity, the data entry clerk produced a printout of the newly created computer record, and it was visually compared with the original data collection instrument. After any corrections were made by the data entry clerk, the printout and the original data collection instrument were given to the project coordinator for another review for errors, either in data entry or consistency. Any errors found in this step were then corrected, and the original instrument was filed.

The Data

The purpose of collecting these data was to determine proper avenues of investigation and, thereby, to produce clues about the most effective way to investigate the murders of abducted or missing children. To accomplish this, information on solved cases was needed. It was also necessary to collect *unsolved* cases to use as a control and to examine the differences in solved and unsolved cases. *Thirty-five percent* of the cases of child murder in this study were unsolved at the time the data were collected.

The data represent cases from 44 states. There are 577 case investigations with a total of 621 victims (some cases had multiple victims) and 419 killers. Of the 621 victims, 562 are under the age of 18 years. Those who are adult victims are typically in “mixed” juvenile and adult victim mass or serial murder cases. In the series cases, all aged victims were included to determine if there were any differences between serial murders of children and those that had adult victims in the series.

During the analysis process, the only time the adult victims were considered was during analysis of the series cases. Unless stated otherwise, the data reported here include only cases in which the victim is less than 18 years of age.

Data Analysis

The analysis was undertaken from two approaches. The first was to examine issues that were labeled “long held beliefs”—things that veteran homicide investigators told us they believe to be true; for example, that the killer always returns to the scene of the crime. As one might expect, some of these assumptions about murder contradicted the results reported here. The task for the project, then, was to determine which of those beliefs is correct and to what degree.

The second approach was to “let the data speak for itself,” by analyzing frequency distributions, cross tabulations, and statistical reliability of the data, thereby identifying those investigative issues that have statistical, but more importantly, investigative relevance.

THE VICTIMS

“Contrary to public perceptions, there are not thousands of cases like Adam Walsh or Polly Klaas, and public fear of such incidents should

be put in perspective.”

*NCMEC, 1994 Report Card to the Nation
on Missing and Exploited Children*

The victims of child abduction murders committed by strangers are both “rare” and “unique” among missing and abducted children, as well as among murder victims and, even, child murder victims.

The most comprehensive national study of the “incidence” of missing, abducted, and runaway children—funded by the National Institute of Justice and conducted by researchers at the Family Violence Research Center at the University of New Hampshire (Finklehor, Hotaling, and Sedlak)—produced a number of estimates of both the extent and nature of the problem. Approximately 85 percent of missing person reports are for “missing children.” Therefore, there may be almost one million missing child reports made to law enforcement each year. Most of those do not involve any kind of abduction, but there are approximately 350,000 child abductions by family members, and 100,000 “attempted abductions” by someone other than family members.

Unfortunately, less than 5 percent (3,000 to 4,500 cases) of the child abductions by nonfamily members are actually reported to the police. And the data show that almost two-thirds of those types of cases involve some degree of sexual assault—they have been referred to as “short-term, sexually-motivated abductions.” Perhaps surprisingly, merely 200 to 300 of the nonfamily child abductions are classic abductions or kidnappings, where the children are taken for an extended period of time, transported some distance from the contact point, taken with the intent to keep, ransom, or kill the child.

The best estimates are that somewhere between 40 to 150 child victims of abduction, by a stranger, are killed each year in the United States. They represent a very small percent of the number of murders committed each year, as well as of child murders. If there are 100 cases like these, they represent less than one-half of one percent of the total number of murders committed each year, and less than five percent of child murders. As a percent of all of the “missing child reports,” perhaps one in ten thousand ends in an abduction murder by a stranger.

So, in any given year, most of the thousands of law enforcement jurisdictions in the U.S. will **not** have a non-family child abduction murder to investigate, and many more homicide investigators will not have one case like this over the course of their careers. But, “Be prepared”—for that unexpected phone call, and for an investigation that will likely be very different than any case ever worked.

Initial Police Involvement

Police involvement in child abduction murder investigations usually begins with a phone call by parents or family to a local police department to report a missing, runaway, or abducted child. The case is typically initiated with the “identification” of the potential victim as a missing child (58% of the cases) or with the “discovery” of the murder victim (23%). Only nine percent begin as reports of a runaway child and an equal percent as abductions. The beginning of police involvement in these types of cases is different than for general murder cases, which are more likely to start with a “dead body” or report of a murder. In the great majority of child abduction murders, the victim is “known” from the very beginning of the investigation—but what is not known is whether the victim (or potential murder victim) will be found alive or dead.

Most reports to the police of a missing, runaway, or abducted child are made relatively soon after someone notices that the child is absent.

Table 1
Percentage Of Missing Children Reports Within Time Periods

Immediately	19%
Within 1 Hour	25%
Within 2 Hours	40%
Within 4.5 Hours	68%
Within 24 Hours	86%
>24 Hours	99%

Table 1 reflects that 19 percent of the victims were reported missing “immediately,” 40 percent within two hours, and 86 percent within 24 hours of being missed. Of course, this also means that two hours lapsed before reports were made in 60 percent of the cases and a whole day passed in 14 percent of the cases. Part of the delay in some of them is attributable to the age of the child—the older the child, the greater the delay in calling the police. Parents are simply less concerned and worried about the short-term absence of their teenager than of their toddler.

These short reporting delays may not seem that important to the course of the investigation. The data show that

the delays are much more critical in child abduction murders than in other types of investigations, because those missing children who are murdered are killed within a very short period of time (see Table 2). Incredibly, in *44 percent* of the cases the victim was dead within only **one hour** after the abduction. Seventy-four percent of the victims were dead within **three hours**, and 91 percent of the victims were dead within **24 hours** after being taken.

Table 2
When Abducted Child Was Killed

<1 Hour	44%
Within 3 Hours	74%
Within 24 Hours	91%
Within 7 Days	99%
Within 30 Days	100%

It was discovered that *22 percent* of the victims were still alive at the time they were reported missing, and a related and, perhaps, even alarming finding is that *42 percent* had already been killed *before* they were reported missing (including the “dead body” cases). Fortunately, only a tiny fraction of missing child reports eventuate in a murder, but for those that do, the belief that killers keep their victims alive for long periods of time is simply not true. Obviously, the dictum that the first 24 hours of an investigation are the most critical needs to be modified in child abduction cases. Concerned guardians need to report an absent child immediately, whatever the apparent reason, and police need to concentrate as many investigative resources as quickly as possible on those cases where foul play is suspected. This may enhance the odds that a live victim is found, and will certainly improve the probability that the killer is caught. The unique characteristics of these murder victims should assist investigators in sorting the potential murder victims from the great majority of missing children who will eventually turn up alive and well.

The Victim of Child Abduction Murder

The victims of child abduction murders are very different than other murder victims, who are typically young adult males killed by someone they know. Child abduction murder victims are much more likely to be female children killed by strangers. The victims look like your next-door neighbor...or your daughter.

The typical child victim of an abduction murder is a white female who is about 11 years old. She is from a middle class or “blue collar” family, who lives in an urban or suburban neighborhood, in a single family residence. Her relationship with her family is stable, and she is described as a “normal kid” who is not thought of as “high risk” in any way. In short, she is your average preteen girl.

Race

As one would expect, the great majority of the victims are white (73%), and there is not much difference in the racial composition of child abduction murder victims and murder victims in general (see Table 3). That is, victims of these types of murders are not being selected by murderers on the basis of race.

Table 3
Victims’ Race

	<u>Child Abduction</u>	<u>All Murders</u>
White	73%	66%
Black	16%	17%
All Other	11%	17%

Gender

However, there are big differences in the gender of the victims in child abduction murders, compared to all child murders and to all murders (Table 4).

Table 4
Victims' Gender

	<u>Child Abduction Murders</u>	<u>All Child Murders</u>	<u>All Murders</u>
Female	76%	55%	38%
Male	24%	45%	62%

One of the most significant differences is that child abduction murder victims are much more likely to be females (76%) than both child murder victims (55%) and murder victims in general (38%), where the typical victim is a male. There is definitely an over-selection of female victims when there is a child abduction murder.

Age

Nationally, approximately 50 percent of all children who are murdered are 15-17 years old. In this special sample of child abduction murder victims, only 21 percent are older teenagers, see Table 5.

Table 5
Distribution Of Victims' Age Groups

<u>1 - 5</u>	<u>6 - 9</u>	<u>10-12</u>	<u>13-15</u>	<u>16-17</u>
9%	21%	21%	28%	21%

As reported earlier, the average age of victims in this research is about 11 years old. Very few (9%) of the victims are what might be characterized as “little children” who are five years old or younger. There are equal percents (21%) of children (6-9 years old), preteens (10-12 years old), and older teens (16-17 years old) among the child abduction murder victims. The largest age group of victims (28%) is comprised of young teens (13-15 years old). The majority of the victims in this research (51%) were not yet teenagers at the time of their death, and almost 80 percent of them had not reached the driving age of 16. Clearly, the victims of child abduction murders are much younger than the typical child murder victim.

When gender and age of the victims are combined, some interesting relationships emerge. Younger male children (1-12 years old) are more likely to be killed by an abductor (15% compared to 9%) than teenagers (13-17 years old). But just the opposite is found for female victims: Teenage females are more likely (40%) to be killed in these types of murders than younger female children (36%). So, the largest group of child abduction murder victims are teenage girls, followed by younger girls, then younger boys, and last, teenage boys.

