# Missing Persons
## Second Edition

Kenna Quinet, Michael S. Scott,
David Rogers, Alan Scharn,
Scott S. Tighe, Brian Kauffman,
and Cassie Harvey

COPS
Community Oriented Policing Services
U.S. Department of Justice

Center for
Problem-Oriented Policing

# Contents

# Acknowledgments

The *Problem-Oriented Guides for Police* are very much a collaborative effort. While each guide has primary authors, all are also shaped by the other project team members, COPS Office staff, and anonymous peer reviewers who contribute by proposing text, recommending research, and offering suggestions on matters of format and style.

The principal project team developing the guide series comprised Herman Goldstein, professor emeritus, University of Wisconsin Law School; Ronald V. Clarke, professor of criminal justice, Rutgers University; John E. Eck, professor of criminal justice, University of Cincinnati; Michael S. Scott, clinical assistant professor, University of Wisconsin Law School; Rana Sampson, police consultant, San Diego; and Deborah Lamm Weisel, director of police research, North Carolina State University.

Matthew Lysakowski oversaw the project for the COPS Office. Research for the guides was conducted at the Criminal Justice Library at Rutgers University under the direction of Phyllis Schultze and by the authors.

The project team also wishes to acknowledge the members of the police departments of San Diego, California; National City, California; and Savannah, Georgia, who provided feedback on the guides' format and style in the early stages of the project, as well as the line police officers, police executives, and researchers who peer reviewed each guide.

# About the Problem-Specific Guides Series

The *Problem-Specific Guides* summarize knowledge about how police can reduce the harm caused by specific crime and disorder problems. They are guides to prevention and to improving the overall response to incidents, not to investigating offenses or handling specific incidents. The guides are written for police—of whatever rank or assignment—who must address the specific problem the guides cover. The guides will be most useful to the following officers:

- **Those who understand basic problem-oriented policing principles and methods.** The guides are not primers in problem-oriented policing. They deal only briefly with the initial decision to focus on a particular problem, methods to analyze the problem, and means to assess the results of a problem-oriented policing project. They are designed to help police decide how best to analyze and address a problem they have already identified. (A companion series, *Problem Solving Tools*, has been produced to aid in various aspects of problem analysis and assessment.)

- **Those who can look at a problem in depth.** Depending on the complexity of the problem, you should be prepared to spend perhaps weeks, or even months, analyzing and responding to it. Carefully studying a problem before responding helps you design the right strategy, one that is most likely to work in your community. You should not blindly adopt the responses others have used; you must decide whether they are appropriate to your local situation. What is true in one place may not be true elsewhere; what works in one place may not work everywhere.

- **Those who are willing to consider new ways of doing police business.** The guides describe responses that other police departments have used or that researchers have tested. While not all of these responses will be appropriate to your particular problem, they should help give a broader view of the kinds of things you could do. You may think you cannot implement some of these responses in your jurisdiction, but perhaps you can. In many places, when police have discovered a more effective response, they have succeeded in having laws and policies changed, improving the response to the problem.

- **Those who understand the value and the limits of research knowledge.** For some types of problems, a lot of useful research is available to the police; for other problems, little is available. Accordingly, some guides in this series summarize existing research whereas other guides illustrate the need for more research on that particular problem. Regardless, research has not provided definitive answers to all the questions you might

have about the problem. The research may help get you started in designing your own responses, but it cannot tell you exactly what to do. This will depend greatly on the particular nature of your local problem. In the interest of keeping the guides readable, not every piece of relevant research has been cited, nor has every point been attributed to its sources. To have done so would have overwhelmed and distracted the reader. The references listed at the end of each guide are those drawn on most heavily; they are not a complete bibliography of research on the subject.

- **Those who are willing to work with others to find effective solutions to the problem.** The police alone cannot implement many of the responses discussed in the guides. They must frequently implement them in partnership with other responsible private and public entities including other government agencies, nongovernmental organizations, private businesses, public utilities, community groups, and individual community members. An effective problem solver must know how to forge genuine partnerships with others and be prepared to invest considerable effort in making these partnerships work. Each guide identifies particular entities in the community with whom police might work to improve the overall response to that problem. Thorough analysis of problems often reveals that entities other than the police are in a stronger position to address problems and that police ought to shift some greater responsibility to them to do so.

The COPS Office defines community policing as "a policing philosophy that promotes and supports organizational strategies to address the causes and reduce the fear of crime and social disorder through problem-solving tactics and police-community partnerships." These guides emphasize *problem solving* and *police-community partnership*s in the context of addressing specific public safety problems. For the most part, the organizational strategies that can facilitate problem solving and police-community partnerships vary considerably and discussion of them is beyond the scope of these guides.

These guides have drawn on research findings and police practices in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia. Even though laws, customs and police practices vary from country to country, it is apparent that the police everywhere experience common problems. In a world that is becoming increasingly interconnected, it is important that police be aware of research and successful practices beyond the borders of their own countries.

The COPS Office and the authors encourage you to provide feedback on this guide and to report on your own agency's experiences dealing with a similar problem. Your agency may have effectively addressed a problem using responses not considered in these guides and your experiences and knowledge could benefit others. This information will be used to update the guides. If you wish to provide feedback and share your experiences it should be sent via email to the COPS Office response center, askCopsRC@usdoj.gov.

For more information about problem-oriented policing, visit the Center for Problem-Oriented Policing online at https://www.popcenter.org. This website offers free online access to the following:

- The *Problem-Specific Guides* series
- The companion *Response Guides* and *Problem-Solving Tools* series
- Instructional information about problem-oriented policing and related topics
- An interactive training exercise
- Important police research and practices

# The Problem of Missing Persons

## What this guide does and does not cover

This guide begins by describing the problem of missing persons and reviewing factors that increase its risks. It then identifies a series of questions to help you analyze your local missing persons problem. Finally, it reviews responses to the problem and what is known about these from evaluative research and police practice.

This revised second edition adds a lengthy chapter on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons (MMIP), as well as adding information and guidance specific to MMIP throughout the guide.

Law enforcement's effort to locate and return missing persons is but one aspect of the larger set of problems related to the reasons people go missing. This guide is limited to addressing the particular issues associated with missing persons. Related problems not directly addressed in this guide, each of which requires separate analysis, include the following:

- Abuse in care facilities
- Child abuse
- Child custody abductions
- Child exploitation
- Child sexual abuse
- Child sexual abuse / exploitation material (sometimes called child pornography)
- Domestic violence
- Elder abuse
- Homelessness
- Homicide
- Human trafficking
- Illegal immigration and border crossing
- International abductions
- Juvenile runaways
- Kidnapping
- Life insurance fraud
- Natural disasters
- Outstanding warrants (e.g., for failure to appear in court)
- Persons lost in the wilderness
- Sex work
- Sex offenders
- Unidentified dead
- Walkaways from assisted living facilities

Some of these related problems are covered in other guides in this series. For the most up-to-date listing of current and future guides, see www.popcenter.org.

## General description of and factors contributing to the problem

For purposes of this guide a missing person is a person 18 years old or older whose disappearance may not be voluntary, or a child whose whereabouts are unknown to the child's legal custodian and the circumstances of whose absence indicate that

1.  the child did not voluntarily leave the care and control of the custodian, and the taking of the child was not authorized by law; or

2.  the child voluntarily left the care and control of the child's legal custodian without the custodian's consent and without intent to return.

State agencies work to coordinate reports of missing persons with federal agencies, such as the National Crime Information Center (NCIC). In states with an Amber Alert Plan, parents of a missing or abducted child can contact their local police or sheriff's department to file a missing persons report. There is no 24-hour waiting period; the law enforcement agency will immediately enter information about the missing child into both its own missing persons database and the National Crime Information Center's Missing Person File.[1]

In the United States, missing persons cases have declined steadily since the 1990s, from a high of nearly one million in 1997 to about 520,000 in 2021.[2,*] It is likely, however, that this figure undercounts the actual number of missing persons, especially among groups that are reluctant to report disappearances to the police. Since 1975, the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) system has collected data on nearly 25 million persons reported missing, of whom approximately 100,000—about 0.4 percent—remain missing as of 2022.[†] The overwhelming majority of missing persons are eventually discovered, either alive or dead.

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\* In Canada, 70,000 to 100,000 persons per year are reported as missing (Huey and Ferguson 2023). In the United Kingdom, about 300,000 per year are (Fyfe, Stevenson, and Woolnough 2015). Unless otherwise noted, the data presented in this guide are for the United States.

† NCIC, because it is only one of the national sources of missing persons data, should be used cautiously to draw research conclusions, as it does not meet the requirements of a statistical/scientific database; rather, NCIC is an operational database. Data are entered by thousands of different people with varying levels of understanding about missing person categories and definitions. Changes in certain categories over time may reflect greater understanding of appropriate assignment rather than real change in a category. For example, declines in the overall category of "juvenile" in NCIC may reflect a better assignment of cases of missing persons under age 18 to other more appropriate categories of "endangered," "involuntary," or "disabled" missing persons.

Missing persons cases can consume a lot of police and other resources, more than is commonly realized.[3] Moreover, in high-profile cases police executives can feel a great deal of pressure to authorize those resources to maximize the chances of locating the person and to be seen as doing all that they can.[4]

## Classifying missing persons cases

Police, researchers, and missing persons organizations classify cases in a variety of ways and for a variety of purposes. Common classification schemes are based on the missing person's demographics (e.g., age, gender, race, ethnicity), risk of harm, and suspected reason for being missing. Because classification can determine the urgency, investigative strategy, and amount of resources police assign to each case, you should carefully consider how your agency classifies cases.

For missing persons cases where circumstances were known (about half of all cases), 95 percent were classified as "juvenile runaway" (see "Missing juveniles" beginning on page 13 for further discussion of juvenile runaway cases).[5],* The remaining known circumstances included approximately 2,500 cases of abductions by noncustodial parents and approximately 500 cases of "abductions by strangers" (involving both juvenile and adult victims).

Women and men are proportionately represented among missing persons. White subjects account for about 57 percent of missing persons, Black subjects for 35 percent, Asians and Native Americans for about 2 percent each, with about 3 percent of missing persons' race being unknown.[6] Black and Native American communities are overrepresented, while White and Asian communities are underrepresented as missing persons. However, White people—particularly attractive, young, White women and girls—appear to receive the bulk of media and social media[7] attention in missing persons cases, with less or no media coverage for missing minorities or those deemed less attractive or less sympathetic.[8]

Some missing people are missing voluntarily and others involuntarily. Each of these categories includes several subtypes of missing persons with potentially different investigative strategies for police. NCIC categorizes the missing as "juvenile," "endangered," "disabled," "other," "involuntary," and "catastrophe." Some of these categories describe characteristics of missing persons, others describe their temporary

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\* Because NCIC cases must be entered by police within two hours of reporting them, it is likely that police eventually know much more about the circumstances of many of these disappearances at a later time.

condition, and others describe their willingness to be missing.* The most likely entry is juvenile (62 percent), followed by other (23 percent), endangered (8 percent), disabled (5 percent), involuntary (2 percent), and catastrophe (less than 1 percent).[9] However, natural disasters such as hurricanes, earthquakes, fires, and floods can add significant numbers to the catastrophe category in affected jurisdictions.

Common categories based on the circumstances under which a person goes missing are the following:

- Individuals not fully capable of caring for themselves (e.g., because of mental illness, developmental disability, intoxication)
- Individuals voluntarily seeking a better life situation (e.g., runaways, fugitives)
- Individuals who do not consider themselves to be missing, but others do (e.g., taking a trip without notifying others)
- Individuals abducted by strangers or acquaintances (e.g., human trafficking, kidnapping)
- Individuals taken away by family members or other caretakers (e.g., child custody disputes)

National, as well as local, counts of missing persons for any given year are constantly changing as cases are listed by the date they occurred (i.e., when the persons went missing or were last seen) and not by the date the cases were entered in the record system. Persons who actually went missing in one year may not be reported as missing until years later. Because of the categorization scheme, the overlap among some categories—and the large gap in knowledge about the circumstances of many missing persons—the scope and nature of the missing persons problem is unclear. Your jurisdiction might have numbers of certain types of missing persons that differ from the national picture.

### Repeat missing persons

A relatively small proportion of missing persons account for a disproportionately high percentage of missing persons reports because they go missing repeatedly. The data for young people is especially skewed by a small number of repeat teenage runaways;[10] by one calculation, the 5 percent of young missing persons who were reported missing 10 times or more accounted for 30 percent of total reported missing young people.[11] One Australian study found that 34 percent of missing persons had gone missing previously.[12] As many

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\* The NCIC categorization scheme may not be of significant operational value for police; accordingly, police agencies are encouraged to develop their own categorization schemes that best reflect the nature of their missing persons cases.

as 4 percent of missing children experienced multiple missing episodes during the course of a single year, the most likely combination being a runaway episode and an episode of whereabouts unknown to caregivers (but otherwise safe).[13] Cases of repeat runaways use a huge amount of police resources and may result in less attention being paid to repeated disappearances of the same individual.[14] Repeat runaway cases may indicate family dysfunction, child abuse, sexual exploitation, substance abuse, or some combination of these factors.[15]

## Harms to and by missing persons

The harms that missing persons experience or that their missing status causes to others vary. At the top of the harm spectrum, some missing persons are raped, otherwise assaulted, or murdered. By one estimate, 10 percent of missing persons cases involve some form of violence, including homicide, nonfatal assault, sexual assault, stalking, coercive control, and psychological aggression, with violence across all these types being somewhat more likely when the missing person is female.[16] At the other end of the spectrum, some missing persons experience little or no harm: They were never in danger but only unaccounted for, or they wished to go missing to escape worse consequences. In the middle of the spectrum, some missing persons are injured or become ill because they did not have support or protection during the time they were missing. Others experience psychological trauma because they have been abducted, held captive, or experienced fear and anxiety from not knowing whether they would be found and rescued.[17]

People who care for missing persons—whether family, friends, guardians, caregivers, or coworkers—experience anxiety and stress from not knowing whether the missing person is safe.[18]

Finally, all community members experience some difficult-to-quantify but elevated risk to their safety when public safety resources are consumed by searching for missing persons who are not, in fact, in any danger. A single missing persons search can consume hundreds of hours by police, fire and emergency, helicopter, dive team, and canine unit personnel.

## Assessing risks for missing persons

There are two main types of risk at issue missing persons cases: (1) the risk that a person will go missing and (2) the risk that the missing person will come to harm. The first type implicates measures that can be taken to prevent people from going missing. The second determines the urgency and amount of resources police and others should devote to finding the missing person.