Lifestyle of Victims

Contrary to what many believe, children who are killed during an abduction are not particularly vulnerable or high risk victims. Most (66%) are described by those who know them as “normal kids.” Of course, this means that one-third of the victims from this study are not considered average kids. For example, 17 percent of the victims are described as street kids and 14 percent as runaways. As one might expect, these types of victims are typically teenagers, not younger children.

Victim-Killer Relationship

The victim-killer “relationship” is very different in child abduction murders than in other kinds of child murders and all murders. These types of murders are much more likely than any others to involve a **stranger** killer—this kind of victim-killer relationship, where the murderer is a stranger to the victim, “defines” this particular type of murder. Table 6 shows that in 53 percent of the cases

Table 6
Victim-Killer Relationship

	<u>Abducted Child Murders</u>	<u>All Child Murders</u>	<u>All Murders</u>
Stranger	53%	5%	20%
Friend/Acquaint. of Victim	39%	28%	42%

Family Member/Intimate

9%

67%

38%

the killer is a “stranger” to the victim, compared to only 5 percent in all child murders (where the killer is much more likely to be a family member or friend), and 20 percent in all murders. As expected, these child abduction murders are less likely to involve killers who are “friends or acquaintances” of the victims (39%), and much less likely to involve “family members or intimates” of the victims (9%). The family members or intimates who are killers in this study differ from the typical parent murderer in that they are implicated, somehow, in the actual or fraudulent abduction. Remember, cases were included in the study sample if they started out being reported, typically by family, as a missing, abducted, or runaway child. As we discovered, in a small number of cases, what started out as a search for a predatory stranger led to a family member or intimate who was involved in the initial missing child report, and perhaps even in assisting in the investigation.

The overwhelming involvement of stranger killers in these types of murders becomes even more dramatic when the victim’s age and gender are examined. It is apparent that the victim-killer relationship varies by the age and gender of the victim. For the *girl* victims, the older girls are more likely to be killed by

Table 7
Female Victim-Killer Relationship, By Age Group

	<u>1 - 5</u>	<u>6 - 9</u>	<u>10-12</u>	<u>13-15</u>	<u>16-17</u>
Stranger	28%	45%	56%	56%	64%
Friend/Acquaintance	64%	48%	37%	36%	23%
Family/Intimate	8%	7%	9%	8%	13%

strangers and younger girls by friends or acquaintances, and family members and intimates do not discriminate by age in their choice of female victims in these murders (Table 7). For example, among the youngest girls (1-5 years old), the killer is a stranger in 28 percent of the murders, while 64 percent of the murders of the oldest girls (16-17 years old) are strangers. Just the opposite, friends or acquaintances are the killers of girls in 64% of the murders of the 1-5 year olds, but only 23% of the murders of the 16-17 year old female victims.

However, the picture for the *boy* victims is quite different (Table 8).

Table 8
Male Victim-Killer Relationship, By Age Group

	<u>1 - 5</u>	<u>6 - 9</u>	<u>10-12</u>	<u>13-15</u>	<u>16-17</u>
Stranger	64%	44%	50%	60%	58%
Friend/Acquaintance	27%	39%	42%	40%	42%
Family/Intimate	9%	17%	8%	0%	0%

The very youngest male victims (1-5 years old) are most likely to be killed by strangers (64% of them), followed by teenagers (60% and 58%). The 1 - 5 year old males are least likely to be killed by friends or acquaintances (27%), who are about equally likely to be the killers of 6-17 year old boys. This pattern is almost the opposite of female victims. And in the kind of abduction murders examined, family or intimates do not kill male teenagers at all, but only younger boys.

These variations in the victim-killer relationship by the age and gender of the victims reflect different types of murders, killers, and M.O.s, which will be discussed in the chapter on The Killers.

THE KILLERS

As the victims of child abduction murders are unique among murder victims, so too are their killers. They share many characteristics with other types of murderers, but are unique in other important ways that suggest a different etiology to their predatory behavior and require different investigative strategies. This chapter will focus on three features of these types of child abduction killers: 1) their personal and social *attributes*; 2) their *methods of operation*; and 3) their *post-offense behavior*.

Killer Attributes

Killers of abducted children are somewhat unique among murderers in general, above and beyond their choice of victims. They can be characterized as **social marginals**: They are not active, successful participants in mainstream, conventional social life, but, rather, they occupy a position in society that is, indeed, on the “edge, brink, border, precipice, or margin.” They are not integrated, personally or socially, into the kinds of relationships or activities that produce and sustain effective self or social controls. Their personal and social attributes establish and define their social marginality.

In terms of their *sociodemographic attributes*, these killers can be typified as white males who, on average, are about 27 years old. In general, this picture is not much different than for all murderers. However, within these primary sociodemographic attributes, there are some interesting and meaningful variations. First, there are no important differences in race between child abduction killers and other killers. About two-thirds are white, 20 percent are black, and the remainder are other racial/ethnic groups.

Second, we know that murder is a predominantly male phenomenon. Eighty-seven percent of all killers are males. However, the killing of children during an abduction is almost a totally-male domain of behavior. An astounding 98.5 percent of these killers are males. Female killers in these kinds of child murders are almost non-existent (1.5%), whereas among general child murder, they are much more likely to be involved as a killer (13%). The clear overrepresentation of male killers is related to the predatory nature of the murders and the sexual motivation of child abduction killers, regardless of the victim’s gender.

Contrary to popular belief, child abduction killers are not aged perverts or “dirty old men.” Their average age is around 27 years old. The age distribution of killers, for child abduction and all murders, is very similar (see Table 9).

Table 9

<u>Age Group Distribution Of Killers</u>					
<u>< 18</u>	<u>18-20</u>	<u>21-25</u>	<u>26-30</u>	<u>31-40</u>	<u>>40</u>
12%	10%	20%	25%	24%	9%

There are not many juvenile (under 18) killers (and most of them are 15-17 years old), the great majority of the killers are under 30 years old.

A more apparent and significant difference emerges at around age 40, where only 9 percent of the child abduction killers are over 40, compared to 19 percent of all murderers. The former are younger than the latter, and the most marked differences between the two are at the older ages. Seven percent of the child abduction killers are between 41-49 years old, and only 2 percent are 50 years old or older, with the oldest murderer in the study being 57 years old. In short, child abduction killers are even more male and younger than the average killer.

Social Marginality

There are a number of indicators of the pronounced *social marginality* of child abduction killers. A number of features of their personal and social lives suggest that they are not integrated personally or socially into mainstream, conventional social relationships, contexts, and activities, as compared to the general population, as well as to other types of killers.

Marital Status

Only 15 percent of these killers are married at the time of the murder—73 percent are single and 13 percent are divorced. This is very different than for young adult males in the general population, as well as for murderers in general, where the pattern is almost the opposite, with the great majority of them being married. This means that 85 percent of child abduction killers are *not* intimately attached or bonded to a “significant other,” partner, or spouse at the time of the abduction and murder of the child.

Employment

A primary indicator of social marginality for adults is their employment status. Those with histories of unemployment or infrequent employment are more likely to occupy a position of economic marginality, which affects a variety of other aspects of their personal and social lives, usually in a negative way. Incredibly, 50 percent of the child abduction killers were unemployed at the time they committed the murder. This rate of unemployment is at least five times greater than the national unemployment rate for the general population.

Occupations

When they are working, they are primarily employed in “unskilled” and “semiskilled” labor occupations. The typical job, listed on an open-ended question, for these killers is *construction worker*—this occupation

Table 10
Killers’ Occupations

Construction Worker	28%
Truck Driver	8%
Food Industry Worker	8%
Student	7%
Service Industry	5%
Auto Maintenance	4%

appeared more than three-to-five times as often (28 %) as the next five most popular jobs (only the top six occupations are listed in table 10). The other most frequently listed occupations include truck driver, food industry worker, student, service industry, and auto maintenance. “Skilled” labor and “professional” occupations are dramatically underrepresented among the typical jobs of child abduction killers. Rather, they tend to work in what economists refer to as “secondary sector” occupations, which require little formal education, produce low wages, are characteristically unstable, indicate lower status, do not lend themselves to career commitments, and so on. In short, workers in these types of occupations are less integrated into the economic and social lives of the community.

Residential Status

With their unusually high rate of unemployment, and typical occupations that are unstable and low-paying, their living arrangements might make more

Table 11
Living Arrangements Of The Killers

Living With Parents	34%
Living Alone	17%
Girlfriend/Boyfriend	16%
Spouse &/or Children	15%
Other Room-mates	12%
Other	7%

sense than at first glance. Contrary to another popular belief, child abduction killers are not “loners” in the strictest sense—only 17 percent of them live alone, while 83 percent are living with someone else (Table 11). However, who they are living with may be more unusual. Oddly enough, 34 percent of these male killers who average 27 years old, are still living with their parents, which in a broader sense, could qualify them as loners—or social isolates from other young adult males or females with whom they might be intimate and share a residence. This group who lives with parents and those who do live alone, together comprise more than 50 percent of the child abduction killers in this study. They may not truly be loners, but they are more likely to be “social isolates,” particularly from their peers, both male and female.

They are also quite mobile—they change their residences quite often, more than most people. Seventy-nine percent of these killers moved at least once within the past five years. This may not be that unusual, but 43 percent of them changed residences three or more times, and 21 percent moved five or more times during the five years preceding the murder. They do not seem to stay anywhere very long, where they could (or would) connect themselves to others or to a place. Or, vice versa, because they are less attached to significant others, they are more free and, therefore, more likely to move often. It is also likely that for many of them, their criminal activity makes it more necessary to move around, either seeking out more fertile grounds for victims and/or avoiding apprehension.

Killers’ Lifestyles

The lifestyles—and, therefore, public identities—of these killers are quite often described by those who know them as being nonconforming, deviant, or “marginal.” For example, compared to the victims’ parents (45%), only four percent of child abduction killers are perceived as “model citizens.”

Table 12
Perceived Lifestyle Of Killers

Described as “Strange”	40%
Alcohol Abuser	32%
Drug User/Abuser	27%
Friendly To Children	21%
Reclusive	20%
Sexually Promiscuous	19%
Transient/Semi-transient	16%

Rather, they are most commonly described by others as “strange” (40%). Since the killers could be described with more than one term, a number of other “deviant” lifestyle characteristics are often apparent (Table 12). For example, 32 percent are identified as alcohol abusers and 27 percent as drug abusers. There are a few other characteristics that are also among the seven most common attributions, but they do not focus on ostensibly deviant behavior. For example, 21 percent of the killers are seen as being friendly to children.

Taken together, many of the killers were not perceived or described by others as ordinary, conventional people, but rather, as leading the kinds of lives that are already deviant or have the potential to lead to trouble, particularly with children. In short, whereas the typical victim might be described as “the kid next door,” the killers were not (before they became identified as a murderer) and are not the kind of guy you would want living in your neighborhood.

Killers’ Past Behavior

In accord with their perceived lifestyles and identities, most child abduction killers—*three-fourths* of them—have a history of at least one serious “personal behavioral problem” of some sort (see Table 13).

Table 13
Personal Problems Of The Killers

	<u>Child Abduction</u>	<u>All Murderers</u>
Sexual Problems	42%	3%
Alcohol Problems	30%	27%
Drug Problems	27%	14%
Mental Problems	23%	13%

Many of them had more than one of these problems. What is most striking is the distribution of prior “sexual problems.” Of the possible behavior problems, sexual problems are the most prevalent (42%) among the child abduction killers, but the least prevalent (3%) problem among all murderers. This difference is substantial and dramatic.

Overall, the child abduction killers have a higher rate of past behavior problems than murderers in general, and a much higher rate of past sexual problems (14 times higher than among all killers). This suggests, rather strongly, that their past behavior problems are related to, and predictive of, the extant murders.

Killers’ Prior Crimes

Their prior criminal acts, against adults and juveniles, also indicate a predisposition to violence, including murder and sexual assaults. Based on a search of their criminal records, it was discovered that the majority of child abduction killers have histories of violence. *Sixty percent* of them had prior arrests for violent crimes. And, alarmingly, their crimes of violence are being perpetrated at a high rate against child victims.

The majority (53%) of the killers had committed prior crimes against children, and the most frequent of those

crimes were *assaults* and/or *sexual assaults* (Table 14). There is a definite sexual component to the prior crimes

Table 14

Prior Crimes Against Children By The Killers

Sexual Assault (Non-Rape)	45%
Rape (or attempt)	31%
Murder (or attempt)	28%
Kidnap	19%
Assault	15%

committed against children by those offenders who have also killed a child during an abduction. Thirty-one percent of the killers had previously committed rapes (or attempted rapes) against children, and 45 percent of them had previously committed other sexual assaults. Incredibly, 28 percent of the priors are for murders (or attempted murders) of children. A significant group (19 %) of these offenders also have histories of kidnapping children. Taken together, it is clear that among many child abduction killers there is a predisposition to predatory violence, sexual and otherwise, against children.

Not surprisingly, the typical killer in these types of child abduction murders—a stranger—is most likely to have this kind of violent, sexual criminal history, compared to killers who are not strangers to their victims. Almost two-thirds (64%) of the killers who are strangers to their victims have committed prior crimes against children, which is twice as likely as a killer who is a family member or intimate (32%). However, it is somewhat surprising that almost one-third of those offenders who are closest personally and emotionally to the victims have priors against children, because it suggests that their own children, perhaps as well as others, were targets of violence before. In between, 41 percent of the child abduction killers who are friends or acquaintances of the victims have committed crimes against children.

Killers' Custody Status

Even though child abduction killers have sordid, troubled histories, including substantial evidence of prior crimes of violence against children, most of them (61%), like murderers in general (66%), are not in any “official custody status” at the time of the extant murder. That is, the majority of them are ostensibly free of legal controls when they commit the murder. At the same time, a meaningful proportion of them (27%) are either on parole or probation when they kill, compared to 17 percent of all murderers. So, on the one hand, most child abduction killers may not be immediately accessible in the custodial system, but compared to other murderers, they are more likely to be found in the active files of the correctional or judicial systems.

Overall, child abduction killers possess a number of important and meaningful indicators of social marginality and of a concurrent predisposition to commit crimes of violence against child victims. Most of them exhibit the weak social bonds to conventional others, contexts, relationships, and activities that criminologists propose are among the strongest predictors of involvement in crime. In the language of control theory, these types of individuals are more “free to deviate”—that is, they are on the verge of committing a crime, given an appropriate motivation and opportunity.

The M.O. (Modus Operandi) and Motivation

Surprisingly, two-thirds (67%) of the prior crimes committed against children had an M.O. that was similar to that in the *abduction murder* that was committed by the same offender. For example, a child abduction killer is very likely to commit a rape against a child in a way that is quite similar to the way he kills another child. The similarities in M.O.s produced other surprises: They were most alike, by a large margin, in the “commission of the offense,” or the way the

Table 15

M.O. Similarities Between Other Crimes And Extant Murder

Commission of the Crime	70%
Victim Characteristics	28%
Approach to the Victim	21%
Specific Acts Committed	17%

crimes were committed (Table 15). In 70 percent of the cases that had similar M.O.s, the priors were committed in similar ways—for example, the choice of weapon (say a knife) was the same across different crimes committed by a killer.

Contrary to what the literature on murder suggests, these child abduction killers were much less likely to select certain types of victims based on their personal characteristics: Only 28 percent of prior crimes were committed against victims with similar personal characteristics—for example, the killer had a prior for an assault on a victim with long blond hair and the murder victim also had long blond hair. The crimes were even less likely (21%) to be similar in their approach to the victim—for example, using deception to gain control over an eventual molestation victim and, later, the murder victim. Last, 17 percent of the prior crimes against children were similar to the extant murder in the kinds of specific acts that were performed during the commission of the crimes—for example, the killer used duct tape to subdue and control a kidnap victim, as well as the subsequent murder victim.

These findings regarding the similarity of M.O.s across the great majority of crimes committed by child abduction killers show that there is more consistency in the M.O.s of these types of killers than expected and as compared to other types of murderers. The data also suggest that there may be a greater predisposition to serial offending among child abduction killers.

Sexual Motivation

Another characteristic that most of them share with serial murderers is a sexual component to their motivation to kill. In the case of child abduction murders, the overwhelming majority—**69 percent**—of the cases involve a sexual motive, compared to only 5 percent of all murders, and 14 percent of child murders. These are extremely big differences in the primary motivation to commit murder. Almost one-half (48%) of the child abduction murders are classified as rapes and 21 percent as other sexual assaults. As one would expect in these types of murders, a large group (30%) are classic kidnappings, which is 15 times greater than in all child murders, and 30 times greater than in murders in general—it is one of the defining characteristics of child abduction murders. Some of the kidnappings may also include a secondary sexual component, because there is physical evidence that almost two-thirds (64%) of the child abduction murder victims had been sexually assaulted, compared to only seven percent of all murder victims and 15 percent of all child murder victims. Again, these are dramatic differences in the role of sexual motivation and behavior across the different types of murder.

Pornography

There is a common belief that pornography plays an important role in the process of motivating sex offenders and lust killers. The evidence simply does **not** support that conclusion regarding these child abduction killers. The role of pornography in the sexual motivation of these murders is insignificant. In only **4 percent** of child abduction murders is there any evidence or indication that pornography was used as a “trigger” to motivate or initiate the murder. We suspect that for these types of killers, their predisposition to engage in these types of violent and sexual acts with children is a deep-seated element of their flawed characters, making the exposure to pornographic materials unnecessary in the process of “getting motivated” to commit the murder. They do not need an external source to get ready to kill—*being* ready is part of who they are.

Crises and Stressors

Some observers of murder have proposed that certain kinds of personal problems—usually revolving around employment or marriage—may serve as “precipitating crises” that contribute to the motivation of the killer. In the case of child abduction murders, there is evidence of at least one precipitating crisis (or stressor) in the life of the killer in 38 percent of the cases. What is striking is that of these cases, the usual crises or stressors emphasized in the literature do not seem to be as important as others that seem to resonate with the character of the killers and with their choice of predominantly female victims. For example, only 12 percent involved marital problems, 14 percent involved employment problems, and 17 percent involved financial problems. The prevalence of these archetypal precipitating crises pales in comparison to two types of personal problems that are apparently more characteristic of child abduction killers. These murderers are much more likely to have had a “conflict with a female” (45% of the cases with crises) or “criminal/legal problems” (36%). We know that the majority of these killers have extensive criminal histories, so it is not surprising that their related criminal/legal problems might be implicated somehow in the motivation to commit murder. We also know that there is a dramatic, disproportionate preponderance (76%) of young, vulnerable female victims. Should it surprise us that conflicts with females (including marital problems) is the most common problem or stressor implicated as a precipitating crisis in child abduction murders? There seems to be some degree of psychological symmetry—albeit distorted—in the nature of the crises and the choice of victims.