### *Assessing risk for going missing*

Reliably assessing risk for going missing requires considering multiple factors rather than a single factor. At a minimum, the interaction of the following types of factors should be understood:

- Demographic status (e.g., age, race/ethnicity, gender)
- State of mind (e.g., mental illness, suicidal ideation, or other vulnerability)
- Physical and social environment from which people go missing[19]
- Prior instances of going missing.

The following people are experiencing common combinations of factors that put them at relatively high risk of going missing:

- A teenager seeking to escape abuse or conflict at home
- A teenager struggling to reconcile traditional and modern cultural expectations
- A teenager living in a foster or group home
- A married person contemplating divorce but with poor coping skills
- A sex worker working on the street without physical protection
- A person suffering from memory impairment, schizophrenia, suicidal ideation, or other mental illnesses
- A young child living in a new, unfamiliar community
- A homeless person with a substance use disorder
- A person experiencing sudden and severe economic loss

## *Assessing risk for harm after going missing*

A small proportion of people who go missing suffer physical harm while missing, with an even smaller proportion being killed.[20,*] However, where there are indications that the missing person had suicidal ideations, the risk that the person will die by suicide while missing is relatively high.[21] Because police cannot know for certain ahead of time who is at risk of harm, and because they lack the resources to give every missing persons case the fullest attention, some risk assessment to prioritize cases is necessary.[†] This risk assessment might be as simple as sorting cases into two priorities: one justifying immediate investigation and search, and the other justifying only monitoring the situation until there is reason to believe the missing person will not be located without an investigation and search.[22,‡]

Across all missing persons cases, an estimated 10 percent suffer some harm while missing.[23] What little reliable research there is suggests that women and girls are at higher risk of being harmed while missing than men and boys, and that young children are at higher risk than older children or adults.[24]

The research evidence on age and sex risk differences is not yet strong, so you must blend research-based risk assessments, standard operating procedures, experiential understanding of missing persons in that community, and, of course, the particular circumstances of each case to calculate risk.[25]

Missing persons cases are not conventional criminal investigations, and most do not involve a crime. But because what originally seems a mere routine missing persons case sometimes entails a far more serious matter, prioritizing potentially high-risk cases is essential. Because missing persons cases can consume a significant amount of police resources, agencies can reap significant rewards by preventing them or responding in a more efficient manner.

The missing persons case least likely to be viewed as unusual or suspicious—the case of the missing adult sex worker with a warrant—may in fact be the case at the highest risk for foul play. Or what may appear to be a typical missing child case may in fact have the

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\* One UK study calculated that only 0.3 percent of missing persons cases had a fatal outcome (see Tarling and Burrows 2004, as cited in Newiss 2004).

† British police agencies commonly employ the THRIVE (Threat, Harm, Risk, Investigation, Vulnerability, Engagement) risk-assessment model (College of Policing 2024).

‡ For a discussion of the ethics of missing persons investigations, see Kim, Leach Scully, and Huston Katsanis (2016).

police responding to a crime in progress—an abduction, a kidnapping, a molestation, a rape, or a murder.* While the missing elderly person or autistic child may not be at significant risk for foul play, they may face significant risks of accidental death, including by exposure or drowning. Assessing risk, while difficult, is a critical component of missing persons investigations, and cases should not be assumed to be of low priority until the initial investigation can be conducted.[26]

In some missing persons cases, there will be obvious signs of foul play, such as evidence of a struggle or of a home or a car in disarray. But in cases originally suspected to be benign, additional information may suggest the missing person is at high risk. Family abduction cases also have varying levels of risk. Cases where a child is taken out of state, those where there is a family history of abuse or danger of sexual exploitation, and those involving children with special medical needs may present greater than average risk in family child abduction cases.[27] Thus, the risk or urgency in a particular case can change over time as you gather information.

### Risk factors for missing children

The following factors may put youth at an increased risk of running away or becoming homeless:[28]

- Physical or sexual abuse
- Family conflict
- Lack of acceptance of gender identity or sexual orientation
- Struggling to manage mental health
- Substance abuse
- Medical issue or developmental or physical disability
- Pregnancy
- Online enticement
- Separation from a friend, romantic partner, or biological family
- Gang activity
- Sex trafficking
- Social rejection or bullying

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* Cases involving child abduction that may present a danger to the child are eligible for the "Child Abduction" (CA) flag when entered into NCIC as involuntarily missing or endangered missing (NCMEC 2006).

## Missing juveniles

Broadly, a "missing child refers to any youth under the age of 18 whose whereabouts are unknown to his or her legal guardian."[29] The total annual number of children who go missing each year—both reported and unreported—is estimated to be around 1.3 million.[30] Of these missing children, nearly all return home alive or are located; less than one percent are not. Most missing children are found within a few miles of where they went missing.[31] Of those relatively few children who remain missing, the majority are runaways from institutional care.[32] The most common categories of missing children, from most frequent to least frequent, are as follows: juvenile runaways, family abductions, lost or injured children, and nonfamily abductions.[33]

Juveniles account for approximately half of active missing persons cases.[34] Three-quarters of missing children are ages 12–17. Male and female children have a nearly equal likelihood of going missing. About 55 percent of missing children are White, 20 percent are Black, and 20 percent are Hispanic.[35]

In child abduction murders, there is a nearly equal likelihood that the perpetrator is a stranger as that the perpetrator is a friend or acquaintance, and the median victim is 11.5 years of age. The mean age of offenders is 27.8. Offenders are typically unmarried and as likely to be unemployed as employed; their initial contact with the victim usually occurs within three blocks of the victim's residence (and in many cases within a half-block). A 2006 study reported that in only about half of these cases were the victims reported as missing and, in many cases, there was at least a two-hour delay in reporting them to police.[36]

Most missing children (84 percent) are runaways or are missing for benign reasons. The most common categories of missing children are not necessarily those in which the child is at greatest risk. The least common missing-child case is the most dangerous—stranger abductions. However, initially, police may not know if the reason the child is missing is a brief runaway episode, getting lost, a miscommunication about the child's whereabouts, or a stranger abduction; this uncertainty is one reason the initial investigation is so important.

### National Center for Missing and Exploited Children

Established in 1984, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) is a nonprofit, private organization which serves as a clearinghouse for information on missing and exploited children. NCMEC provides technical assistance and training to law enforcement and social service professionals, distributes descriptions and photographs of missing children, and networks with other nonprofits and state clearinghouses for missing children.

### National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs)

In existence since 2008, the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) is sponsored by the National Institute of Justice. NamUs is a national clearinghouse for information and includes an online system for recording missing persons, unidentified dead, and unclaimed dead, accessible through the NamUs website at https://namus.nij. ojp.gov. The NamUs database can be accessed and searched by anyone—police, medical examiners or coroners, and families. Cases and updates to existing cases are vetted by NamUs experts before they are added, and police and coroners can keep sensitive case data away from public display. Only coroners and medical examiners are authorized to enter unidentified and unclaimed dead cases. The databases are linked, and searches can be performed by using a number of different identifiers, including scars, tattoos, clothing, jewelry, and DNA. NamUs cleared 18 previously unresolved cases in its first 18 months.

NamUs improves the efficiency with which dental records and other radiographs can be shared with experts; has extensive search capabilities; allows free access to expert anthropologists, odontologists, and fingerprint examiners; and provides free DNA testing. It allows for automatic searching of two of the databases to find similarities in missing persons and unidentified dead cases. NamUs can help police and missing persons' families only if police enter their missing persons cases into the system.

## Juvenile runaways

Runaway and thrownaway juveniles (children forced from their home or abandoned) constitute the most significant portion of missing persons cases.[37] As many as 1.7 million children run away from home each year, with approximately 20 percent of those cases reported to police. Most runaway episodes last only a day or two—75 percent of such juveniles return home within a week—and most do not leave the local area.[38,*]



*Tomas Castelazo/Wikimedia Commons/CC BY-SA 4.0*

Juvenile runaways are at an increased risk of being sexually exploited.

Although most runaway cases do not result in an arrest, there are approximately 100,000 juvenile runaway arrests each year.[39] NCIC statistics show a decline in the number of juvenile runaways over the past few years, and this decline may reflect improvements in child well-being, such as reductions in teenage pregnancy and alcohol use as well as general declines in violence and other victimization.[40] However, runaway cases still require a huge amount of police resources and may involve sexual, physical, and emotional abuse. Juvenile runaways are at an increased likelihood (compared to their peers) of physical, drug, and sexual abuse; suicide; and sexual exploitation.[41] A focus on high-risk victims can not only lead to reductions in repeat runaway behavior but also help address child exploitation and trafficking, sexual assault, and organized crime.[42]

## Children missing from care

Children missing from care can be missing from institutional facilities or from alternative in-home care, such as foster care. Children in care are afforded more confidentiality protections than those not in care; thus, getting necessary information about these missing children may present challenges. Of the nearly 600,000 foster children in the United States, as many as 20 percent are missing from care at any given time, and most of those (98 percent) are considered runaways. The remaining 2 percent are unaccounted for, and

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\* See Problem-Specific Guide No. 37, *Juvenile Runaways, 2nd edition*, https://portal.cops.usdoj.gov/resourcecenter?item= cops-w0752, for further information.

their status is unknown.[43] Some of these children have been taken by family members, and many have run away, and some proportion of both groups is at risk for homicide, suicide, or accidental deaths.

### Abductions of children by strangers (stereotypical child kidnapping)

Although abductions of children by strangers are rare, they are high-profile cases, require a huge amount of police resources, and often pose a significant risk to the child.[44] An estimated 115 child abductions by strangers occurred during the most recent study year (2022) of the National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway (NISMART) Children.[45] Only about 100 children per year are victims of stereotypical kidnapping; most are pubescent girls who are assaulted or otherwise physically abused in some fashion. These abductions are equally likely to occur during spring, summer, and fall. The lower number of winter abduction cases likely mirrors other crime patterns that decline during winter months, when there is less opportunity for crime; in these cases, fewer children are outdoors without supervision. Men and older boys are the abductors in 93 percent of abductions by strangers, and persons in their twenties constitute about one-third of the abductors. Of these cases, 40 percent result in the murder of the child, and an additional 32 percent of the abducted children are injured. In abductions in which the child is murdered, the killer is about equally likely to be a stranger as to be known to the child. The killers commonly have prior arrest histories for violence against children, and most are motivated to abduct the child for sexual gratification.[46]

### Nonfamily abductions

In addition to stereotypical child abductions or kidnappings by strangers, each year there are approximately 58,000 child victims of nonfamily abductions perpetrated by friends, acquaintances, and strangers in diverse situations. These abductions, although sometimes involving strangers, differ from the stereotypical abductions / kidnappings by strangers in terms of offender intent and other case characteristics.[47] Police data do not reflect nearly this number, as only about half of nonfamily abductions are reported to police; because such abductions are not commonly perceived to be dangerous situations, caretakers think the child will return, or caretakers do not even know about the episode.[48] Nonfamily abductions, as opposed to stereotypical kidnappings, typically involve less forced movement and detention (but may involve moving the child using physical force or threat, detaining the child for at least an hour, or luring a child 15 or younger for purposes of concealment or with intent to keep the child permanently). In only about one-fifth of nonfamily abductions are police initially contacted to help locate the abducted child. In a 2002 study,

teenagers were the most likely victims in nonfamily abductions (81 percent of nonfamily abduction victims were 12 or older); girls account for 65 percent of victims; and in nearly half of the cases, victims were sexually assaulted.[49]

About one-half of nonfamily abductions are perpetrated by someone known to the child, including friends, neighbors, caretakers, or other persons of authority.[50] Men are the abductors in three-fourths of nonfamily abductions, and persons in their 20s commit nearly half of nonfamily abductions.

The most likely place of a nonfamily abduction is an open area, such as a street, a public place, or wooded area. Sexual assault is the primary motive in nonfamily abductions. Weapons are involved in fewer than half of nonfamily abductions.[51]

There are relatively few cases of nonfamily infant abductions—only about 3–14 cases nationwide per year—and even that figure appears to be declining. Historically, they occurred primarily in health care facilities and were committed by women seeking a baby, often following a faked pregnancy.[52] Most of these infants (more than 90 percent) are successfully recovered, quick reporting to police being vital to recovery.[53] However, because of increased healthcare facility security, about half of these still rare cases now occur at the home of the mother or elsewhere. Some of these cases (18 percent) involve violence, and some (about 10 percent) involved the killing of the mother—and, more rarely, the killing of both parents. In many of the cases involving the death of the mother, the infant is abducted by cesarean section at the mother's or the offender's home.[54]

## Family abductions

Most abductions of children are perpetrated by noncustodial parents, sometimes referred to as "family abductions."* Based on surveys of youth, about one million children a year are victims of family abductions; slightly fewer than one-half of cases are reported to police. About 60 percent of family abductions are perpetrated by the mother or a female relative and 40 percent by the father or a male relative, although those ratios are reversed when the abduction constitutes a kidnapping.[55] Female children are a bit more likely to be the victims in family abductions. The most likely place that abductions occur is the child's or someone else's home or yard; school or day care abductions are relatively rare. The majority of the children abducted are with the abductor just before the abduction; typically, in these abductions, the children are not returned to the custodial parent

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* Laws on criminal custodial interference vary from state to state.

after visits. Family abductions are more likely to occur in the summer. Most of the children (91 percent) are returned. Contributing factors to family abductions may include unresolved conflicts over child custody issues that make abduction seem a last option. Children are often psychologically traumatized by these abductions, and family abductions often are associated with various other forms of abuse of the child.[56]

Family abduction cases may be prolonged and may sometimes involve international implications. There have been a number of legislative initiatives affecting family abductions (see appendix B). These cases involve significant legal, civil, and liability issues regarding the enforcement of the most recent custody order.[57] According to NCMEC officials, about half of international cases of U.S. child abduction involve abductors who flee or are at risk of fleeing to Mexico.[58]

### Children missing involuntarily, lost, or injured (MILI) or missing because of benign explanations (MBE)

Missing children who do not fall within any of the above categories are commonly missing because of miscommunication: They are too young to contact a caretaker; or they are lost, stranded, or injured and therefore unable to contact a caretaker. As many as 200,000 children a year are involuntarily missing from caretakers because they were lost, injured, or stranded. These children are most commonly White male teens who disappeared from wooded areas or parks. An additional nearly 350,000 children are missing for benign reasons; they are not actually lost, injured, abducted, victimized, or runaways. Rather, their cases were basically false alarms.[59] Most of those missing for benign explanations are teenagers who failed to return home when expected. The reasons for these types of cases (MILI and MBE) can include car trouble or car accidents, inclement weather, poor communication, helping a friend, riding the wrong bus, truancy, or sleeping in unknown places. Most of these children are teenagers, missing for fewer than six hours.[60] Although these categories of missing children account for far greater numbers than kidnapped or abducted children, less attention has been paid to preventing cases of MILI and MBE children than to resolving cases of runaway and abducted children. In areas where hiking, camping, boating, flying, rock climbing, and other outdoor activities are popular, police may encounter more of these cases. Children missing for the reasons described here often come from families that are otherwise socially and economically stressed, a confluence of factors that leave such children more vulnerable to going missing.[61]

## Missing adults

In the United States, adult missing persons cases are categorized as follows:[62]

1. **Disabled.** A person of any age who is missing and who is physically or mentally disabled or senile and thereby subject to personal and immediate danger

2. **Adults missing involuntarily.** A person of any age who is missing under circumstances indicating that the disappearance was not voluntary

3. **Endangered.** A person of any age who is missing under circumstances indicating that that person's physical safety may be in danger

4. **Catastrophe.** A person of any age who is missing after a catastrophic event

5. **Other.** A person who is missing, declared unemancipated as defined by the laws of the person's state of residence, and does not meet any of the entry criteria set forth in items 1–4.

Slightly more than half of all active missing persons cases are missing adults, and thus, at any given time, there are about 100,000 active missing adult cases in police files.[63,*] While men account for about 60 percent of all (not just active) missing adult cases, younger missing adults are disproportionately women.[64] About two-thirds of missing adults are White; about one-fourth are Black; and about 5 percent are American Indian, Asian, or other races.[65] Black people are again disproportionately represented as missing adults, although not quite at the level of missing children.

### Adults missing voluntarily

Unlike juveniles, adults can legally choose to go missing, and often they do so out of a wish to escape relationship difficulties, financial problems, or depression or just to disappear. When police locate these persons, they are not permitted to divulge their location to those who reported them missing—just that they were located and do not wish to be contacted. Although adults have the right to go missing and may in fact not be officially missing, police resources are consumed by following up on these missing adult cases to determine the circumstances.

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\* In the past, when a missing child turned 18 years of age, some police agencies removed the missing child cases from their records. However, the 2006 Adam Walsh Act mandates that these records be converted to missing adult cases (NCMEC 2006).

### Disabled adults and walkaways from care

This category of missing adults includes elderly persons as walkaways from home or care facilities, as well as other adults with autism, Down Syndrome, dementia, Alzheimer's disease, and other cognitive disabilities. As populations age, those adults with some form of dementia, including Alzheimer's, will become a larger proportion of missing persons cases. Wandering behavior is associated with Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia; as many as 6 in 10 people with Alzheimer's will engage in wandering behavior.[66]

### Persons missing in disasters

Natural disasters and catastrophes can also cause adults and children to go missing. Some will have been injured or killed in the disaster, but their bodies have either not been found or identified.[67] Some will be alive but will have fled the disaster area and not yet notified people of their whereabouts. Police and other rescuers will be under great pressure to announce who has been found, dead or alive, so accuracy is critical but slow to emerge.

## The "missing missing" or murdered

Most missing persons are not reported as missing to police. Some proportions of these missing persons—the "missing missing"—were victims of foul play and in hindsight were clearly involuntarily missing and endangered.

### Sex workers

Sex workers are a particularly vulnerable pool of victims of serial murder. In many cases, these victims are not part of police missing persons cases because no one reported them as missing or because they had outstanding warrants and departmental policy was not to accept missing persons cases for those with outstanding warrants.[68] Presumably, the logic behind this procedural rule was that those with outstanding warrants were considered more likely to be fugitives than missing. In the Green River sex worker serial murder case in Washington and Oregon in the 1980s and 90s, 11 of the 48 victims had no active missing persons case. An additional five victims were unidentified dead and were also likely to have been among the "missing missing," meaning that as many as one-third of

the victims were not known to be missing before their deaths. Many other recent serial murder cases have included "missing missing" victims.[69],* Although some missing persons risk assessments would categorize those with outstanding warrants for nonviolent crimes as low-urgency cases,[70] these cases can in fact be very high risk. Although from 1970 through 2009, 32 percent of serial murder cases included victims who were female sex workers, more recently, from 2000 through 2009, the proportion of serial murder cases involving such victims climbed to 69 percent of the total, and serial murderers who kill sex workers continue to kill over longer timespans and amass more victims.[71] Rather than paying less attention to a missing sex worker who is assumed to live a transient lifestyle and perhaps to have outstanding warrants, you should treat the disappearance of sex workers as high-risk cases.

## Homeless persons

Another group of missing persons not likely to be reported as missing is the homeless, especially those with mental illness. Those who are reported as missing are commonly reported by staff at homeless shelters; many are repeatedly reported as missing, and many are reported when they fail to return to the shelter when they are expected to do so. Most are eventually located alive, having gone missing voluntarily.[72] This population of missing persons may have become so estranged from family and friends that no missing persons report is filed, and if they are located by police and are older than 21, the police are not allowed to disclose their location to those reporting them as missing, thus creating stress for families and friends and potential frustration with police.

Homeless persons who are reported missing are more likely than other missing persons to be found having died by suicide.[73]

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* The Herbert Baumeister (Indianapolis), Robert Berdella (Kansas City, Missouri), Jeffrey Dahmer (Milwaukee, Wisconsin), John Wayne Gacy (Chicago), and Robert Lee Yates (Spokane, Washington) cases all included a significant proportion of "missing missing" victims (Quinet 2009).

### Undocumented immigrants

Undocumented immigrants are also likely to be part of the "missing missing" population. This population in Arizona constitutes a large part of the unidentified-dead population.[74] These undocumented border crossers are technically not missing persons in the United States but may have missing persons reports in Mexico, thus requiring cooperation between the U.S. and Mexican governments and police. This issue is increasing in frequency, and a recent symposium on border crossing deaths finds that in a six-year period, as many as 1,000 persons died trying to cross into Arizona.[75] In Mexico, families can enter information about their missing into a database that can then be checked by missing victims' advocates in the United States; in the event that unidentified remains are located in a U.S. medical examiner's office, fingerprints and DNA matching can bring closure for some families.[76] U.S. Customs and Border Protection has launched a Missing Migrants program to try to reduce deaths among border crossers.[77]

### Human trafficking victims

In addition to those voluntarily crossing into the United States, others are brought here against their will. Although the exact number of persons trafficked into the United States is not known, if they escape their traffickers, their disappearance may never be reported to police and, although they are missing persons, their eventual discovery may be through investigation of other criminal activity or of unidentified remains.[*]

## Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons (MMIP)

The issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons (MMIP)[†] overlaps with the categories of missing children and missing adults but merits special consideration for both the seriousness of the problem and its special aspects.[78] This special category of missing persons cases gets its own classification because of the unique circumstances surrounding tribal sovereign nation status.

For the purposes of this research, the labels Indigenous peoples, Native Americans, and American Indians (including Alaska Natives) will be used interchangeably. Lisa Monchalin offers a definition we will use: "The term Indigenous is used throughout this paper to

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[*] See Problem-Specific Guide No. 38, *Exploitation of Trafficked Women, 2nd Edition*, https://portal.cops.usdoj.gov/resourcecenter?item=cops-w0763, for additional information.

[†] Other common names for this movement are Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives (MMIR).

refer to original peoples in North America and their descendants."[79] This term refers collectively to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples in Canada but has also been used to refer to Indigenous peoples worldwide.[80]

## Colonization, assimilation, and unresolved historical trauma

Historical trauma refers to a complex and collective trauma experienced through time and across generations by a group of people who share an identity, affiliation, or circumstance.[81] In context, it refers to the collective, cumulative, and intergenerational traumatic experiences of Native American communities that impact descendants of the initial primary victims.

The effects of unresolved historical trauma resulting from the genocidal policies, both eliminationist and assimilative, used against this population can manifest in numerous ways, including the loss of traditional values or beliefs, substance use, depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and violence. Unresolved trauma is a significant contributing factor for Indigenous peoples' involvement in risky behaviors that lead to unexplained disappearance or death.[82]

## Indigenous victimization

It is estimated that more than four of five American Indian and Alaska Native women have experienced some form of violence in their lifetimes; in some counties, Indigenous women experience violent victimization at a rate 10 times the national average.[83] Homicide is a leading cause of death for American Indians / Alaska Natives (AI/AN).[84] Further, Indigenous men also experience high rates of violence. The CDC estimates that non-Hispanic American Indian / Alaska Native men younger than 55 face the greatest risk of experiencing homicide of all races or ethnicities.[85]

## Tribal sovereignty

As of April 2024, there are 574 federally recognized Native American tribes in the United States that possess tribal recognition and sovereignty. Tribal sovereignty refers to the Constitutional rights of Native Americans to self-govern, create tribal law, and establish their own justice systems. Like the U.S. government, tribal nations are vested

with authority to manage tribal affairs and maintain welfare and safety of tribal citizens. However, this sovereignty status has been repeatedly challenged since 1831, with the latest U.S. Supreme Court decision issued in 2021.*

Throughout U.S. history, the U.S. Congress has passed legislation that has vacillated between two conflicting themes in Native American affairs: assimilation policies mandating Native Americans enter the American mainstream vs. policies supporting tribal self-government and self-determination; however, far more legislation has eroded tribal self-governance than supported it. These dramatic swings in public policy have had severe social and psychological effects on many Native Americans (see the earlier section Colonization, assimilation, and unresolved historical trauma).

### Federal legislative and policy initiatives

Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution states that "Congress shall have the power to regulate Commerce with foreign nations and among the several states, and with the Indian tribes," establishing that Indian tribes were separate from the federal government, the states, and foreign nations.[86] The Indian Appropriations Act of 1871 ended the recognition of independent Native nations and reclassified Native nations as domestic dependent nations subject to applicable federal laws.

In 1877, the General Allotment Act or Dawes Act was passed. This law delegated authority to the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to allot parcels of tribal land to individual Indians. Under the Dawes Act, large amounts of tribal land not allotted to individual Native Americans was made available for the taking by White people. This created a checkerboard pattern of ownership of traditional tribal lands by tribes, tribal members, and non-Indian homesteaders. Congress then adopted the General Allotment (Severalty) Act of 1887, a policy of removing Native Americans from their ancestral lands, and established the reservation system that exists to this day.

This assimilation policy extended to removing Native American children from their homes and forcing them to attend off-reservation boarding schools. In 1887, to provide funding for more boarding schools, Congress passed the Compulsory Indian Education Act. The

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* *Cherokee Nation* v. *Georgia* (1831) held that tribal nations had the legal right to self-governance and legally defined the relations between the U.S. government and tribal nations. In 2021, the decision in *United States* v. *Cooley* (https://www.scotusblog.com/case-files/cases/united-states-v-cooley/) held that tribal nations' police officers can conduct limited investigatory stops of nontribal members on public highways within reservations for violation of state and federal law.

American government believed they were rescuing these children from a world of poverty and depression and teaching them life skills. This legislation has arguably had a more devastating impact on the fabric of Native American culture than any other federal policy.

Many Native American children were sent to BIA boarding schools, where they had their hair cut, were prohibited from speaking their native languages, and were punished for traditional Native American cultural practices in the effort to rapidly assimilate them into mainstream White society. "Virtually imprisoned in the schools, children experienced a devastating litany of abuses, from forced assimilation and grueling labor to widespread sexual and physical abuse."[87]

The Carlisle Indian Industrial School exemplifies these policies. Lieutenant Richard Pratt, a former U.S. Army officer, founded the Carlisle School and is responsible for advocating the off-reservation education of Native Americans to immerse them into the White culture. Pratt is quoted as saying, "A great general has said that the only good Indian is a dead one. In a sense, I agree with the sentiment, but only in this: that all the Indian there is in the race should be dead. Kill the Indian in him, and save the man."[88] The Carlisle School was the model for BIA boarding schools across the country, such as the Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan and the Industrial Indian Boarding School in Haskell, Kansas. Gloria King, a Saginaw Chippewa, discusses these schools' effect on her family:

> I would like to show you my mama's picture. This was taken when my mom was about 89 years old. I love my mom. She was a hard worker. Someone asked me one time if my mom, because she had raised three children, was she a good parent? How did her parenting skills affect my parenting skills?
>
> And I laughed. I just laughed out loud. I said, my mother had no parenting skills. She went to an Indigenous boarding school. She went to Mount Pleasant. And when she was quite young, probably 9 or 10, she was put on a train with many other Indigenous children. And they were taken to Haskell, Kansas, to the Industrial Indian Boarding School in Haskell, Kansas. And that's where she stayed until she was probably 17 or 18 and graduated—I don't know if that's the word they used, but until she was finished with her education there. And then she came back to Michigan. But they didn't teach Indian children how to be parents. They taught them how to be domestics and bakers and farmers and servants.[89]

In 1934, Congress passed the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 (IRA) into law. This law promoted tribal self-government and encouraged tribes to adopt constitutions and to form chartered corporations. Then, in 1953, House Concurrent Resolution 108 (HCR 108) was adopted, calling for terminating tribal self-government and forcing tribal members to assimilate into White society as rapidly as possible.

These policies and their implementation are entwined with the challenges that Native Americans experience in American society today.

## Law enforcement and federal action

Law enforcement jurisdictions on reservations can make it difficult to prosecute some crimes, including sex trafficking. After the 1978 U.S. Supreme Court case *Oliphant* v. *Suquamish Indian Tribe* decided that Indian tribal courts have no criminal jurisdiction over non-Indians,[90] it became illegal for non-Natives to be tried under tribal laws, even if the crime occurred on tribal land. This made it very difficult for real justice to be served to trafficking victims, because sex traffickers tended to overwhelmingly be non-Native, and even when the perpetrators are Native members, the maximum sentence that tribal law can impose is three years. With such little deterrence, non-Native traffickers could easily recruit Native women and girls into the sex trade.[91]

The MMIP grassroots movement originated in Canada in the mid-2000s, calling public and government attention to the violence against Indigenous women. This prompted federal U.S. legislation to examine the disproportionate unresolved homicide and missing persons cases involving Indigenous victims, as well as working groups across the nation to create local, state, and national task forces to investigate the scope of this issue. In 2018, the 115th Congress declared May 5 the National Day of Awareness of Missing and Murdered Native Women and Girls. In May 2023, the President addressed a proclamation on MMIP to heighten awareness and urge lawmakers to respond to the crisis.