Choosing and Controlling the Victim

A theoretical perspective in criminology—“lifestyle” or “routine activities” theory—proposes that there are three basic elements in a crime: a motivated offender, the opportunity to commit the crime, and ineffective guardians. In keeping with the prior observation that most of these child abduction killers seem to be predisposed or “ready” to kill, if they are given the opportunity, and the risk of identification or apprehension is minimized because the potential victim is not being monitored, the probability of an abduction and murder increases. Absent any one of the elements, the chances of murder decline. However, given this kind of group of motivated offenders, it should not be surprising that **57 percent** of the murder victims are simply “victims of opportunity” (Table 16). They were killed

Table 16
How The Killer Chose His Victim

Victim of Opportunity	57%
Prior Relationship with Victim	15%
Physical Characteristics	14%
Specific Motivation	13%

because of the opportunity to act on a general predisposition to commit violence against children (only 13% had a “specific motivation” to kill a particular victim). It is clear that most of these killers are not searching for and selecting a specific type of victim. Only 14 percent of them chose their victim based on distinguishable physical characteristics, such as hair color, body type, or race/ethnicity. And in keeping with these types of murders, only 15 percent of the killers chose their victim because they had any kind of prior relationship with the victim—remember, most of these killers are total strangers or acquaintances. These types of child abduction killers are not typically targeting specific victims for specific reasons (or motives), but, rather, they seem to be more like “killers-in-waiting”—given the right opportunity coupled with an available child, they are more likely to spring into action, changing from a chronic hunter to an occasional predator to an episodic killer.

When they do spring into action, the great majority of them are not subtle or clever predators. Almost **two-thirds** of them simply assault the victim and subdue her: 62 percent engage in a direct physical assault and another 3 percent threaten an assault. Therefore, control over the victim is usually the result of a “blitz” confrontation with the victim at the point of approach and abduction. It is a “snatch and grab.” With most children, this is relatively easy to accomplish because of their small physical stature.

Children are also more vulnerable in a psychological sense—they are immature and more easily duped or deceived by a predatory abductor. Of course, victim vulnerability (16% of the cases) and the use of deception (19%) by the offender go hand-in-hand. Child abduction killers prey upon the innocence of the youngest victims (the “little kids” and “children”), upon whom deception is used much more often than on older victims. The killer knows that the lure of “seeing my puppies” may be sufficient to get a young child into his car and, therefore, under his control. A direct assault to gain control over the victim is unnecessary, at least at the point of initial victim-killer contact.

Binding of the Victim

There is evidence that child abduction killers are 6 to 12 times more likely than other murderers to “bind” their victims. In **one-fourth** of the cases the killers bound their victims, compared to only 2 percent in child murders and 4 percent in all murders. The much more frequent binding of child abduction murder victims reflects both *control* and *sexual* elements. Binding a victim makes control easier, and for uncooperative, strong victims it may be absolutely necessary. For child victims, this control function of binding is less critical. But in these types of murders, with their strong sexual component, the binding (or “bondage”) is more likely to serve more primary sexual functions. These victims are being bound less to physically control them than to fulfill the sexual fantasies and needs of the killers.

The source of the binding material is known in 87 percent of the cases of binding. Of those cases in which the source of the binding material is known, 67 percent of the killers brought the binding material with them to the crime scene. This has evidentiary implications for matching binding material found in the possession of the killer after he is identified.

Cause of Death

Whereas firearms are the most common cause of death among murders in general (43% in Washington state and over 50% in most states), they are the least common cause of death among child abduction murders (only 11%). Strangulation is the least common cause of death in all murders (only 9%), but it is the most common cause among children who are abducted (33%).

Table 17
Cause Of Death

	<u>Child Abduction Murders</u>	<u>All Murders</u>	<u>All Child Murders</u>
Strangulation	33%	9%	13%
Stabbing/Cutting	24%	23%	9%
Blunt Force Trauma	21%	18%	37%
Firearm	11%	43%	16%

To the contrary, the most common cause of death among all child victims of murder is blunt force (37%)—they are beaten to death, typically by one of their parents.

Comparing the causes of death of the victims of child abduction killers versus all child murderers (Table 17): The former are more likely to strangle (33% versus 13%) and stab/cut (24% versus 9%) their victims than the latter, and less likely to beat or bludgeon (21% versus 37%) and shoot (11% versus 16%) them. Direct, *hands on* ways of killing the victim are the clear preference of child abduction killers—strangulation and stabbing/cutting account for 57 percent of the deaths, compared to 22 percent for all child murderers.

There are also differences in the cause of death by the age of the victim. As one might expect, since it is physically easier to kill younger and, therefore, smaller and weaker victims with one’s hands, killers are more likely to use firearms on older victims, especially boys, and strangulation on younger victims. So, some of the ways of killing (e.g., strangulation) have psychological or symbolic meaning for the murderer, while others (e.g., firearms) reflect more expedient choices.

Unusual Acts

There is a common belief that killers who commit murders that are out of the ordinary are involved in a variety of unusual acts during the murder incident, ranging from cult rituals to “posing” victims to grotesque mutilation. In general, the data suggest that child abduction murders are **not** characterized by unusual, bizarre, or weird acts or rituals. There is almost no evidence (less than 1% of the cases) that would indicate that unusual ceremonies or acts had been performed at the crime scene (e.g., burnt candles, dead animals, satanic symbols). The extreme rarity of these kinds of acts in child abduction murders is consistent with what is found in all murder cases.

Body Disposal

Likewise, once the murder has been committed, child abduction killers are much more likely (52%) to *conceal* the victim’s body when they dispose of it (Table 18) than murderers in general (14%). Therefore, they are also much less likely to be unconcerned about body discovery (39% versus 69%), as well as to

Table 18
Disposal Of The Victim’s Body

	<u>Child Abduction Murders</u>	<u>All Murders</u>
Concealed to Prevent Discovery	52%	14%
Unconcerned Whether Body Discovered	39%	69%
Openly Placed To Insure Discovery	9%	17%

place the body in the open (to ensure its early discovery) for anyone to see who might come upon it (9% versus 17%). In short, they do not want the body to be seen or discovered, at least not easily and quickly.

At the same time, the killers of abducted children do not go out of their way to intentionally stage or pose the body. In only 3 percent of the cases did the killer intentionally “pose” or intentionally display the victim’s body in an unusual—and typically symbolic—position. This rate of public display of the body is comparable to that found for all murders, as is the removal of body parts from the victim’s body (5% of the cases) before it is disposed of. Parenthetically, child abduction killers do not seem to prefer any particular body parts for removal.

In summary, child abduction murders are part of a general pattern of violence against children, typically with a strong sexual component.

Post-Offense Behavior

After the murder is committed and the body disposed of, the killer apparently engages in a variety of behaviors that are related to the murder, which for many of them constitute a prelude to apprehension and arrest.

Table 19
Post Offense Behavior Of Killers

Returned to Body Disposal Site	22%
Left Town	21%
Confided In Someone	18%
Followed Case In Media	17%
Contacted Victim's Family	11%
Interjected Himself Into Investigation	10%

The killers do a number of things after the murder (Table 19), but six behaviors are most common and, at the same time, most telling. Twenty-one percent of these child abduction killers left town right after the murder, eighteen percent confided in someone about their involvement in the murder, and seventeen percent followed the case in the media. Ten percent actually interjected themselves into the murder investigation in some way. Of course, skipping town or moving after the murder, or maintaining ties to the murder and its investigation, all may provide leads for investigators to pursue.

In 15 percent of the cases, the killer kept the body longer than necessary to dispose of it, and he kept it in convenient and accessible places where it could be concealed, moved quickly, and/or “played” with. In 50 percent of these cases, the killer kept the body in his residence, in 28 percent in his car, and in 22 percent of the murders, in a variety of other places within easy reach. However, contrary to beliefs about murderers, especially serial killers, who prolong their relationship with the victim, these child abduction killers only held onto the bodies for very short periods of time. Of the bodies that were kept by the killer, 31 percent were in his possession for less than three hours and 69 percent for less than 24 hours. So, it is likely that most of the bodies were being kept only until they could be disposed of safely. Only 6 percent of the bodies that were kept by the killer were in his possession for more than a week; it is more likely that in these cases there was a reason other than delayed disposal—for example, to play out sexual fantasies with the corpse or to treat it like a trophy—for keeping the body. And this is a very small number (about 5) of cases.

More striking is the number of child abduction killers who returned to the body disposal site. Almost **one-fourth** (22%) of the killers return to the body after they have not only killed the victim but have also disposed of the victim and left the crime scene for some meaningful period of time. Of these killers who return, an incredible *81 percent* do so *prior* to the discovery of the body, and *56 percent* do so within *three days* after the murder. Clearly, a significant proportion of child abduction killers return to the body disposal site, particularly soon after the murder has occurred. As one would expect, very few return after the body has been discovered and reported in the media. But an opportunity exists—albeit for a short period of time—for investigators to observe potential suspects between the time the body is reported to the police and, then, made public by the media.

THE INVESTIGATION

Police Refusal to Accept A Missing or Runaway Report

Over the years there has been considerable discussion in police circles about agencies refusing to accept missing persons and runaway juvenile reports. The data for this study show that a law enforcement agency refused to accept an initial report for a missing or runaway child in less than two percent of these cases. The number of such cases was so small that it could not be determined whether this refusal to accept the initial attempt to report has any effect on investigations in general.