Public Law No. 116–165, or Savanna's Act, signed into law in October 2020, was a bipartisan effort to improve the federal response to MMIP, including by increasing coordination among federal, state, tribal, and local law enforcement agencies.[92] Also signed into law in that month was the Not Invisible Act of 2019, the first bill in history to be introduced and passed by four U.S. congressional members enrolled in their respective federally recognized tribes, led by then-Congresswoman Deb Haaland of New Mexico.[93]

As Secretary of the Interior, Haaland is now working in coordination with Attorney General Merrick Garland to implement the Not Invisible Act. They have established the Not Invisible Act Commission, a cross-jurisdictional advisory committee composed of law enforcement, tribal leaders, federal partners, service providers, family members of missing and murdered individuals—and, most importantly, survivors. The commission's purpose is to develop recommendations through the work of six subcommittees focused on improving intergovernmental coordination and establishing best practices for state, tribal, and federal law enforcement to bolster resources for survivors and victims' families and on combating the epidemic of missing persons and of the murder and trafficking of American Indian and Alaska Native peoples, as specified under the law. The commission's report is available along with the joint response from the U.S. Departments of the Interior and Justice.[94]

## *Special risk factors for Native Americans*

The available research on risk factors for runaway incidents consistently finds that an individual's race, ethnicity, and gender can increase their risk of running away, especially alongside other life stressors.[95] In 2021, NCMEC reported that the most common case type reported to them was endangered runaways, of whom 55 percent were female. With a mean age of 15, Native American endangered runaways were slightly older than endangered runaways of other racial and ethnic backgrounds.[96] A year earlier, the American Academy of Pediatrics stated in a clinical report that girls of color were at a significantly higher risk of running away than White girls;[97] among youth who called the National Runaway Safeline, Black, multiracial, and female adolescents were overrepresented compared to the general population.[98] Running away and homelessness often go hand in hand, with common risk factors such as family dynamics, substance abuse, mental illness, socioeconomic disadvantage, and education present among both adults and juveniles.[99] Runaway Black girls in particular commonly report family dynamics, childhood abuse, and frequent substance use as reasons for leaving home.[100] While these factors are common among all runaways regardless of gender or race, women and girls of color experience them at disproportionate rates.

Substance use is frequent among runaways, with 67 percent of missing and runaway children reporting having used drugs at least once.[101] Among a sample of runaway youth living in shelters, more than half of whom were girls of color, 40 percent were found to have a substance use diagnosis, alcohol and marijuana being the substances most commonly used.[102] The available literature varies in how it ascribes causality: While one study found that runaway risk was predicted by substance use among Black girls in

foster care,[103] new research supports the theory that substance use is a consequence of homelessness, not a cause.[104] Substance use has been shown to be increasingly common among populations of homeless women[105] and often goes hand in hand with mental health problems; Slesnick and Prestopnik reported in their study that more than one-third of their sample of runaway youth were diagnosed with both mental health and substance use disorders.[106] Women and girls who are homeless or runaways report higher rates of mental health issues than men and boys; these rates are even higher for non-White women and girls.[107] Specifically, Black women and girls are more likely to have schizophrenia than women and girls of other ethnicities and more likely to be diagnosed with depression than Black men and boys.[108] Among runaway youth, disengagement from school was a significant risk factor;[109] compared to the general population, homeless young adults were 346 percent more likely to lack a GED or high school diploma.[110] Girls of color are especially likely to be affected by this factor, as evidenced by their higher rates of in-school suspensions.[111] Adolescents who run away are more likely to attend school irregularly, be suspended, or be expelled.[112] One common theme among the lives of homeless and runaway women and girls is a history of both physical and sexual abuse, a risk factor that, once again, is highest among girls of color.[113].

Adult women often report running from homes because of domestic violence;[114] domestic violence is more likely to occur among those experiencing poverty and to Black and Hispanic individuals.[115] Before running away or becoming homeless, girls of color often report a history of foster care.[116] Research on a sample of 53,610 foster care youth found that Black and Hispanic girls ran away from foster care at significantly higher rates than their White peers.[117] Runaway youth and adults experience a variety of risk factors that increase their probability of fleeing; women and girls of color are overexposed to abuse and neglect at school and at home and have a higher probability of being diagnosed with mental health and substance use disorders, fueling their motivation to run away.[118]

The scope of the MMIP problem itself has had alarming impacts, long recognized by tribal communities alongside the effects of historical trauma. Well before the Federal Government's belated recognition of the problem in 2018, Indigenous families were demanding justice for the numerous unexplained disappearances and murders of their loved ones. Obstacles to awareness include a limited pool of current data, racial or tribal misclassification in reporting methods, misidentification in existing data, and the overall underreporting of cases involving Indigenous victims in media. All these factors together mean that statistics likely undercount the true extent of the issue, which also hinders creating awareness and support outside of tribal communities.

## Jurisdictional complexities

Jurisdiction is complex and creates unique complications for addressing MMIP–related crime on and off tribal lands. As previously mentioned, tribal sovereignty allows tribes to exercise jurisdiction over enrolled tribal members. However, the Federal Government exercises authority over all major crimes that occur on tribal lands.[119] In addition, in 1953, P.L. 280 granted five states (six since Alaska statehood in 1959) legal civil and criminal authority over tribal and nontribal citizens on tribal lands within those states.[120] Then, in 2022, the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act expanded tribal authority over nontribal defendants in cases related to stalking, sexual assault, child abuse, and sex trafficking on tribal lands. For MMIP-related cases, determining the primary jurisdiction is based upon numerous factors, such as where the person went missing, whether or not an incident occurred on tribal lands, and level of crime involved. This often puts the burden on Indigenous families and survivors to contact multiple agencies in their attempts to locate their loved one or to file a report.

## Geographic challenges

Another distinctive component of MMIP cases is the complications for reporting incidents, responding to incidents, and determining jurisdiction. The majority of tribal lands, often referred to as Indian country,* are rural areas that can have limited cellular, Internet, and other infrastructure, making it difficult for families to call for service or find resources.[121] Socioeconomic barriers can also impact whether families can cover travel costs to file reports at police stations, assist in searches, or receive aid. These geographic challenges also pose difficulties for tribal law enforcement personnel, who provide public safety services for the 5.1 million people who live on reservations.[122] Of those who reside on reservations, only 1.13 million identify as an American Indian or Alaska Native, but it is the resident's status that determines whether any of the 3,834 law enforcement officers in the 258 tribal law enforcement agencies can address a crime at hand.[123]

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\* Federal law defines *Indian country* as (a) all land within the limits of any Indian reservation under the jurisdiction of the United States Government, notwithstanding the issuance of any patent, and including rights-of-way running through the reservation; (b) all dependent Indian communities within the borders of the United States whether within the original or subsequently acquired territory thereof, and whether within or without the limits of a state; and (c) all Indian allotments, the Indian titles to which have not been extinguished, including rights-of-way running through the same. (18 USC § 1151 - Indian country defined, June 25, 1948, ch. 645, 62 Stat. 757; May 24, 1949, ch. 139, § 25, 63 Stat. 94.)

## Residential status

Migration, relocation, and seeking opportunities off the reservation are common among Indigenous people. Many reasons influence a person to change living situations, such as employment, housing, education, and access to commodities and resources available off reservations. Most Indigenous peoples (71 percent)[124] live in urban areas, off a reservation, and may have limited connection to family still living on a reservation. Moving away from home decreases families' ability to monitor their loved ones and ensure their safety. When combined with high-risk situations like family conflict, substance use, or escaping domestic violence, these changes in residential status make it difficult for families to know one another's behavior, actions, and whereabouts. The inability to monitor actions makes it challenging for family members to know whether a loved one's disappearance was violent. In addition, some Indigenous peoples live only part of the time on reservations, which can also impact the response to and outcomes of MMIP cases.[125]

## Juveniles

Because of the jurisdictional complexities of Indian Country, cases involving juveniles pose an additional challenge. Statistically, juveniles make up the most missing persons cases in Indian country. According to 2022 Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) statistics, Native American / Alaska Native women and girls made up 72 percent of all female missing persons and Native men and boys made up 58 percent of all male missing persons.[126] Again, depending on the jurisdictional status of the tribe, the agency primarily in charge of these cases will vary. Tribal members often feel that their cases are not treated with the same priority as others when in a P.L. 280 jurisdiction. These situations stress the importance of Tribal Community Response Plans (see Responses to the Problem section) to enhance a collaborative response to missing persons cases involving juveniles.

# Understanding Your Local Problem

The information provided in the previous sections is only a generalized description of missing persons problems. Analyzing your local problem carefully will help you design a more effective response strategy. National data can present a large-scale snapshot of the missing persons problem, but you will need to assess the extent of your local problem and the relative proportion of different missing persons categories to allocate resources appropriately.

## Stakeholders

In addition to criminal justice agencies, the following groups have an interest in the missing persons problem, and they should be considered for the contribution they might make to gathering and sharing information about the problem and responding to it:

- Local government agencies
  - Child protection agencies
  - Foster care providers
  - Victim services
  - Coroner and medical examiner offices
  - Public safety communications
  - State missing persons clearinghouses
  - Mental health centers
  - Veterans Affairs departments
  - Local, county, and state emergency managers
- Social service organizations
  - Runaway shelters and service providers
  - Guardian homes
  - Assisted living facilities
  - Homeless shelters and service providers
  - Domestic violence shelters and service providers
  - Sex worker service providers
  - Faith communities

- Emergency medical service providers
- Employers
- Schools
- National centers with databases for missing persons and unidentified dead
- Mass media

## Asking the right questions

The following are some critical questions you should ask in analyzing your particular missing persons problem, even if the answers are not always readily available. Your answers to these and other questions will help you choose the most appropriate set of responses later on.

### *Missing persons*

- How many missing persons are there in your jurisdiction? Are these trends stable over time?
- How does the number of missing persons break down by the different categories of missing persons?
- Within each category, what are the likely reasons the person went missing? Relationship issues? Legal issues? Substance abuse? Mental illness?
- For each missing persons category, what is the age, race, gender, and socioeconomic breakdown of the missing in your jurisdiction?[*]
- What percentage of missing persons cases are unfounded, and what is the nature of these cases (i.e., why were they reported missing, and why was the report later determined to be unfounded)?
- What is the average amount of time missing for each missing persons category, and what percentage of missing persons cases are still unresolved after one month, six months, a year? What is the nature of unresolved missing persons cases?
- For those who returned on their own, did they return to the place they had left? If not, what other places are return sites?
- Where did missing persons go while they were missing?

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[*] Some states have commissioned counts of the actual numbers of missing and murdered Indigenous people (MMIP) in their states.

- What percentage of missing persons are repeats (i.e., have been reported missing before), and what is the nature of repeat-missing cases (e.g., runaways from care, elderly with dementia)?
- How long are the different types of missing persons missing? For each category of missing, what is the time lag until discovery, and what factors contribute to the time lag?
- What percentage of missing persons have orders of protection against another person, and what percentage have histories of domestic violence victimization?
- What percentage of missing persons have mental health issues? What percentage have attempted or threatened suicide?
- What percentage of missing persons incidents involve some sort of arrest? What is the nature of those arrests?
- What is the nature of runaway cases? What is the average age and demographic profile of runaways?
- Are missing persons being victimized while they are missing?
- How often is foul play suspected in missing persons reports? If these cases are handled differently, what is the difference?

## Reporters, caregivers, and custodians

- What proportion of runaways run away from custodial care, assisted living, or foster care?
- Who makes missing persons reports (e.g., family, partners, friends, employers, schools), and how are these reports made (by phone, in person)?
- For those missing persons who did not return on their own and were discovered, where were they discovered, and by whom (police, family, others)?
- What percentage of juvenile runaways are arrested and officially processed by the juvenile justice system, and what determines whether an arrest is made versus an informal response?
- How do missing persons cases affect those who reported them as missing? What resources are available for the families and friends of the missing?
- Are there complaints from the community about how police handle missing persons cases?
- What advocacy groups in your community work with family and friends of the missing to provide additional resources, including lists, photos, and descriptions of missing persons?

### Third parties

- What proportion of missing persons went missing with another person? Who are these other people?
- Does the agency have an up-to-date list of registered sex offenders in the area?
- What percentage of incidents involve crimes such as child molestation, kidnapping, rape, homicide, illegal immigration, or human trafficking?
- Are there offenders in your area who have been linked to other cases of missing persons (e.g., child abductions, child molestation, violence against sex workers)?
- For chronic runaways, are there parents or other guardians who should be investigated for abuse and neglect?
- Are missing persons engaging in criminal activity while missing? What types of crime do they commit? Are they repeat offenders?
- What proportion of found runaways are located while residing with someone who harbored them?
- What is known about harborers and their motives for harboring runaways?

### Locations/times

- Where do the different categories of missing persons go missing from—schools, home, child custodial care, adult facilities (day centers, nursing homes, assisted living facilities)?
- Are missing persons reports coming from certain places in your jurisdiction? Are there hot spots for missing persons reports?
- Are there locations where missing persons are commonly found? What is known about those places?
- Are missing persons reports seasonal? Do they occur more frequently after special events or on certain days of the week?

## Current responses

- What services have been used or could be used to remedy the chronically or repeat missing?

- Are cases removed from NCIC within three days of discovery?

- Are all local missing persons cases shared with the state clearinghouse for missing persons, NCMEC, and NamUs?

- Does your agency have a family liaison for all missing persons cases?

- What is your agency's policy for accepting missing persons reports for persons with outstanding warrants?

- What do police and other local agencies do to encourage missing persons reports and to follow up on their resolutions?

- What is the policy of the prosecutor's office regarding runaways and harboring runaways?

- What services exist in the community to prevent persons from going missing and to encourage their safe return?

- What percentage of missing persons use relevant services after their return (e.g., shelters, electronic tracking aids, counseling)?

- What is your agency's agreement with other entities for searches (e.g., internal search teams, search teams from other agencies, K-9 search)?

- What partnerships exist between your agency and domestic violence shelters?

- What cooperative agreements exist between your agency and other law enforcement agencies to assist in missing persons and related investigations?

- What cooperative agreements exist between your agency and schools, hospitals, runaway shelters, and child protective services, including for foster children and other children in care, regarding the release of protected information needed in missing persons cases?

- Are fingerprints of missing persons retrieved (e.g., from records systems or personal items) and entered into the Integrated Automated Fingerprint Identification System (IAFIS)?

- Are dental records (or at least the name of the missing person's dentist) retrieved for persons missing longer than 30 days?

- Has DNA been collected from family members for a possible later match to unidentified dead?

- Has missing persons information been compared to local coroner and medical examiner records of unidentified dead?

## Measuring your effectiveness

Measurement allows you to determine to what degree your efforts have succeeded and suggests how you might modify your responses if they are not producing the intended results.

You should take measures of your problem *before* you implement responses, to determine how serious the problem is, and *after* you implement them, to determine whether those measures have been effective. Where possible, you should take all measures in both the target area and the surrounding area. For more detailed guidance on measuring effectiveness, including outcome/impact measures and process measures, see Problem-Solving Tools Guide No. 1, *Assessing Responses to Problems, 2nd Edition* (https://portal.cops.usdoj.gov/resourcecenter?item=cops-p034) and Problem-Solving Tools Guide No. 10, *Analyzing Crime Displacement and Diffusion* (https://portal.cops.usdoj.gov/resourcecenter?item=cops-p167).

The following are potentially useful *outcome* measures of the effectiveness of responses to missing persons; they enable you to determine the *impact* of your strategies on the overall problem:

- Reduced number of missing persons
- Increased number or percentage of missing persons located and returned home safely
- Decreased length of time persons are missing
- Increased number of missing persons reports (if there is reason to believe that a significant percentage of missing persons are not reported to police)
- Reduced harm occurring to missing persons while they are missing
- Reduced number of repeat or chronically missing persons

The following are potentially useful *process* evaluation measures for missing persons; they will measure the extent to which your various strategies were implemented as planned:

- Increased number of missing persons using referral services
- Reduced amount of time between the time a person is last seen and the time police are first contacted
- Reduced time and resources needed to search for and recover missing persons
- Improved early identification of high-risk cases most likely to involve endangered missing persons
- Increased satisfaction with police services for missing persons

# Responses to the Problem of Missing Persons

Your analysis of your local missing persons problem should give you a better understanding of the factors contributing to it. Once you have analyzed your local problem and established a baseline for measuring effectiveness, you should consider possible responses to address the problem.

The following response strategies provide a foundation of ideas for addressing your particular problem. These strategies are drawn from a variety of research studies and police reports. Several of these strategies may apply to your community's problem.

It is critical that you tailor responses to local circumstances and that you can justify each response based on reliable analysis. In most cases, an effective strategy will involve implementing several different responses. Law enforcement responses alone are seldom effective in reducing or solving the problem.

Do not limit yourself to considering what police can do: rather, carefully consider whether others in your community share responsibility for the problem and can help police better respond to it. The responsibility of responding, in some cases, may need to be shifted toward those who have the capacity to implement more effective responses. (For more detailed information on shifting and sharing responsibility, see Response Guide No. 3, *Shifting and Sharing Responsibility for Public Safety Problems* [https://portal.cops.usdoj.gov/resourcecenter?item=cops-w0716].)

## General considerations for an effective response strategy

1. **Collaborating with other agencies.** Create formal partnerships with other law enforcement agencies, schools, hospitals, care facilities, fire and rescue agencies, and other stakeholders to create prevention and intervention strategies. Consider establishing a missing persons advisory committee comprising representatives of all key agencies. Establish search protocols with fire, emergency, and other police personnel to coordinate search resources (e.g., canine, aviation, and dive resources).[127] Having partnership agreements with other agencies and organizations in a position to provide assistance in such serious cases will dramatically increase the likelihood of quickly resolving a case.

   A significant issue is the use of agency records to locate missing persons. Finding out if missing persons are in jail may be relatively easy for police, but finding out if they are in the hospital, in a domestic violence shelter, or enrolled in a school in another state is more difficult.

To access school records, medical and dental care records, child welfare records, domestic violence shelters, and runaway shelter records, you will have to negotiate memoranda of understanding (MOU) with a number of different agencies and will need parental consent in cases involving the release of juvenile records.[128] Time is lost during the critical early hours of a missing persons investigation if police are forced to get court orders to find out if a person has been admitted to or released from a hospital or a psychiatric facility or is present in a juvenile guardian home. Limited information may be available; in the case of domestic violence shelters, confidentiality is required by federal statute, and police are not exempt from such restrictions.[129]

Even other government agencies may not release information that could help in missing persons cases. Since 2016, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) has been authorized to release information about the location of persons filing tax returns who are believed to be fugitive parents who have abducted their children.[130] The Social Security numbers of abducted children and their abductors often appear on tax returns, along with their current location.

a. **Working with social service agencies.** Collaborating with social service agencies can reduce the amount of time police spend on cases and can especially contribute to a reduction of repeat runaways and repeat dementia wandering cases. Establish collaborations for sharing agencies' proprietary databases.[131] Collaboration with domestic violence shelters, juvenile guardian homes, assisted living facilities, and family respite programs can prevent persons from going missing and can develop placement facilities and other options for at-risk persons.

Domestic violence shelters may be housing persons who have been reported as missing, and you will need to develop close working relationships to protect privacy but also resolve missing persons cases. Counseling centers and various advocacy groups can provide police with information about their client group.

Child protection agencies and foster care providers can provide data about placement numbers, high-risk persons, and those missing from care; they may also be able to provide detailed information after the return of missing children, such as the location of the child while missing and persons involved in the child's going missing.

Share your police missing persons report form with child welfare agencies so they will know what sort of information police need in missing persons cases.

b.  **Working with family court.** Work with family court to provide services in custody disputes and contentious divorces and in cases of domestic violence, including training and information about cross-cultural and international marriages. The Fresno (California) Police Department developed a model program to reduce child custody disputes and provide controlled exchange environments for parents with no contact between the exchanging parties. A safe exchange program, involving formal authorities, for parents sharing custody of children may help to reduce the temptation to abduct children.

c.  **Working with the prosecutor's office.** Prosecutors can provide information about orders of protection and child custody status and about the status of laws regarding police access to information (e.g., active cell phone records and "pings"). In family abductions, police will have to verify the most recent custody orders and work with the custodial parent to retrieve information and authorizations for information from schools and medical facilities. Significant federal legislation affecting child abduction cases exists, but you should also become familiar with legislation in your state and consider regular training sessions with prosecutors' offices.[132]

d.  **Working with social service and nonprofits that serve homeless, mentally ill, or sex worker populations.** Partnerships with local homeless service providers, mental health centers, and groups that provide services for sex workers have found success in lowering the number of these types of missing persons cases.[133]

    Mental health centers and veterans' services, including hospitals, may be able to provide information to help locate missing persons. The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) provides guidance for families of the homeless or mentally ill.[134] Families of missing mentally ill adults may need to consider involuntary commitment options, guardianship and conservatorship laws in their state, and other options for community mental health treatment.

    Model strategies exist for identification programs for sex workers in the event that they are suspected victims of foul play.[135] Agencies that work closely with sex workers may be able to enlist them to help locate their missing.

e.  **Working with coroners and medical examiners.** Coroners and medical examiners can work with police agencies to provide DNA, fingerprint, X-ray, and dental information on unidentified dead for upload into the NamUs system, permitting a national search and a possible match to missing persons across the

country. The Doe Network, a volunteer organization in existence since 2000, also provides another resource for information on unresolved missing persons and unidentified dead cases.

f.  **Working with schools.** To release school records, it may be necessary to obtain parents' or other guardians' written consent. Developing joint protocols and record-sharing agreements between schools and police can reduce the amount of time police spend gathering necessary information. Schools can also serve as primary places for prevention by educating teachers and staff about the warning signs of runaway or abduction and by providing information on social services available. San Diego (California) police developed a model worksheet as part of a school-based program for educating children and parents about what to do when parents do not arrive to pick their children up; the worksheet included information about children's routes to and from school and the names and phone numbers of their friends. When schools keep this information, police may not even be contacted about a missing child because the child is discovered by parents or school officials.[136] Connecting the families of schoolchildren who go missing for benign reasons with social service resources can help prevent repeat events.

g.  **Working with medical providers.** Medical providers can work with police to identify patients in health care facilities who have been reported as missing. You should seek to develop joint protocols and record-sharing agreements that allow for parental consent for release of medical records of juveniles or of those under other guardianship (e.g., for use with Silver Alerts in cases where medical issues are necessary for alert).

h.  **Working with foster care and children's guardian homes.** Educate child welfare providers to assure they have recent photographs of all children in their care. Ensure that police have access to child welfare representatives 24 hours a day. Establish policies for what to do when a missing child is located, including in another jurisdiction. Enhance collaboration and cooperation—e.g., by creating joint protocols for handling missing-from-care cases. Engage in joint training. Children's guardian homes should immediately notify police when a child is missing from care and provide recent photographs and other information (e.g., family and friends, previous missing episodes, substance use issues).

i.  **Working with high-risk facilities.** At facilities from which clients frequently go missing, such as child guardian homes, assisted living facilities, nursing homes, and mental health institutions, develop reliable and dignified identification systems

for persons who might not have the mental capacity to report their identity or residence if they are located. With appropriate attention to consent and privacy, encourage facility managers to make location-tracking technology available to clients who are at risk of going missing (see response No. 8 in appendix A).

Assisted living facilities can also provide information, including recent photographs of residents, their previous missing episodes, and their possible destinations.

j.  **Working with state- and national-level missing persons clearinghouses.** State missing persons clearinghouses can provide information about nonprofits, private agencies, and other entities that can provide assistance. For those cases where a child is thought to be in jeopardy, Team Adam provides police with extensive resources, including search-and-rescue, computer forensics, equipment, and family advocacy for cases involving missing and abducted children as well as sexually exploited children. Team Adam members include retired police professionals who provide free assistance at the site through a program run by NCMEC.[137]

Entities such as NamUs can provide information about the characteristics of the unidentified dead across the United States for possible matches to missing persons and can publicize details of active missing persons cases. The Doe Network also contains information on thousands of unidentified dead and missing persons cases, and their volunteers have successfully brought case closure to many families.[138]

k.  **Working with local media.** Media can be a critical resource for distributing information to the local community and for encouraging civilians to share information with police. The media have been criticized for giving greater coverage to cases in which young, White, physically attractive women are missing than to other cases;[139] whatever criteria media use to determine coverage, you shouldn't take for granted that all cases will receive the coverage you desire.

l.  **Working with employers.** Employers may be able to provide information about a missing person's last whereabouts, as well as fingerprint and other contact information.

m.  **Working with tribal police and Tribal Governments.** A major goal of the MMIP Coordinator positions created by the U.S. Attorney General in 2020 was to use a best-practices guideline, written by the tribes, for missing persons cases

and assist the tribes in developing their own Tribal Community Response Plans (TCRP) designed around their culture, demographics, resources, and geography. It promotes a collaborative approach, with law enforcement, victim services, media, and community working together on missing persons cases. The pilot TCRPs were created in Montana, Michigan, and Alaska and have been shown to be successful.

Partnerships between tribal and local law enforcement agencies can strengthen their efforts to prevent and effectively respond to MMIP cases using a fair, victim-centered, and trauma-informed approach. Tribal, federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies have various tools to support communication and collaborative efforts to prevent and respond effectively to MMIP cases, including MOUs or memoranda of agreement (MOA) and other relationship-enhancing and shared-resource documents.

The U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) has established an initiative for effective multijurisdictional collaboration in MMIP cases. The initiative includes training and technical assistance on MMIP partnerships; MOU/MOA development, implementation, and administration; and developing model protocols and procedures for handling new and unresolved MMIP cases (See Appendix C).

2. **Training police and other emergency response personnel.** Training increases understanding of the different categories of missing persons, improving information-gathering, search, and post-recovery responses.[140] All police officers handling missing persons cases should also be trained in legislation, liability, orders of protection and orders of custody, case management, search issues, and working with families. Dispatchers, as the first point of contact, should also be trained in how to calm reporting persons and get accurate and necessary information. Police may also need training in managing children's return and offering additional resources, how to interview recovered missing persons, when to seek physical exams for them, and when to use referral services such as mental health professionals.* Police, fire and emergency rescue personnel and volunteers might also benefit from some aspects of missing persons response training, particularly for cases involving search and

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* Training opportunities exist through the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's Missing and Exploited Children Training and Technical Assistance Program, (https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/tta-provider/missing-and-exploited-children-training-and-technical-assistance-program-mectta), NamUs (https://namus.nij.ojp.gov/events/upcoming-events), and NCMEC (https://www.missingkids.org/education/training).

rescue.[141] In the United Kingdom, specially trained police search advisers (PolSA) are available to assist in gathering information and developing a search strategy for missing persons.[142]

3. **Educating the public.**\* Encourage families and caregivers to keep up-to-date pictures of children and others at risk of going missing. Encourage people to call the police immediately when someone is missing and to let the police know when the missing person has returned or when their whereabouts are known. Increasing public awareness of the importance of prompt reports to police is critical, because delayed reporting hampers searches and investigations.[143]

   Encourage reporting of the "missing missing." Implement programs that allow sex workers and homeless persons to share information about possible missing persons with police without putting themselves at risk of arrest or harassment. Programs such as the Arlington, Texas, citizen notification and CrimeWeb program provide a ZIP code– and Internet-based email alert system for public safety issues, including missing persons.[144]

   Even though the effectiveness of many child abduction awareness and education programs is unknown, logic suggests that you should not limit prevention messages to the relatively rare abductions by strangers ("stranger danger"). Prevention messages should also cover abductions by acquaintances, including teaching children rules about going places, even with someone they know.

4. **Mandating reporting of missing children.** The Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act, 42 U.S.C. § 671 (a)(35) was enacted in September 2014. State agencies had two years to comply with the requirement to report all missing children to NCMEC. As a result, intakes rose dramatically between 2015 and 2017. This pattern also held true for Indigenous children.[145]

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\*   See Response Guide No. 5, *Crime Prevention Publicity Campaigns* for further information.

## Specific responses to missing persons

5. **Enhancing information gathered from reporting parties.** The standard preliminary police investigation of a reported missing person can be enhanced by asking the reporting party to complete a self-administered form that prompts them to recall details about the missing person's description, state of mind, actions just prior to going missing, and habits. This self-administered form might be completed prior to the responding officer's arrival, while the officer is at the scene, or after the officer has left. A well-designed form based on the science of memory recall can help the reporter recall potentially important details. It can also suggest tasks the reporter and others concerned about the missing person can perform to further assist the police investigation and search. This deeper engagement can help alleviate reporters' anxiety and sense of helplessness.[146] Establishing a means by which the reporters can relay new information to police on an ongoing basis can further enhance this technique. Caretakers for people at high risk of going missing can be encouraged to complete and save forms that provide details about the at-risk person that they can give to responding officers, thereby speeding up the information-gathering phase and getting the search underway more quickly. Alternatively, caretakers might enter this information into an online form that police can readily access.[147]

6. **Enhancing case files.**[*] The identification of missing persons can be facilitated with additional information from dental records, DNA, and fingerprints. Many states' laws require that dental records be requested and retrieved for all missing persons after some period (typically 30–60 days). Despite these laws, one study found that dental records had been obtained for only four percent of missing persons.[148] It is critical to have at least the name of the missing person's dentist on file if remains are found at some point.[149] Although dental records, DNA, and fingerprints are most likely to be used to match remains with known identities, this evidence can also be used to identify living located missing persons in cases of amnesia and other cognitive dysfunctions, as well as to identify infants or children who had been abducted but who may be recovered years later.