Multiple Police Agencies

Some murder victims were reported to be missing from within one law enforcement agency's jurisdictional boundary and the body was subsequently discovered within another jurisdiction. While this is not unusual, what has not been well understood is to what extent that actually happens.

Of the murders studied in this project, 64 percent of the victim's bodies were discovered within the jurisdictional

boundaries of the law enforcement agency that received the initial missing/abduction report. In short, almost two-thirds of the victims apparently did **not** cross law enforcement jurisdictional boundaries in the course of events that led to the discovery of the body. On the other hand, 36 percent of the time killers transported victims and dumped their bodies in jurisdictions different from where they were first contacted.

At first glance, it is tempting to think that such crossing of jurisdictional lines would have a negative impact on the outcome of the investigation. What was found was that, while the investigation was at times made more complicated for the detectives, there is no statistical difference in the clearance rates between those cases that crossed jurisdictional lines and those that did not.

Unknowning Witnesses

Unknowning witnesses are witnesses that saw some aspect of the crime, but at the time did not realize that they were witnessing part of the crime or potential abduction. It was discovered that in 40 percent of the cases there were “unknowning” witnesses.

Neighborhood Canvass

“Neighborhood canvass” means the checking, by police, around the area of the victim’s last known location and/or the location the victim was known to be going, or around any site determined to be important to the investigation, in an effort to locate witnesses, or to obtain facts about the circumstances. This typically involves going door-to-door.

In 63 percent of the cases reported as an Abduction or a Missing Child, the neighborhood canvass was conducted in less than 2.5 hours. Seventy-two percent were conducted in less than 12 hours. In over 10 percent of abducted or missing children cases, no neighborhood canvass was conducted.

What was not collected during this research was information on *who* conducted the neighborhood canvass. However, from personal experience of the project team and from off the record discussions with the detectives being interviewed, it is known that it is a common practice in law enforcement, though not universal, to have uniformed patrol officers conduct an initial neighborhood canvass. This is a simple issue of manpower availability and attempting to assess the true circumstances of the instant case. Unfortunately, all too often the police agencies do not have written Standard Operating Procedures for these types of cases and patrol officers frequently are not given specific guidance as to what to ask the people they interview. It is unfortunate also that in many cases there is no further neighborhood canvass by detectives.

On the surface the neighborhood canvass doesn’t seem to be a big issue. As a matter of fact it may be among the biggest issues uncovered in this research project. Reviewing the data on the murder incident Sites, the victim’s last known location was usually very close in proximity to the site of the initial contact between the killer and the victim. When the police did not know the initial contact site, the solvability rate dropped 40 percent below average. When the initial contact site was known, the solvability rate increased 13 percent above average.

The initial contact site is the site at which there is potentially the greatest chance for a witness to observe the killer and the victim together. This is where the killer may be most likely to expose himself to observation by others. There are quite often witnesses to the initial contact, as evidenced by the fact that those agencies that conducted thorough neighborhood canvasses identified those witnesses and obtained their statements.

There is an example of the importance of the neighborhood canvass in a case in the Midwest. In that case the victim was abducted off the street in her own neighborhood. The initial canvass and a follow-up canvass were conducted and leads were exhausted. The detective returned to do an additional canvass. The detective returned again and again after all leads were exhausted. After many canvasses of the neighborhood, the detective was making another canvass and found a neighbor who had left the area immediately after the abduction and murder and who had just recently returned home. This neighbor turned out to be a witness who had information that eventually led to the identity of the killer. Had the detective not been persistent about canvassing the neighborhood, this witness would never have been identified.

The initial neighborhood canvass is also an opportunity to put everyone contacted “on-the-record.” A good technique in neighborhood canvass is to provide to patrol officers and detectives pre-printed questionnaires that include specific questions, to include identifying everyone who lives in that specific residence. The completion of these questionnaires provides easy reporting of the results of the interviews of each house/business, and subsequent interview results can be compared with the initial statements. Such comparisons can identify inconsistent statements and persons who have left the area since the initial canvass. This technique also eliminates the absence of reporting when the person interviewed contends that they “know nothing.”

It is worth pointing out that in 30 percent of the cases in this research project, a physical description of the killer was obtained before he was identified. In those cases in which a physical description was obtained the clearance rate increased by 15 percent.

Area Search

An area search, here, differs from a neighborhood canvass in that the latter typically involves going from door to door to contact potential witnesses, while the former is more involved with the actual search for the victim and/or physical evidence. These two activities may occur simultaneously or separately, depending on circumstances. They are separated in this project for specificity.

The area most commonly searched (98% of the cases) was the area in which the victim was last seen. It was searched within five hours in 83 percent of the cases.

It was determined that searching resulted in finding evidence or leads in 44 percent of the cases. Cases in which evidence or leads were found by searching had a higher solution rate than those in which no evidence or leads were found.

Like the neighborhood canvass, the initial area search is also frequently handled by uniformed patrol officers. Later searches are often conducted with volunteers, such as Explorer Scouts or Search and Rescue teams. What is often missing from these searches are explicit instructions on what the searchers are looking for.

For every abduction murder a police agency handles, there could be thousands of reports of a missing child. This issue is important in the discussion of the area search because it is easy for officers responding to a missing child call to think in terms of a lost child, and not think of the possibility of an abduction-murder. A lost child is thought of as being alive, not dead. With the lost child mindset, it could be easy to overlook the body of a murdered child that has been concealed. It could also be easy to overlook or inadvertently destroy evidence of murder when murder is not considered as a possibility.

There are also examples of cases in which officers made contact with the killer at his residence and, unknown to the officers, the body of the victim was on the premises at that moment. While there is no way that can be determined while talking with a *potential witness* at his front door, at least one of the examples involved a search of the killer's residence in which the body was in a box and missed. The chances of such things happening are slight, but officers should remain mindful of the possibility.

The research confirms that the body of the victim is the single most important source of physical evidence that can be connected to the killer. It also tells us that 52 percent of the victims' bodies are concealed when they are disposed of by the killer. These two facts make a thorough area search very important in the investigation. See the section on the Body Recovery Site for further discussion of investigative implications related to the area search.

Who Discovered the Body of the Victim?

Experienced homicide detectives "take a good hard look" at the person who reports finding the body. In this project that issue was analyzed. Table 20 shows that in the majority of the cases the victim's body was found by an innocent passerby or by the police. The killer "discovered" the body in less than three percent of the cases.

Table 20
Who Discovered The Body?

Passerby	58.4%
Police	23.1%
Search Party	6.5%
Relative/Acquaint of Victim	4.5%
Offender	2.7%
Witness to Death	1.8%
Fire Dept./Aid Crew	1.6%

Investigative Steps in the First 48 Hours

The investigative activities of the first 48 hours of the cases were reviewed and broken down into seven general categories, as listed in Table 21. Collecting information is the most common activity. Circumstances in the early stages of a missing or abducted child murder case can vary from simply accepting a missing person report and conducting no immediate investigation, to immediately dispatching officers to the area and conducting a neighborhood canvass and an area search, to a full scale crime scene investigation and arrest of the killer, to any number of variations in between.

Table 21

Major Investigative Steps In First 48 Hours

Collected Information	88%
Searched	41%
Collected Evidence	38%
Disseminated Information	23%
Direct Contact with Killer	15%
Organizational Changes	5%
Other	1%

Police “Contact” With The Killer

The potential for contact with anyone who may physically be around some aspect of the murder, crime scene, or body disposal site is critical to investigations. The evidence shows that the police had “contact” with *the killer* about some aspect of the case—*before* he became the prime suspect—in more than **one-third** (34%) of the cases. The police often do not realize or know that they have come this close to the killer, and probably early in the investigation, when many names are being recorded, interviews are being done, canvassing is taking place, records are being searched, tips are being received, and so on. Police need to know and recognize this in conducting the investigation of a child abduction murder—the killer’s name may be in the possession of investigators in a substantial proportion of cases, and early in the investigation.

Surprisingly, the data show that the killer’s name became known—in any way, not necessarily even as the “suspect”—very early in the course of most of the investigations of child abduction murder. In almost one-third (30%)* of the cases, the killer’s name came up *immediately*. In a majority (51%) of the cases it appeared within *24 hours*. In three-fourths (74%) of the cases it emerged within a *week*. This might be cause for alarm, but there is other evidence that the police are on the trail of the killer relatively early in the investigation as well.

In 25 percent of the cases, investigators “focused” on the killer as a suspect or person of interest almost “immediately,” meaning at the beginning of the murder investigation. In more than 50 percent of the cases, police moved on the murderer within one and one-half days. But then there is a dramatic drop-off—after a month from the beginning of the murder investigation, there is still no primary suspect in more than 20 percent of the cases. Fortunately, this also means that by a month’s end, in 78 percent of the cases investigators have focused on the eventual identified killer.

Physical Evidence

Physical evidence related to the killer was collected in 64 percent of the cases. While there is a correlation between the gathering of physical evidence and the solution of the case, physical evidence itself does not ensure solution.

Table 22 shows that the most common evidence collected that is related to the killer is hair. Strands of the killer’s hair were collected in 27 percent of the cases of child abduction murder. When we look at hair evidence, in all murder cases, we find that it is present in only 18 percent of the cases, and that includes killer, victim, animal, and “unknown” hair evidence.

The most common evidence collected in “all murder” investigations is a weapon, in 39 percent of cases. In these child abduction murder cases, weapons are collected as physical evidence in only 17 percent of the cases. This is consistent with cause of death figures.