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[*]  See Morewitz and Sturdy Colls *Handbook of Missing Persons* (2016) for further information. The volume includes several chapters devoted to forensic analysis of unidentified remains.
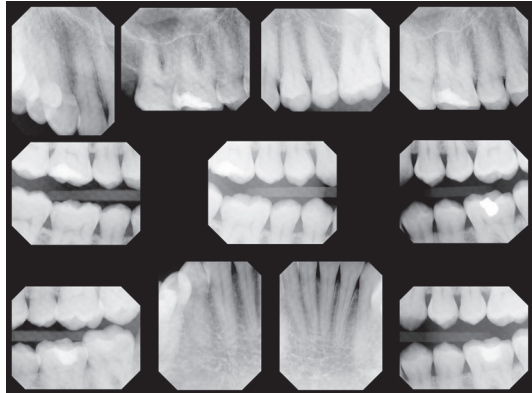
Legally accepted methods of identifying the dead include visual identification by next of kin, fingerprints and footprints, dental records, and DNA. The National Dental Image / Information Repository (NDIR) allows storage of dental information for missing, unidentified, and wanted persons—more information than can be entered into NCIC. NamUs also stores and shares dental information.



*Steve Wood/Shutterstock*

Dental records can be used to match the unidentified dead with missing persons across the country.

DNA can be the critical connection for matching the unidentified dead to missing persons cases.[150] DNA can be submitted to the FBI's National Missing Person DNA Database, and DNA profiles of family members can also be included in the NamUs files for missing and unidentified persons. The FBI's Combined DNA Index System (CODIS) and National DNA Index System (NDIS) store DNA profiles from across the United States.[151] Backlogs in DNA analysis interfere with a local police agency's ability to successfully and timely resolve missing persons cases. Despite major efforts to speed up laboratory analysis in missing persons cases, national, state, regional, and local labs still struggle to keep up with growing demand.[152] The NamUs system includes access to a DNA laboratory that is available free to police working on missing persons and unidentified dead cases, and it is assisting with the overall DNA backlog in these cases.[153]

Fingerprints, when available, can also be collected and added to missing persons case reports. The U.S. Visitor and Immigrant Status Indicator Technology program (US-VISIT) fingerprints most non-U.S. citizens who enter the United States. Although the primary goal of this program is the identification of suspected terrorists, persons with criminal histories, and undocumented immigrants, in the event that these persons later go missing, authorities should remember that their fingerprints are likely on file with US-VISIT.[154] Similar programs exist in other countries, and these could serve as information sources in cases of international abductions.

7. **Promoting the use of endangered-missing advisories.** The AMBER (America's Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response) Alert system allows the media to generate public service announcements in cases of abducted children that meet specific criteria and thereby generate a short-term intense focus on that missing child.* AMBER Alerts were implemented by state by state and initially were intended for cases of abductions by strangers, but they have been expanded to include abductions by others, including family members. Once it has been established that an abduction has occurred, that the case has been entered into NCIC, that the child (age 17 or younger) is in danger, and that information exists to allow for a description of the victim and suspect, police can provide the information to the media, which can then broadcast alerts.[155] Facebook and NCMEC have launched a partnership to make AMBER Alerts available to Facebook users who live in the geographic area of the AMBER Alert.[156] In addition, a new national alert plan, the Personal Localized Alerting Network (PLAN), will alert the public to geographically targeted emergencies, including AMBER Alerts and other missing persons alerts via text messages to cell phones.[157] Participating wireless carriers will be able to distribute these alerts to persons with cell phones containing special chips and software. As of 2022, AMBER Alerts had been credited with helping recover 1,127 (an average of 43 annually) children in the United States.[158,†] The state of Washington created the first MIP Alert, similar to an AMBER or Silver Alert for missing Indigenous persons.

The AMBER Alert system allows the media to generate public service announcements in cases of abducted children that meet specific criteria and thereby generate a short-term intense focus on that missing child.

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* AMBER Alert was part of the 2003 Congressional PROTECT Act (Prosecutorial Remedies and Other Tools to End the Exploitation of Children Today). Similar AMBER Alert systems operate in Australia, New Zealand, Mexico, Canada, and U.S. Indian country, and a Child Rescue Alert system operates in the United Kingdom. For detailed guidance on managing AMBER Alerts, see Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (2019a, 2019b).

† Annual AMBER Alert reports that summarize an analysis of alerts and recoveries can be accessed from the NCMEC website at https://www.missingkids.org/gethelpnow/amber.

Silver Alerts were originally intended to facilitate searches for older adults with mental impairments, but most state adoptions of the Silver Alert program extend the coverage to all mentally impaired persons 18 and over. Unlike AMBER alerts, there is no nationally coordinated program, but most U.S. states have developed Silver Alert systems.[159]

As missing persons alerts of all types increase, so too does the risk that the public will become less attentive to them, thereby making them less effective.[160] AMBER alerts are not as effective at preventing harm to children as many would like to believe they are: Most alerts are related to child custody disputes rather than to stranger abductions, and children are seldom located within the short time period in which children tend to be harmed if their abductor intends to do so.[161] Until research is more definitive, on balance it makes sense for police to continue issuing AMBER and Silver alerts, doing their best to issue them when there is reason to believe the risk to the missing child, senior, or disabled person is high and there is a reasonable chance of the public spotting the missing person or a vehicle in which they are believed to be.

Some jurisdictions have found innovative ways to bring longer-term attention to unresolved missing children cases. The Washington State Patrol's Homeward Bound Project worked with trucking companies and other interested parties to place large pictures of missing children on the sides of commercial trailers to create rolling billboards that would be seen by many more people over a wider area than stationary alerts. One of their selected missing children was recovered as a result of the publicity.[162]

Also, the Federal Communications Commission has proposed rules for a new emergency alert code, Ashanti Alerts, intended to provide additional tools to increase law enforcement's ability to find missing Native and Indigenous people.[163]

8. **Promoting the use of search and information technology.** Technological innovations can aid in searches for missing persons, often enabling caretakers to find the missing person without police assistance. Project Lifesaver is a nonprofit organization that uses global positioning satellite (GPS) tracking devices to find persons with Alzheimer's disease, autism spectrum disorders, and Down syndrome. Less costly short-range wireless devices such as radio frequency identification (RFID) or near field communication (NFC) have also been used.[164],* Such devices can

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\* See also the Avon and Somerset Constabulary's (2019) responses to sexual exploitation of missing children.

shorten searches considerably. Even tracking the location of a missing person's cell phone or other electronic device can be helpful in locating the person. As parents increasingly provide their children with cell phones, they are more likely to be able to locate their missing child without police assistance.[165] Sending text messages to the phone of a missing person from an organization that can ensure confidentiality can encourage the missing person to at least report that they are alive and safe or to accept assistance.[166]

GPS technology can also be programmed to send an alert if the person to whom it is attached travels outside a specified area. This helps safeguard people before they go missing.

For some missing persons, finding them physically is less difficult than identifying them and returning them to where they belong once they have been found. Technology such as near field communication and QR codes stores information electronically that can be read by police or others who encounter them, telling them who the wearer of the technology is, whom to contact if found, and where they belong.

iFIND is a software program developed in the United Kingdom that provides searchers guidance in looking in particular locations for missing persons based on an accumulated history of where other missing persons of a similar profile were located.[167]

The increased deployment of surveillance cameras in public places—including the widespread use of doorbell cameras—has potential to enhance police investigations of missing persons. If the missing person's location can be determined at any point in time, searching for camera footage in that vicinity might provide additional clues to guide the search for the missing person. Machine-learning technology can make searching large amounts of video footage, as well as other online information sources, more efficient.[168] The increased use of automated license plate readers by police is also likely to increase the probabilities of locating vehicles associated with missing persons alerts.

Databases containing information about persons known to be at high risk for going missing can also facilitate returning the person home when they are found. Irvine (California) police developed a model program for gathering biographical information, previous wandering patterns, current photographs (in digital format for ease of distribution), and cognitive information for at-risk persons with cognitive disorders.[169]

The FBI has developed a mobile app, known as Child ID, for parents to store information about their children (e.g., height, weight, photos) on their cell phones, to be shared with police if the child goes missing.[170]

9. **Enlisting volunteers to support missing persons searches, investigations, and prevention.** Many jurisdictions have implemented volunteer programs to assist police with programs relating to missing persons. Volunteers help in activities such as verifying addresses in sex offender registries, replacing batteries in electronic tracking devices, and assisting in active investigations by canvassing door to door, providing perimeter controls, providing relief services to police and other volunteers, helping with searches, answering phones, and maintaining missing persons files. There are model protocols for the recruitment, training, and coordination of civilian volunteers.[171]

10. **Providing families with information and support.** Information on the status of a missing persons investigation should be shared with family and friends, as allowed by law and as the investigation warrants. Families need to understand what to expect as investigations progress. For example, families need to know that if adults are voluntarily missing, police will not divulge their location when it is discovered if the missing persons request privacy. Designating a single person as the point of contact with the family or other reporter of the missing person is helpful. Families should also be apprised of counseling resources. Team HOPE offers support resources for families with missing and exploited children and can assist families in dealing with the psychological impacts of missing child cases. The Doe Network also provides support and assistance to the families of missing persons. The Australia Federal Police's National Missing Persons Coordination Centre has a model program for family support; its website offers resources for dealing with ambiguous loss, common mental health issues for families of missing persons, continued support after the location of the missing person, and support services for the families of the long-term missing.[172]

11. **Facilitating at-risk persons' return home.** For missing persons found far from their home, returning them home can be a challenge. The Greyhound bus company provides free bus transportation home for recovered abducted and runaway children, in collaboration with NCMEC and the National Runaway Safeline (formerly "Switchboard"), respectively.[173] Many communities have emergency shelters operated by nonprofit organizations for runaway and at-risk children.

12. **Ensuring proper cancellation of resolved cases.** Remove recovered missing persons alerts from NCIC within three days of the person's recovery. Follow up regularly with family members and other reporting parties to determine whether the missing person has returned. Reporters often neglect to notify police if the missing person is located without police assistance.

    Beyond formally cancelling missing persons entries in NCIC, try to conduct follow-up interviews with the missing person and caretakers to learn more about why the person went missing, where they went, and what happened to them while they were missing. These interviews might be conducted by police but are probably better conducted by social service providers. Such interviews are required by law in the United Kingdom but not always conducted thoroughly or in timely fashion.[174] The information gathered might help prevent a repeat disappearance of that individual, and it will improve overall understanding of the circumstances under which people go missing in that jurisdiction. Also, periodically audit your police department's missing persons case files to determine which missing persons remain missing.

13. **Focusing on repeat missing persons.** Link missing persons to appropriate social services when they return to prevent repeat occurrences and to improve future police responses.[175] The Lancashire (United Kingdom) Constabulary developed a model program for working with runaways and other missing children with a thorough post-return interview by persons with whom juveniles will feel comfortable sharing their experiences. This project focused on identifying children who had been subject to sexual exploitation and who may not have even recognized it themselves.[176]

14. **Planning for disasters and catastrophes.** Conduct case scenario and tabletop exercises to prepare to effectively manage a large volume of missing persons cases after a tornado, flood, fire, hurricane, explosion, or other natural disaster. The International Committee of the Red Cross aids in finding missing persons after large-scale disasters through its "Restoring Family Links" web pages, which allow people to register the name of a missing person and contact details in the local language.[177]

15. **Promoting legislation that allows police access to information.** Support legislation that allows police immediate access to cell phone records and computer activity for finding missing persons believed to be in imminent danger.[*]

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[*] The Kelsey Smith Act remains pending in Congress as of this publication. Several states have already passed a version of this law that allows police to request and obtain call information from providers of mobile services when the case involves emergency situations that involve death or risk of physical harm and that are not necessarily yet criminal investigations.

## Responses with limited effectiveness

16. **Handling cases over the telephone.** Although the initial contact may be made over the telephone and police should make it easy for civilians to file a missing persons report (by telephone, fax, or email), a missing persons detective or uniformed officer should be dispatched to the reporting person's location and to the location the missing person was last seen as soon as possible after the initial report is made to canvass for information, to search the area where the missing person was last seen, and to talk to potential witnesses or others with information.

17. **Rejecting cases for missing persons with outstanding warrants.** If an NCIC record already exists for an individual because they have an outstanding warrant, the NCIC record should be modified to note that the person is also missing and may be endangered.

18. **Arresting juveniles for running away from home.** A punitive response to runaways may decrease the likelihood of reporting by parents and other custodians and may make it less likely that runaways will offer police information about their whereabouts when missing or about criminal and sexual victimization.

19. **Forcing runaway juveniles to return home.** Children may be fleeing abusive relatives or may be thrownaway, abandoned, or deserted children.

# Appendix A. Summary of Responses to Missing Persons

Table 1 summarizes responses to missing persons, the mechanisms by which they are intended to work, the conditions under which they ought to work best, and some factors you should consider before implementing a particular response. It is critical that you tailor responses to local circumstances and that you can justify each response based on reliable analysis. In most cases, an effective strategy will involve implementing several different responses. Law enforcement responses alone are seldom effective in reducing or solving the problem.