Table 22
Physical Evidence

Hair	27%
Semen	18%
Prints (finger & shoe)	17%
Weapons	17%
Fibers	14%
Blood	12%

In addition to evidence that was residual, or that was inadvertently left behind by the killer, there is also evidence that the killer deliberately discards potential physical evidence after the murder. Discarded evidence was found by

police in 21 percent of the cases. Of that discarded evidence, 50 percent of it was found along the roadway on which the killer traveled in the course of the murder, body disposal, and escape. Fifty-nine percent of that evidence found along the roadway was within one mile of the body recovery site. The implication is that increased clearance rates are observed when discarded evidence was found by the police.

In any given case of child abduction murder, there is probably a 10 percent chance that there is discarded physical evidence along the roadway within one mile of the body site, and that increases the chance of case solution. Is it worth the effort to do the search? That depends on the circumstances of the case. The detectives at the scene have to make that decision. But, now there is an objective measure to apply during consideration.

The Polygraph

The use of the polygraph in cases of murder of abducted or missing children is fairly common. In fact, the polygraph was used as an investigative tool in 47 percent of the cases studied. While it is a common practice, its utility is in question.

As shown by Table 23, the polygraph was used 53 percent of the time to test acquaintances of the victim, and 41 percent involved testing family members of the victim. However, in 17 percent of the cases in which the polygraph was used, an innocent person showed “deception” on the test. Interestingly, of those innocent persons who showed “deception”, 64 percent were family or friends of the victim, the two groups most often polygraphed.

Table 23

Relationship To Victim Of Persons Polygraphed

Acquaintances of Victim	53%
Victim’s Family Members	41%
Strangers	39%
Neighbors of Victim	14%

When two additional facts are considered, the polygraph issue becomes a little more clouded: 1) The younger the victim, the less likelihood of the polygraph being perceived by police as helping the investigation; and 2) The younger the victim, the more likely the family/friends of the victim will be polygraphed.

The issue of the use of the polygraph becomes a circular one. The people who are more apt to be polygraphed are the people who are more apt to show a “false deception.” And, the less likely the polygraph is to help the case, the more likely it is to be used.

The use of the polygraph was perceived by the detectives to have helped the investigation in 62 percent of the cases. In 10 percent of the cases, it was felt the use of the polygraph was inconclusive or led the investigation in a false direction.

This discussion is not intended to be a condemnation of the use of the polygraph. It is intended to provide facts on which to base future decisions regarding whether or not the polygraph is appropriate in a specific abducted child murder investigation.

The News Media

Anyone familiar with criminal investigation understands how media involvement sometimes affects orderly investigation. At times there tends to be a distrust of the news media by law enforcement officers. There are many concerns about the media; for example, fear of inappropriate information being released, fear of telling the suspect what the police know or do not know, and fear that media representatives will interfere with the process of the investigation. Forty-five percent of the detectives interviewed felt that the media coverage was “excessive.”

These concerns have led many police agencies to establish a Media Relations Officer, either as a full time position, or as a position appointed on a case by case basis for potentially high visibility investigations. We know from experience that a designated Media Relations Officer generally makes for a smoother working relationship with the news media. However, there is absolutely no statistical correlation between whether a law enforcement agency establishes a Media Relations Officer and the clearance rates of the murders of abducted or missing children.

In spite of the law enforcement concerns, and in spite of the high profile nature of these cases, the police used the news media in one way or another in 77 percent of these abducted child murder cases. The most common use of the media was in an attempt to locate witnesses.

Even while using and cooperating with the news media, there is a fear in law enforcement that news media involvement is going to hinder the investigation in one way or another. To justify their suspicions, homicide detectives can point to examples of media interference hurting an investigation.

In actuality in these types of murder cases, the media effect on the criminal investigation is more positive than negative. As shown by Table 24, in 63 percent of these cases, the media involvement had no effect at all. The majority

of the

Table 24
Effect Of Media Coverage On The Investigation

No Effect	63%
Helped	31%
Hindered	6%

time, the media is insignificant. However, in 31 percent of the cases, the investigating detective believed that the use of the media actually helped the investigation, usually by bringing a witness forward. Only in six percent of the cases did the detective feel that the media involvement hindered or hurt the investigation. An argument can be made that that is too often, but we will learn shortly that there are other institutions that have a more negative impact on the investigation.

“Outside Forces” That Created Problems for the Investigation

Thirty-nine percent of the detectives identified some ‘outside force’ as creating problems for the investigation. As presented in Table 25, the three most frequently identified “outside forces” are an Outside Law Enforcement Agency, the News Media, and the Family of the Victim.

Table 25
Problems Caused By “Outside Forces”

Outside L.E. Agency	24%
News Media	19%
Family of Victim	11%
Community/Political Pressure	6%
Lawyers	4%

“Red Herrings”

A “red herring” is something that detracts attention from the matter or issue at hand. Examples of a red herring in the context of a murder investigation might be a vehicle that the detectives believe to be the killer’s vehicle and a major commitment of manpower has been devoted to finding it, at the expense of other avenues of inquiry, only to learn later that the car was not involved.

Red herrings were reported in 38 percent of the cases. They ranged from “good” suspects, to physical evidence, to erroneous polygraph results. While troublesome and time consuming for the investigation, the presence of a red herring had no statistical effect on the clearance rate of the cases of abducted or missing children murders.

MURDER INCIDENT SITES

The crime of murder is an *incident*. Each murder incident contains multiple sites or locations of contact between the offender, or a witness, and the victim. The investigation into a child abduction murder emphasizes the search for clues or information about the major investigative sites of a murder incident. The presence of information that establishes the existence of each site, coupled with when and where each site is located within the incident, and the manner in which their relationships affect each other, greatly influences the solution of child abduction murder investigations.

Specifically, the follow-up investigation into an abducted child’s murder involves the gathering of information about various components that are locations of victim-offender contact. The information crucial to the investigation in order of their usual occurrence within the murder event are:

- (1) where and when the victim was last seen,
- (2) where and when the offender initially contacted the victim,
- (3) where the murder took place, and

- (4) where and when the body was recovered.

Components of the Murder Incident

1. The location where and time when the victim was last seen, or Victim Last Seen Site (VLS), is developed from eyewitness information and records that reflect when and where the victim was last seen alive. For example, eyewitness accounts included visual sightings and telephone conversations.

2. The place where and time when the killer initially contacted the victim or Initial Contact Site (IC) is established from evidence that the killer first met the victim at a certain time and at a specific location during the course of the murder incident. For example, if a stepfather killed his stepdaughter in their apartment after she returned home from school, the time and location for the initial contact within that murder incident was when the stepdaughter returned home from school and was confronted by her stepfather, not the date when they first were united years ago.

3. The Murder Site (MS) is the place where and time when the victim sustained the death-producing injuries.

4. The Body Recovery Site (BR) is the location where and time when police, medics, or witnesses found the victim, dead or alive, prior to transportation to a medical facility or morgue. For example, if a living victim was found strangled along a roadside, transported to a hospital for treatment, and died in the emergency room, the body recovery site is the roadside location, not the hospital.

All of the above sites occur in each incident of murder. Problems with any case's solution surface when investigators fail to find information about the location and the time of each site within the sequence of the murder incident. Fortunately, in most murder cases, the events occur simultaneously, and the information that is available suggests that all events are located in the same place and not separated by intervals of distance or spans of time. This is not the case in the murder of a missing or abducted child.

Separation of Components by Time and Distance

The sites within most incidents of murder of a missing or abducted child become separated by time and distance. The separation occurs in two ways.

First, the offender consciously separates the components. The killer's belief that the separation of murder components prolongs the investigation by delaying the discovery of various sites contributes to the destruction of evidence. The separation also inhibits the investigation by causing problems in communication and cooperation among police agencies because the location of all sites are not within the authority of one police agency. For example, multiple-victim murderer Theodore Bundy intentionally contacted victims in locations different from where he killed them and disposed of their bodies. In one case he contacted a female victim in Oregon and dumped her remains 265 miles away near Seattle, Washington. In a 1989 interview, Bundy revealed that he was aware that time and distance separation among the locations of disappearance, murder, and body recovery resulted in more weathering and deterioration of human remains and physical evidence. He was also mindful of the problems in cooperation and communication among police investigators when murderers use locations in different jurisdictions when contacting victims and disposing of their bodies.

Second, the offender *unintentionally* separates the location of components by time and distance. For example, a man picked up a female child outside a supermarket. He transported her to a remote location to have forcible sex in his car. Then a struggle ensued. The offender pulled out a gun and pushed the victim down. Her head struck a rock, rendering her unconscious. The offender then transported the victim to a hospital where she died. The offender had not intentionally separated the components of the incident to deceive investigators.

Additionally, the discovery of a body after the murder may be delayed more by chance than by the efforts of the offender. For instance, a female child, murdered away from her own home in an abandoned barn, was not found for several weeks. The barn was not inspected by its owners until much later after the child's death. The checks of the property and barn were only done in a sporadic manner, so the discovery of her remains took longer than if there was someone there to check the barn on a daily basis.

The importance of the information that identified the location and time of each site cannot be overemphasized. The investigative implication here is that confirming through evidence the time, date, and location of a site prior to the identification of a possible suspect enables the investigator to more accurately check the whereabouts and verify or refute alibis of a suspect against the time and location of that site.