**Table 1.** Summary of Responses to Missing Persons

| Response No. | Response | How it works | Works best If . . . | Considerations |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **General Considerations for an Effective Response Strategy** | | | | |
| 1 | Collaborating with other agencies | Facilitates searches for, recoveries of, and prevention of missing persons. | . . . confidentiality issues are addressed in MOUs; participants meet regularly and share information and concerns; case information is shared with NCIC, NCMEC, and NamUs; custody order and protective orders are shared among involved agencies. | Determine if your collaboration is for services, training, or information exchange; assess agencies' capacity for new referrals; ensure that collaborations cannot violate information privacy regulations or tribal sovereignty; avoid interagency conflicts through transparency and common goals. |
| 2 | Training police and other emergency response personnel | Increases understanding of types of missing persons; improves searches, investigations, recoveries, and prevention. | . . . training is relevant to all personnel and covers demographic factors. | Training will need to be updated and repeated. |

| Response No. | Response | How it works | Works best If . . . | Considerations |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3 | Educating the public | Promotes prompt reporting, improves information to aid search, and improves prevention. | . . . target audience includes high-risk groups such as schoolchildren, sex workers, and home-less persons; mes-sage extends beyond stranger abductions. | Too much information may either saturate the public and cause less attention to be paid to missing persons or inflate public view of the frequency of rare types of missing persons cases. |
| 4 | Mandating reporting of missing children | Requires reporting of missing children to NCMEC. | . . . missing children are reported in a timely manner. | A NCMEC case manage-ment team will work directly with the family and the law enforcement agency investi-gating the case. |
| *Specific responses to missing persons* | | | | |
| 5 | Enhancing information gathered from reporting parties | Improves risk assess-ments and focuses search for missing persons. | . . . reporter is aided by a checklist based on memory recall science. | Requires ongoing communica-tion between reporter and police. |
| 6 | Enhancing case files | Increases likelihood of identifying miss-ing persons once located. | . . . file includes miss-ing persons report data (e.g., age, race, gender, location) as well as length of time missing; dental, DNA, and fingerprint infor-mation are collected when case is active and shared with NCIC and NamUs. | Creating detailed reports and proactive plans is labor inten-sive; law enforcement may need to consult with forensic anthropologists, dentists, medical examiners, and fam-ily doctors. |
| 7 | Promoting the use of endangered-missing advisories | Increases likelihood of finding recently missing persons by widening and intensi-fying search. | . . . agreements exist between police and broadcasters for media alerts; alerts are localized. | Too many alerts may reduce citizens' vigilance; alerts have not been shown to be highly effective. |

| Response No. | Response | How it works | Works best If . . . | Considerations |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8 | Promoting the use of search and information technology | Increases likelihood of finding missing persons and reduces search time; increases likelihood of returning located person home. | . . . electronic tracking devices are properly maintained; information databases are updated. | Missing person can become separated from electronic tracking devices; widespread use of technology can be costly. |
| 9 | Enlisting volunteers to support missing persons searches, investigations, and prevention | Increases likelihood of finding, recovering, and preventing missing persons by enhancing resources. | . . . volunteer programs are established in advance and include background checks, training, and proper management of volunteers. | Requires some additional expenditure to properly manage volunteer programs. |
| 10 | Providing families with information and support | Alleviates some of families' anxiety. | . . . a designated liaison trained in emotional and legal issues of missing persons is assigned to the family; other social services are available. | Police may not be able to meet all of families' needs and desires. |
| 11 | Facilitating at-risk persons' return home | Increases likelihood located missing person will be returned home safely and quickly. | . . . financial assistance is available for immediate and safe transportation. | Most relevant to cases in which missing person is located far from home. |
| 12 | Ensuring proper cancellation of resolved cases | Prevents wasting resources searching for missing persons who have already been located. | . . . family liaison or lead detective makes regular contact with family/reporter to update status; persons who report missing are strongly encouraged to report updates to police. | Requires expenditure of some resources to confirm that missing person has actually been discovered/returned. |

| Response No. | Response | How it works | Works best If . . . | Considerations |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 13 | Focusing on repeat missing persons | Increases likelihood of preventing repeat instances of disappearing; conserves police resources. | . . . cases are referred to family court and social services; chronically missing persons and their families take advantage of services. | Social services can be costly and not always effective. |
| 14 | Planning for disasters and catastrophes | Facilitates large-scale search and recovery operations. | . . . agencies train for large-scale missing incidents. | Resources may be expended planning for unlikely or rare catastrophic events. |
| 15 | Promoting legislation that allows police access to information | Increases likelihood of promptly locating missing persons. | . . . state-level legislation authorizes information sharing; efficient protocols are established and followed. | Voluntary information-sharing agreements might be executed even if mandatory legislation is not enacted. |
| *Responses with limited effectiveness* | | | | |
| 16 | Handling cases over the telephone | N/A | N/A | Telephone may be appropriate in limited cases or for initial contact only. |
| 17 | Rejecting cases for missing persons with outstanding warrants | N/A | N/A | May add to missing persons caseload; may necessitate change in standard case management for missing persons. |
| 18 | Arresting juveniles for running away from home | N/A | N/A | Adjudication is unlikely for runaways, so arrest is inefficient and can deter reporting of runaway juveniles. |
| 19 | Forcing juvenile runaways to return home | N/A | N/A | Could return juvenile to an unsafe environment and discourage them from obtaining assistance. |

# Appendix B. Selected National Legislation Relating to Missing Persons

## United States

The following U.S. laws enacted between 1980 and 2022 have improved the tools available to police in missing persons cases. You should also consult local legal counsel to determine specific state or local laws governing missing persons cases.

- **1980.** Parental Kidnapping Prevention Act, 28 U.S.C. §1738(a). Extends federal investigation resources to local authorities, allows abductors to be charged under the Fleeing Felon Act, 18 U.S.C. §1073 (1961), and allows for the Federal Parent Locator Service, 42 USC §663 (1988), to be used in cases of child abduction.

- **1982.** Missing Children Act of 1982, 28 U.S.C. §534. Encourages investigation of all missing-child cases and entry of those cases into the NCIC Missing Person File; makes FBI resources available in missing-child cases.

- **1983.** Creation of FBI's unidentified person file. Allows comparison of missing child cases to information about unidentified bodies.

- **1984.** Missing Children's Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C. §5771. Requires periodic studies by Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention to determine the number of missing and recovered children each year (four reports were published between 2002 and 2022) and creates the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC).

- **1988.** International Child Abduction Remedies Act, 42 U.S.C. §§11601-11610. Includes funding for the Transitional Living Program for Homeless Youth and enforcement of the Hague Convention rules for cases of internationally abducted children.

- **1990.** National Child Search Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C. §§5779-80. Requires immediate entry of juvenile missing persons cases into NCIC, abolishes waiting periods for missing persons and unidentified dead reports, and requires annual statistical summaries of the number and nature of missing children.

- **1993.** International Parental Kidnapping Crime Act, 18 U.S.C. §1204. Makes it a federal crime to remove a child from the United States and to interfere with custodial/parental rights.

- **1994.** Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, 42 U.S.C. 136. Includes Jacob Wetterling Crimes Against Children and Sexually Violent Offender Registration Act (Megan's Law) (42 U.S.C. §14071). Requires a 10-year registration requirement for offenders convicted of sexually violent offenses or criminal offenses against a victim who

is a minor. Sexually violent predators have additional registration requirements, and the Child Safety Act establishes supervised visitation centers for visits between children and family members.

- **1994.** Nation's Missing Children Organization, Inc. (NMCO). Assists law enforcement and families of missing persons with cases of missing children and adults.

- **1997.** Uniform Child Custody Jurisdiction and Enforcement Act, 9(1A) U.L.A. 657. Codifies practices to reduce interstate conflict in child abduction cases; creates uniform practices in each state.

- **1998.** The Protection of Children from Sexual Predators Act, 18 U.S.C. §1. Provides protection for children from child pornography, increases penalties for repeat offenders in child-related crimes, and clarifies that there is no 24-hour rule before initiating a federal investigation in kidnappings of children.

- **1999.** Missing, Exploited, and Runaway Children Protection Act, 42 U.S.C. §5601. Funds the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC).

- **2000.** Child Abuse Prevention and Enforcement Act (Jennifer's Law), 42 U.S.C. §3711. Encourages the compilation of all information about deceased, unidentified individuals into NCIC.

- **2000.** Kristen's Act, 42 U.S.C. §14661. Establishes the National Center for Missing Adults and provides grants for the assistance of organizations to find missing adults.

- **2002.** Executive Order 13257. Designed to combat trafficking in persons and to enable prosecution of abductors.

- **2003.** Prosecutorial Remedies and Other Tools to End the Exploitation of Children Today Act, 18 U.S.C. §2252 and Suzanne's Law, 42 U.S.C. §5779(c). Changes the age of mandatory missing persons case entry into NCIC from under 18 to 21 years of age, includes enhanced AMBER Alert provisions, enhances sentencing for kidnapping, establishes a Code Adam program for children missing within a building, and changes the statute of limitations for child abductions.

- **2004.** Justice for All Act of 2004, 42 U.S.C. §13701. Establishes funding for DNA initiatives, including the identification of missing persons and the report *Identifying the Missing: Model State Legislation*.

- **2006.** Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act, 42 U.S.C. §16901. Amends the National Child Search Assistance Act to include a mandate that missing child cases are entered into NCIC within two hours of receipt of the report.

- **2008.** The Suzanne Lyall Campus Safety Act. Requires colleges to specify roles for campus, local, and state police in investigating violent crimes on campus, including those involving missing students.

- **2010.** Help Find the Missing Act (Billy's Law). Establishes funding for NamUs and for incentive grants for reporting missing persons and unidentified dead to NCIC, NamUs, and the National DNA Index System.

- **2018.** Ashlynne Mike AMBER Alert in Indian Country Act. Provides resources to enhance AMBER Alert systems on tribal lands.

- **2019.** Executive Order 13898. Establishes Operation Lady Justice to address issues relating to missing and murdered American Indians and Alaska Natives.

- **2020.** Missing Persons and Unidentified Remains Act of 2019. Provides federal funding to improve reporting of missing persons and identify unidentified remains. Funds use of "rescue beacons" in border areas to enable migrants crossing the U.S. Southwestern border to summon assistance. Enhances privacy rights in use of biometric evidence.

- **2020.** Savanna's Act. Clarifies the roles of Federal, state, and Tribal governments in the investigation of major crimes; increases coordination among governments; increases resources to tribal governments and police; increases and improves data collection on MMIP; increases tribal police access to national law enforcement databases; establishes guidelines to respond to MMIP cases; provides training and technical assistance.

- **2020.** Not Invisible Act. Increases coordination of efforts to reduce violent crime within Indian lands and against Indians.

- **2022.** U.S. Code Title 34, Subtitle I, Chapter 111, Subchapter IV: Missing Children. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention administers programs under this subchapter, including programs that prevent and address offenses committed against vulnerable children and support missing children's organizations, including the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

Go to www.NamUs.gov and click on "resources" to find legislation by state for missing persons.

## Canada

Canada's several provincial missing persons laws aim to do one or more of the following:[178]

- Define a "missing person," enabling police to employ a consistent definition across agencies in the province.
- Clarify the appropriate release of missing persons information and publishable information, such as news media appeals.
- Allow police to access some records not previously available or restricted and make emergency demands for such information.
- Allow police to apply for court orders to retrieve records or conduct searches in cases where a crime is not suspected.
- Enable officers to demand records directly in emergencies without a court order, such as from financial institutions, cell phone data from telecommunication providers, video footage from businesses, and health care and social service files.
- Mandate certain police investigative practices.

Specific provincial laws include the following:

- Ontario: Missing Persons Act, 2018, SO 2018, c. 3, Sched. 7. https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/18m03.
- British Columbia: Missing Persons Act, SBC 2014, Chapter 2, https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/14002_01.
- Alberta: Missing Persons Act, Statutes of Alberta, 2011, Chapter M-18.5, https://www.qp.alberta.ca/documents/Acts/m18p5.pdf.
- Manitoba: The Missing Persons Act. https://web2.gov.mb.ca/laws/statutes/ccsm/m199.php
- Saskatchewan: *The Missing Persons and Presumption of Death Amendment Act, 2019.* https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2019/march/15/missing-persons-legislation.

# Appendix C. Additional Resources for Police

## National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC)

- *Long-term Missing Child Guide for Law Enforcement: Strategies for Finding Long-term Missing Children.* Robert G. Lowery, Jr. and Robert Hoever (eds.). https://www.missingkids.org/content/dam/missingkids/pdfs/publications/ncmeclongtermmissingguide2016.pdf.

- *Checklist for Public-Safety Telecommunicators When Responding to Calls Pertaining to Missing, Abducted, and Sexually Exploited Children.* https://www.missingkids.org/content/dam/missingkids/pdfs/publications/nc200.pdf.

- *Investigative Checklist for First Responders.* https://www.missingkids.org/content/dam/missingkids/pdfs/publications/nc88.pdf.

## U.S. Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP)

- *A Law Enforcement Guide on International Parental Kidnapping.* https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh176/files/pubs/250606.pdf.

- *AMBER Alert in Indian Country: Investigative Checklist.* https://www.amber-ic.org.

# Appendix D. *Effective Multi-Jurisdictional Collaboration in Missing or Murdered Indigenous Persons (MMIP) Cases* eLearning Course

*Effective Multi-Jurisdictional Collaboration in Missing or Murdered Indigenous Persons (MMIP) Cases* is an eLearning course that explores how partnerships between tribal law enforcement and local, state, federal and private sector agencies can strengthen and help sustain their efforts to prevent and effectively respond to MMIP cases using a fair, victim-centered, and trauma-informed approach.

The course is three hours in length and teaches how tribal, federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies, as well as private organizations, can form partnerships through the use of Memoranda of Understanding / Memoranda of Agreement (MOU/MOA) and other relationship-enhancing and shared resources to support communication and collaborative efforts to prevent and respond effectively to MMIP cases. Through a case study exercise, students will learn how MOU/MOAs can be used as a guide for law enforcement agencies seeking to enhance their MMIP efforts.

Learning objectives for the course include the following strategies for collaboration on MMIP cases:

- Identify gaps in jurisdictional authority, expertise, and resources that could impede an effective response to MMIP situations.
- Identify multijurisdictional partnership and collaboration agreements to supplement existing MMIP resources.
- Incorporate the key components of community policing into a tribal law enforcement agency's approach to developing partnerships and agreements to effectively manage, investigate, respond to, and solve MMIP cases.
- Draft, develop, and implement MOU/MOAs that effectively facilitate the formalization and adaption of agreements and resource-sharing efforts for effectively addressing MMIP cases.
- Establish multijurisdictional best practice protocols and procedures for successfully investigating MMIP cases.

The target audience for this online course is tribal, federal, state, and local criminal justice agencies with responsibility for preventing and effectively responding to MMIP cases, which include but the following disciplines:

- Law enforcement
- Emergency medical services
- Victim services
- Government administration
- Public safety communications
- Media/communications
- Medical/health care
- Education
- Emergency managers
- Community stakeholders

*Effective Multi-Jurisdictional Collaboration in Missing or Murdered Indigenous Persons (MMIP) Cases*, an eLearning course, can be reached on the COPS Office Training Portal at https://copstrainingportal.org/project/effective-multi-jurisdictional-collaboration-in-missing-or-murdered-indigenous-persons-cases/.

# Endnotes

1. DOJ (2024).

2. Statista (2023).

3. Shalev Greene and Pakes (2013); Durham Constabulary (2019).

4. Fyfe, Stevenson, and Woolnough (2015).

5. NCIC (2023).

6. NCIC (2023).

7. Jeanis et al. (2021); Jeanis and Powers (2017).

8. Associated Press (2005); Robinson (2005); Gardiner (2008); Corlette (2021); Barton (2011).

9. NCIC (2023).

10. Sidebottom et al. (2020); Babuta and Sidebottom (2018); Abrahams and Mungall as cited in Newiss (1999); Sedlak et al. (2002).