Since the basic model for abducted children's murder investigations consists of four locations of a murder incident, the extent to which any information is simply "known" about each location was examined before exploring other information about the relationships among the sites. The location that is most often "known" was the Body Recovery Site (99.9%), followed in order by the Victim Last Seen Site (93.8%), Initial Contact site (83%), and the Murder Site (77%). The order of locations makes sense, since police officers usually start the investigation of a murder at the site of body recovery and use information gathered at that time to continue the inquiry for further information or leads about

the other locations.

Body Recovery Site

The terms “Body Recovery Site” and “Body Disposal Site” will be used interchangeably in this report, depending on the context of the reference being made, whether from the point of view of the police or the killer.

For the location of the Body Recovery Site, the general geographical locations are shown, Table 26. Of particular note, it was discovered for abducted children murders that even though the body recovery sites were found in all of the major geographical locations, they were more often found in rural areas. This contrasts with all murder cases in which rural body disposal is less frequent.

Table 26
Areas Of Body Recovery Sites

	<u>Child Abduction</u>	<u>“All Murders”</u>	<u>“All Child Murder”</u>
Urban	28%	25%	14%
Suburban	21%	54%	61%
Rural	51%	22%	26%

The killers deliberately chose the Body Disposal Site for his own reasons 49 percent of the time. In 37 percent of the cases, the killer chose the Body Disposal Site purely at random, and in 14 percent of the cases, the killer was forced by outside circumstances to choose a certain site (Table 27).

Table 27
How Body Disposal Site Selected

Deliberately Selected	49%
Random/Arbitrary Choice	37%
Forced by Circumstances	14%

Whatever the case, abducted children’s murders were more pre-planned than the average murder.

In *all murder cases*, the killer is unconcerned whether or not the body was found 69 percent of the time. However, murders of missing or abducted children are quite different.

The most telling information about the location of the abducted or missing child’s body is that the killers dispose of them mostly by concealment. As mentioned earlier, the child’s body is concealed in 52 percent of the cases. While concealment of the body is present in only 14 percent of all murder cases.

The implication for investigation here is that when the police are searching for the body of an abducted child homicide victim, they should pay close attention to ground that has been disturbed for burial purposes and remove items available to conceal victims, such as broken tree branches or large portions of discarded rugs.

When the distance from the victim’s home to the body recovery site was analyzed, it was discovered that in 63 percent of the cases, the body recovery site is greater than 1 1/2 miles from the victim’s home. Only in 4% of the cases is the body found at the victim’s residence. Interestingly, the younger the victim, the closer the body is found in relationship to the victim’s home. In five percent of the cases the body recovery site is the killer’s residence.

Murder Site

Unfortunately, the site of the actual murder is known less frequently than any other site. The obvious connection here for its importance to investigations is that without the murder site, the police have less evidence to tie to any particular offender. This study has shown that the murder site is the richest site in terms of physical evidence collection. It is second in importance only to the actual body of the victim for evidence that is connected to the killer.

If the murder site is so important, why have we historically only found it in 77 percent of the cases of murder of abducted children? The data from the study does not provide an answer to that question. It is probably fair to say that in at least part of the cases, the searchers didn’t know where to look. We now know that the distance between the murder site and the body recovery site is less than 200 feet (1/2 of an average city block) in 72 percent of the cases (Table 28).

Table 28

Distance From Body Recovery To Murder Site

0-199 Feet	72%
200 feet - 1/4 mile	6%
>1/4 mile - 1 1/2 miles	4%
>1 1/2 miles - 12 miles	10%
>12 miles	8%

It was stated above that the murder site is the most important site in terms of physical evidence associated with the killer. We know that in approximately 3/4 of the cases, it is within 200 feet of the body recovery site. Armed with this information, it is recommended that investigators do a search over 200 feet in every direction from the body site. Additionally, in this study, 53 percent of the killers either told detectives where the murder site was or confirmed its location while making a statement.

Table 29 shows the distance from the murder site to the initial contact site. While the distance between the murder site and the body site is very short in the majority of the cases, the distance between the murder site and the initial contact site is erratic; there is no clear pattern. However, in 53 percent of the cases, the distance is greater than 1/4 mile, and in 43 percent it is greater than 1 1/2 miles.

Table 29

Distance From Murder To Initial Contact Site

0 - 199 Feet	31%
200 feet - 1/4 mile	16%
>1/4 mile - 1 1/2 miles	10%
>1 1/2 miles - 12 miles	25%
>12 miles	18%

Initial Victim-Killer Contact Site

The initial contact site is the single most important site in terms of its effect on the outcome of the investigation. *If the initial contact site is **not** discovered by police, the clearance rate drops 40 percentage points below the average clearance rate. If the initial contact site **is** discovered by police, the clearance rate is 13 percentage points above the average clearance rate.*

We visited this issue briefly under the Neighborhood Canvass section, above. At that time we learned that the initial contact site is the site at which there is potentially the greatest chance for a witness to observe the killer and the victim together. This is where the killer must expose himself.

In 80 percent of the cases, the initial contact site is within 1/4 mile of the victim's last known location. If we start at that point and work out, the percentages favor identifying the initial contact site and witnesses. If the initial contact site is not found, the witnesses who can put the killer with the victim are not identified. It is recommended that the neighborhood canvass be complete and followed up with a re-canvass.

Why was the killer at the initial contact site? The killer was in the area of the initial contact site 2/3 of the time because he belonged there. He lived in the area 29 percent of the time; 19 percent of the time, he was there for some normal social activity, (visiting a friend or coming from a sporting event); and 18 percent of the time, he was there for some non-social activity (working, putting an ad in the newspaper). This follows, since we have already learned that 57 percent of the victims were victims of opportunity. The fact that the killer belongs in the area of the initial contact site 2/3 of the time suggests that officers conducting the neighborhood canvass should not only ask the question, "What did you see that was unusual?" but should also ask, "What did you see that was *usual*?"

Table 30 shows the general geographical areas of the initial contact.

Table 30

Areas Of Initial Victim-Killer Contact

	<u>Child Abduction</u>	<u>"All Murders"</u>	<u>"All Child Murders"</u>
Urban	51%	31%	17%
Suburban	33%	58%	74%
Rural	16%	11%	9%

It is noted that there is a difference in the types of areas in which the abducted child was initially contacted by the killer and where the body was recovered. These abducted children are typically contacted by the killer in an urban or suburban area, and half of them are disposed of in a rural area.

Victim's Last Known Location

As previously stated, the victim's last known location is within 1/4 mile of the initial contact site in 80 percent of the child abduction cases. Also, in 33 percent of the cases, the initial contact site is less than 200 feet from the victim's home. In 58 percent of the cases, it is within 1/4 mile of the victim's home.

Curiously, even though these cases are most often stranger relationships, in 18 percent of the cases the killer lives less than 200 feet from the initial contact site. In 35 percent of the cases, he lives within 1/4 mile.

We can summarize the relationship between the sites by reviewing Table 31, below. The data show that the typical victim is near his/her home when last seen prior to the abduction. The initial contact between the killer and the victim is also very close to the victim's last known location. After the initial contact is made, the victim is taken or transported some distance away and killed. The victim's body is then disposed of very near the murder site.

Table 31
Distances Between Sites

	<u>Initial Contact</u>	<u>Murder Site</u>	<u>Body Recovery</u>
<u>Last Known Location</u>	<200 ft (65%)	>1/4 mile (55%)	>1/4 mile (66%)
<u>Initial Contact</u>		>1/4 mile (54%)	>1/4 mile (63%)
<u>Murder Site</u>			<200 ft (72%)

If the police agency is dealing with the case as a reported missing child, it is difficult for the agency to assess whether the victim has been, or will be, harmed or killed. If the victim has been killed it will be more difficult for the police agency to locate the body because of the greater distances involved between the initial contact site and the body disposal site than is so in murder cases in general.

On the other hand, if the police agency is dealing with the case as a murder investigation, i.e., the body has been found, part of the early investigative strategy should be to identify the murder site, for the reasons listed above.

In review, two basic things can be said about the activity sites: 1) It is important to locate the initial victim-killer contact site to identify the witnesses to the contact; and 2) it is important to locate the murder site to collect the evidence that is related to the killer.

SERIES CASES

There were 55 series, representing 138 individual cases examined in this study. The series cases were examined in two ways. The first involved comparisons of the series cases and non-series cases. For example, is the ratio of male to female victims the same between series and non-series cases? The second entailed an examination of the individual cases within a series. This approach was an effort to identify "flags" that would aid in the linking of cases. Basically, it was an attempt to find that "common thread" within a series.

Similarities Between Series And Non-Series Cases

There are several M.O. and investigative issues that can be said to be similar between series and non-series murders of abducted children. Following are some of those similar issues:

- 1) Concealment of victims' bodies when disposed of;
- 2) Consistent rate of body parts being removed;
- 3) Average distance from the initial contact site to the body recovery site;
- 4) Average distance from the victims' last known location to the body site;
- 5) The rate of sexual assault; and
- 6) The rate at which "Red Herrings" show up in the investigation

There are also *Dissimilarities* between series and non-series cases.

Victims' Gender

When the victims' gender is considered, the data show there is a difference in victim selection. The males are

over-selected in the series cases. In non-series cases, males represent less than 1/4 of the victims, while in series cases they represent well over 1/3 of the victims. Table 32 shows that 38 percent of the series victims are males, compared to 22 percent male victims in nonseries cases, a difference of 16 percent.

Table 32
Victim Gender

	<u>Series</u>	<u>Non-Series</u>	<u>Total</u>
Males	38%	22%	26%
Females	62%	78%	74%

Victim-Killer Relationship

The series killer is more likely to be a stranger to the victim and less likely to be an acquaintance than in non-series cases. Table 33 shows that the stranger relationship jumps from 46 percent in non-series cases to 80 percent in series cases.

The important investigative implication is in prioritizing leads. If it is reasonably suspected that the case at hand is a series case, strangers (80% of series killers) should become the major focus as suspects. On the other hand, if it is suspected that the case is a non-series case, strangers (46% of non-series killers) and acquaintances (also 46% of non-series killers) should be given equal consideration as suspects.

Table 33
Victim-Killer Relationship

	<u>Series</u>	<u>Non-Series</u>	<u>Total</u>
Stranger	80%	46%	53%
Acquaintance	14%	46%	39%

Killers' Personal Problems

When we discussed the killers' characteristics, without considering the series issues, we learned that 74 percent of the killers who abduct and kill children have an assortment of personal "problems."

When we compare the series and non-series cases, we discover that 95 percent of series killers had a history of personal problems. Table 34 shows also that of those series killers with a history of personal problems, 57 percent of them had a history of sexual problems.

Table 34
Killers' Personal Problems

	<u>Series</u>	<u>Non-Series</u>	<u>Total</u>
Sexual Problems	57%	25%	42%
Alcohol Problems	37%	21%	30%
Drug Problems	39%	18%	27%
Mental Problems	23%	15%	23%

Here, too, there are investigative implications in the data that go to the issue of evaluating potential suspects. Again, absent evidence to the contrary, in this case if the child abduction murder is known to be part of a series, the presence of a history of sexual problems in the background of a suspect should statistically make him a better suspect than one without such a background.

Killers' Prior Crimes Against Children

Fifty-three percent of child abduction killers have committed prior crimes against children. When we separate the series and the non-series cases, 76 percent of the series killers had committed prior crimes against children and 38 percent of the non-series killers had such prior crimes. In short, series killers are *twice as likely* to have committed prior crimes against children as non-series killers. Again, there are investigative implications in this evidence that impact the evaluation of potential suspects. Prior arrest records and police contact records should be considered when evaluating and prioritizing suspects.

Linking Cases

Being able to determine whether two or more murders (or other types of offenses) were committed by the same

killer is often helpful in an investigation. Identifying two or more cases that had been committed by the same individual has been labeled "linking." Linking cases is an objective, scientific process when it is done by matching physical evidence, such as latent prints, DNA, or spent bullets. Unfortunately, all cases do not have physical evidence for scientific comparison and we then enter the realm of subjectivity and uncertainty.

One of the aims of this research project was to identify elements in child abduction murders that would, absent physical evidence, make the linking process more objective. To some extent that aim has been fulfilled by the information that has been discovered about series killers, as stated above. This information will allow us to make better judgments about whether an arrested killer might be a series killer. Knowing the facts of the case for which he was arrested may help find other cases for which he is responsible.

However, the more difficult task of linking unsolved cases continues to be almost wholly subjective. After hundreds of factors were reviewed and thousands of calculations were made, only a couple of factors emerged that may lend some objectivity to the task of linking unsolved cases: binding of the victim and gender of the victim.

It was found in the 55 series analyzed, that the gender of the victims was consistent from case to case within the series in 87 percent of the series. That is, in 87 percent of the series, the killer consistently chose only males or only females as victims. While this is not an earth-shattering piece of information, one of the cries we constantly hear during any discussion of linking cases is that killers switch from one victim gender to another. We now know that to be true in only 13 percent of the series.

Binding is a similarly weak factor. It was found that in series, the killer more often bound his victims. This figure needs to be put into perspective. Binding is present in only four percent of all murder cases and in only two percent of all child murder cases. But in child abduction murder, binding is present 25 percent of the time, and in 42 percent of the abducted child murder *series* cases. In non-series cases, binding is used 22 percent of the time. Binding may be a useful indicator of a serial killer at work.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The murder of an abducted child, by a stranger, is a rare event. There are estimated to be about 100 such incidents in the United States each year, less than one-half of one percent of all the murders committed. There is approximately one child abduction murder for every 10,000 reports of a missing child.

The victims of these cases are typically "average" children, leading normal lives, and living with normal families. The vast majority of them are girls, with the average age being slightly over 11 years of age. In most cases, the initial contact between the victim and killer is within 1/4 mile of the victim's residence.

These cases are typically reported to a law enforcement agency as a "missing child." Often there is no initial indication of foul play, just a report that the child is unaccounted for. This is a difficult time for the investigator, not knowing whether the "missing child" is late or has been abducted.

Any report to the police of a missing child should be taken seriously. As many facts as possible surrounding the circumstances should be obtained as fast as possible, and an assessment of the nature of the case made expeditiously. Factors to consider in assessing the case should include the age and gender of the child, the circumstances surrounding the child's missing status, and the history of the child.

Fast action is dictated by two facts, 1) there is typically over a two hour delay in making the initial missing child report, and 2) the vast majority of the abducted children *who are murdered* are dead within three hours of the abduction. Because of these critical time features, there is a need to respond quickly with a neighborhood canvass and search of the area.

Over half of the child abduction murders are committed by a killer who is a stranger to the victim. Family involvement in this type of case is infrequent. However, the relationship between the victim and the killer varies with the gender and age of the victim. The youngest females, 1-5 years old, tend to be killed by friends or acquaintances, while the oldest females, 16-17 years old, tend to be killed by strangers. The relationship between the killer and victim is different for the male victims. The youngest male victims (1-5 years old) are most likely to be killed by strangers, as are the teenage males.

The average age of killers of abducted children is around 27 years old. They are predominantly unmarried, and half of them either live alone or with their parents. Half of them are unemployed, and those that are employed work in unskilled or semi-skilled labor occupations. The killers can generally be characterized as "social marginals."

Almost two-thirds of the killers had prior arrests for violent crimes, with slightly more than half of those prior crimes committed against children. The most frequent prior crimes against children were rape and other types of sexual assaults. Most of the child abduction murderers' prior crimes were similar in M.O. to the murder that was committed by

the same killer.

Commonly, the killers are at the initial victim-killer contact site for a legitimate reason. They either lived in the area or were engaging in some normal activity.

Most of the victims of child abduction murder are victims of opportunity. Seldom did the killer choose his victim because of some physical characteristic of the victim. The primary motivation for the child abduction murder is sexual assault.

After the victim has been killed, over half of the bodies are concealed to prevent discovery. Rarely is the body openly placed to insure its discovery. When searching for the victim, searchers must be aware of this fact and look under branches, rugs, or debris. The fact that so many of the bodies are concealed also requires that searchers be placed at intervals approximately equal to the height of the victim.

A unique pattern of distance relationships exists in child abduction murders. Often, the initial contact site is located very close to the victim's last known location. Conversely, the distance between the initial contact site and the murder site increases to distances greater than 1/4 mile. The distance from the murder site to the body recovery site again decreases, to less than 200 feet in the vast majority of cases.

There are investigative implications of these spatial relationships. If the initial contact site is not identified by the police, the clearance rate drops drastically, and vice versa. The close proximity between the initial contact site and the victim's last known location suggests thorough neighborhood canvass and area search be completed to locate the initial contact site.

Similarly, knowledge of the location of the murder is important to the investigation. The murder site is second only to the body of the victim as a source of physical evidence that can be connected with the killer. Its close proximity to the body recovery site suggests that a thorough search be completed to locate it.

It was discovered that once the murder investigation has begun, *the name of the killer* is likely to be in the investigative file *within the first week*. This provides an opportunity for investigators who are stalled to regroup after a week or two and re-evaluate everyone connected with the investigation. Similarly, it is not uncommon for the police to have actual contact with the killer before he becomes a primary suspect, for example, during the initial neighborhood canvass.

While at times the media seems to "get in the way," in the end they are much more likely to have a positive effect on the investigation than a negative one. In short, the media are more likely to bring witnesses forward than to aid the killer in his escape.

One question answered by this research is: What can we tell parents to help them protect their children? Even though child abduction murders are rare events, the thing for parents to do is to eliminate, or minimize, the opportunity for their children to become victims. The first step is to be aware that children are not immune from abduction because they are close to home. In fact, well over half of these abductions that led to murder took place within three city blocks of the victim's home and approximately one-third of them within one-half block. (It is probably not a good idea to send an unescorted ten year old girl to the grocery store to buy a quart of milk.) The greatest single thing we can do as parents is to be certain that our children are supervised, even if they are in their own front yard.

There has been much publicity about "not speaking to strangers" and "not getting into cars with strangers." We should carry that precaution one step further. We should also educate our children *not to even approach a car, whether the occupant of the car is a stranger or not*. We should tell our children, "if someone offers a ride, asks for directions, or offers treats, *turn around and run* to a safe place, and tell (their guardian)."

Citizens need to be aware of strangers and *unusual* behavior in their neighborhood. They need to have the presence of mind to observe and to write down descriptions of people, vehicles, and license numbers. Many child abductions are witnessed by people who do not realize that a crime is being committed. For example, when a citizen observes an adult pulling a struggling child in a public place, it is easy to interpret the event as a guardian taking control of an unruly child. In fact, in most instances, that is exactly what it is. However, nothing prevents a citizen from evaluating the circumstances, intervening, and, certainly, from noting descriptions and license numbers.

Finally, we need to tell parents that if their child is unaccounted for, *call the police immediately*. Do not delay.

* Time measurements here are from the beginning of the murder investigation, not from the time victim was reported missing.