11. Sidebottom et al. (2020).

12. Henderson, Henderson, and Kiernan (2000).

13. Henderson, Henderson, and Kiernan (2000).

14. Sidebottom et al. (2020); Newiss (1999).

15. Sidebottom et al. (2020); Babuta and Sidebottom (2018).

16. Hafner, Spamer, and Budowle (2021).

17. Gabbert et al. (2020).

18. Holmes (2016).

19. Ferguson (2022b).

20. Newiss (2004).

21. Yong and Tzani-Pepelasis (2020).

22. Bonny, Almond, and Woolnough (2016); Babuta and Sidebottom (2018).

23. Hafner, Spamer, and Budowle (2021).

24. Hafner, Spamer, and Budowle (2021); Newiss (2004).

25.  Fyfe, Stevenson and Woolnough (2015).

26.  Fyfe, Stevenson and Woolnough (2015).

27.  Chiancone (2001).

28.  NCMEC (2024).

29.  OJJDP (2005).

30.  Hammer, Finkelhor, and Sedlak (2002a).

31.  Babuta and Sidebottom (2018); O'Brien, Giles and Waring (2021).

32.  Sedlak et al. (2002).

33.  OJJDP (2019c).

34.  NCIC (2023).

35.  Sedlak et al. (2002).

36.  Brown et al. (2006).

37.  Sedlak, Finkelhor, and Brick (2017); Hammer, Finkelhor, and Sedlak (2002b).

38.  Finkelhor, Hammer, and Sedlak (2002).

39.  Puzzanchera (2009).

40.  Hammer et al. (2004).

41.  Fassett (n.d.).

42.  Fassett (n.d.).

43.  Peterson (2002).

44.  Wolak, Finkelhor, and Sedlak (2016); Finkelhor, Hammer, and Sedlak (2002); Sedlak et al. (2002).

45.  Westat (2024).

46.  OJJDP (2019).

47.  Finkelhor, Hammer, and Sedlak (2002).

48.  Finkelhor, Hammer, and Sedlak (2002).

49.  Finkelhor, Hammer, and Sedlak (2002).

50.  Finkelhor, Hammer, and Sedlak (2002).

51.  Finkelhor, Hammer, and Sedlak (2002).

52.  Burgess et al. (2008).

53.  Burgess et al. (2008); Hammer, Finkelhor, and Sedlak (2002a).

54.  Baker et al. (2002).

55.  Wolak (2016).

56.  Finkelhor et al. (2017).

57.  NCMEC (2006).

58.  AMBER Advocate (2009).

59.  Sedlak, Finkelhor, and Hammer (2005).

60.  Finkelhor, Asdigian, and Hotaling (1996).

61.  Finkelhor, Asdigian, and Hotaling (1996).

62.  NCIC (2023).

63.  NCIC (2023).

64.  NCIC (2004); Quinet (2007).

65.  NCIC (2023).

66.  Peng et al. (2018).

67.  Reidenberg et al. (2013).

68.  Quinet (2007).

69.  Quinet (2009).

70.  Young and Wehbring (2007).

71.  Quinet (2011).

72.  Huey and Ferguson (2023).

73.  Huey and Ferguson (2023).

74.  Anderson (2008).

75.  Anderson and Parks (2008); see also Guerette and Clarke (2005).

76.  Associated Press (2010).

77.  U.S. Government Accountability Office (2022).

78.  Bachman et al. (2008).

79.  Monchalin (2019).

80.  Younging (2018).

81.  Brave Heart & DeBruyn (1998;); Crawford (2013;); Evans-Campbell (2008); Dhalia (2012).

82.  Mohatt et. al. (2014).

83.  Green (2019); Norwood (2019); Tucker (2023); Razack (2023).

84.  Petrosky et al. (2021).

85.  Rosay (2016).

86.  U.S. Constitution, art. 1, sec. 8.

87.  Smith (2015).

88.  Bear (2008).

89.  American Indian Services (2011).

90.  *Oliphant* v. *Suquamish Indian Tribe* (1978).

91.  Human Trafficking Search (2013).

92.  U.S. Department of Justice (2024).

93.  Not Invisible Act of 2019.

94.  Not Invisible Act Commission (2023); U.S. Department of Justice and U.S Department of the Interior (2024).

95.  Fedina et al. (2018); Gambo & Gerwitz O'Brien (2020); National Runaway Safeline (2018); Pergamit (2010); Slesnick & Prestopnik (2005); Voices of Youth Count (2017).

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97.  Gambo and Gerwitz O'Brien (2020).

98.  National Runaway Safeline (2018).

99.  Fedina et al. (2018); Shelton et al. (2009); Slesnick and Prestopnik (2005); Thompson, Zittel-Palamara, and Maccio (2004).

100.    Fedina et al.( 2018); National Runaway Safeline (2018); Thompson, Zittel-Palamara, and Maccio (2004).

101.    National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (2021).

102.    Slesnick and Prestopnik (2005).

103.    Courtney et al. (2005).

104.    Rosario et al. (2012); Gambo and Gerwitz O'Brien (2020).

105.    Phipps et al. (2019).

106.    Slesnick and Prestopnik (2005).

107.    Phipps et al. (2009); Slesnick and Prestopnik (2005); Thompson, Zittel-Palamara, and Maccio (2004).

108.    NCMEC (2021).

109.    Gambo and Gerwitz O'Brien (2020).

110.    Voices of Youth Count (2017).

111.    OJJDP (2015).

112.    Thompson, Zittel-Palamara, and Maccio (2004).

113.    Kempf-Leonard and Johansson (2007); OJJDP (2015); Phipps et al. (2019); Thompson, Zittel-Palamara, and Maccio (2004).

114.    ACLU (2006).

115.    Capaldi et al. (2012).

116.    Gonzalez et al. (2021).

117.    Dworsky, Wulczyn, and Huang (2018).

118.    Courtney et al. (2005); Gambo and Gerwitz O'Brien (2020); Slesnick and Prestopnik (2005); Thompson, Zittel-Palamara, and Maccio (2004).

119.    Major Crimes Act, 18 U.S.C. § 1153.

120.    Public Law 83-280.

121.    Perry and Field (2023).

122.    Perry and Field (2023).

123.    Perry and Field (2023).

124.  UIHI (2017); Fox et al. (2020).

125.  UIHI (2017).

126.  FBI (2024).

127.  Young and Wehbring (2007).

128.  OJJDP (1996).

129.  OOJDP (1996).

130.  Recovering Missing Children Act (2016).

131.  Smith et al. (2005).

132.  Allender (2007).

133.  Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department (2003).

134.  NAMI 2024.

135.  New Westminster Police Service (2002).

136.  San Diego Police Department (1997).

137.  NCMEC (2011).

138.  Zachariah (2011).

139.  Associated Press (2005).

140.  Fyfe, Stevenson, and Woolnough (2015).

141.  IACP and BJA (2011).

142.  Fyfe, Stevenson, and Woolnough (2015).

143.  Brown et al. (2006).

144.  Arlington Police Department (2007).

145.  NCMEC (2021).

146.  Gabbert et al. (2020).

147.  Durham Constabulary (2019).

148.  Kamb (2003).

149.  Kamb (2003).

150.  Dawson (2019).

151.    Chakraborty (2020).

152.    Dawson (2019).

153.    University of North Texas Health Science Center (2011).

154.    Associated Press (2010).

155.    Allender (2007); AMBER Advocate (2009).

156.    Seaman (2011).

157.    FEMA (2011).

158.    AMBER Alert Program (2024).

159.    Gergerich and Davis (2017).

160.    Lampinen and Moore (2016).

161.    Griffin, Williams and Kadleck (2022).

162.    Washington State Patrol (2007).

163.    FCC (2024).

164.    Avon and Somerset Constabulary (2023).

165.    Sedlak, Finkelhor, and Brick (2017); Wolak, Finkelhor, and Sedlak (2016).

166.    Yong and Tzani-Pepelasis (2020).

167.    Babuta and Sidebottom (2018).

168.    Solaiman et al. (2022).

169.    Irvine Police Department (2009).

170.    Milian (2011).

171.    IACP and BJA (2011).

172.    National Missing Persons Coordination Centre (2024).

173.    Greyhound (2023).

174.    Boulton et al. (2023).

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# About the Authors

## Kenna Quinet

Kenna Quinet is professor emerita of criminal justice, law, and public safety in the School of Public and Environmental Affairs at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) and a faculty fellow at the Center for Criminal Justice Research at the Indiana University Public Policy Institute. She has worked with the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department on a series of surveys to support community- and problem-oriented policing strategies and has evaluated the impact of police interventions for the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department and Indiana State Police. She is the author of "The Missing Missing: Toward a Quantification of Serial Murder in the United States" and "Prostitutes as Victims of Serial Homicide: Trends and Case Characteristics, 1970–2009" (both in the journal *Homicide Studies*) and coauthor of *The Will to Kill: Making Sense of Senseless Murder* (with James Fox and Jack Levin). She serves as the Indiana victim's advocate for NamUs, the National Missing Persons and Unidentified Dead System; is a member of the Indiana Violent Crime and Homicide Investigator's Association; and was recently appointed by the mayor of Indianapolis to the Indianapolis–Marion County Forensic Services Agency. Her research interests focus on homicide, missing persons, unidentified dead, and unclaimed dead. Quinet holds a doctorate in sociology from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

## Michael S. Scott

Michael S. Scott is the director of the Center for Problem-Oriented Policing and clinical professor at Arizona State University's School of Criminology & Criminal Justice. He was formerly clinical professor at the University of Wisconsin Law School; chief of police in Lauderhill, Florida; civilian administrator in the St. Louis (Missouri) Metropolitan, Ft. Pierce (Florida), and New York City police departments; senior researcher at the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF); and a police officer in the Madison (Wisconsin) Police Department. He is the chair of the judging committee for the Herman Goldstein Award for Excellence in Problem-Oriented Policing. He was the 1996 recipient of PERF's Gary P. Hayes Award for innovation and leadership in policing. Scott holds a law degree from Harvard Law School and a bachelor's degree from the University of Wisconsin – Madison.

## David Rogers

David Rogers is a program manager and trainer with Western Community Policing Institute. He is enrolled with the Nez Perce Tribe of Idaho. He has 42 years of experience in the criminal justice field. Rogers's police experience has spanned 20 years with city police, county sheriff, and federal and tribal policing agencies and has included positions as patrolman, lieutenant, captain, undersheriff, and chief, including chief of his own tribe from 2013 to 2016. He served as a probation officer and court commissioner for the Clark County District Courts in Vancouver, Washington, for nine years. Rogers specializes in community policing, youth gangs, drug trafficking, probation, and jurisdiction in Indian country.

## Alan Scharn

Professor Alan Scharn (ret.) headed the criminal justice and forensic psychology programs at Corban University. He was deputy director of the Oregon Department of Public Safety Standards and Training and prior to that spent 17 years with the Marion County (Oregon) Sheriff's Office. While at the sheriff's office, Scharn held many positions, including a six-year assignment to the Detective Division, where he worked primarily on complex homicide and child abuse investigations. He was the lead investigator in a landmark double "no-body" homicide investigation, which resulted in convictions for two murders based entirely upon circumstantial evidence. Scharn holds an Associate of Arts degree in law enforcement, a Bachelor of Science degree in management and communication, and a Master of Business Administration degree.

## Scott S. Tighe

Scott S. Tighe, PhD, is an Associate Professor of Criminal Justice at Western Oregon University. His primary research interests center on Native Americans and their culture. He has recently turned his attention to Native Americans ensnared in the criminal justice system. Tighe has spent considerable time working with Western Community Policing Institute on Native American issues, which include drug use and abuse among Native American tribes.

## Brian Kauffman

Brian Kauffman is currently serving as the Executive Director of the Western Community Policing Institute (WCPI), a nationally recognized community policing and homeland security training institute. He has served for more than 20 years in law enforcement and public safety in a variety of positions including patrol supervisor, tactical entry team member, police and corrections training expert, and lieutenant and captain with the Oregon Department of Public Safety Standards and Training (DPSST). Kauffman has trained thousands of public safety and community representatives across the nation in police and homeland security topics. He received a Bachelor of Science degree in Management and Communication from Western Baptist College and a Master of Science in Adult Education and PhD in Educational Leadership from Oregon State University.

## Cassie Harvey

Cassie Harvey is an Indigenous scholar with Navajo and Zuni tribal affiliations. She serves as a project coordinator within Arizona State University's (ASU) Research on Violent Victimization (ROVV) Lab, which is housed in ASU's School of Criminology and Criminal Justice. Harvey holds a dual bachelor's degree in public policy and criminology and criminal justice with a certificate in public administration management and a dual master's degree in criminology and criminal justice and legal studies from Arizona State University. Her research interests are the criminal justice response to violent victimization and delinquency and resilience among special populations, such as Indigenous peoples. Her work integrates collaboration and innovativeness to create community-based research that informs policy and solutions.

# About the COPS Office

The **Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office)** is the component of the U.S. Department of Justice responsible for advancing the practice of community policing by the nation's state, local, territorial, and tribal law enforcement agencies through information and grant resources.

Community policing begins with a commitment to building trust and mutual respect between police and communities. It supports public safety by encouraging all stakeholders to work together to address our nation's crime challenges. When law enforcement and communities collaborate, they more effectively address underlying issues, change negative behavioral patterns, and allocate resources.

Rather than simply responding to crime, community policing focuses on preventing it through strategic problem-solving approaches based on collaboration. The COPS Office awards grants to hire community policing officers and support the development and testing of innovative policing strategies. COPS Office funding also provides training and technical assistance to community members and local government leaders, as well as all levels of law enforcement.

Since 1994, the COPS Office has been appropriated more than $20 billion to add community policing officers to the nation's streets, enhance crime fighting technology, support crime prevention initiatives, and provide training and technical assistance to help advance community policing. Other achievements include the following:

- To date, the COPS Office has funded the hiring of approximately 138,000 additional officers by more than 13,000 of the nation's 18,000 law enforcement agencies in both small and large jurisdictions.
- More than 800,000 law enforcement personnel, community members, and government leaders have been trained through COPS Office–funded training organizations and the COPS Training Portal.
- More than 1,000 agencies have received customized advice and peer-led technical assistance through the COPS Office Collaborative Reform Initiative Technical Assistance Center.
- To date, the COPS Office has distributed more than nine million topic-specific publications, training curricula, white papers, and resource CDs and flash drives.

The COPS Office also sponsors conferences, roundtables, and other forums focused on issues critical to law enforcement. COPS Office information resources, covering a wide range of community policing topics such as school and campus safety, violent crime, and officer safety and wellness, can be downloaded via the COPS Office's home page, https://cops.usdoj.gov.
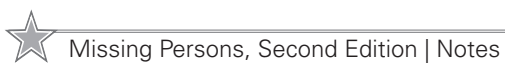
*Missing Persons*, part of the Problem-Oriented Guides for Police series, describes the problem of missing persons, reviews risk factors, and poses a series of questions to help law enforcement agencies analyze their local missing-persons problem. Finally, it reviews responses to the problem from evaluative research and police practice. This second edition has been revised with additional information about Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons.